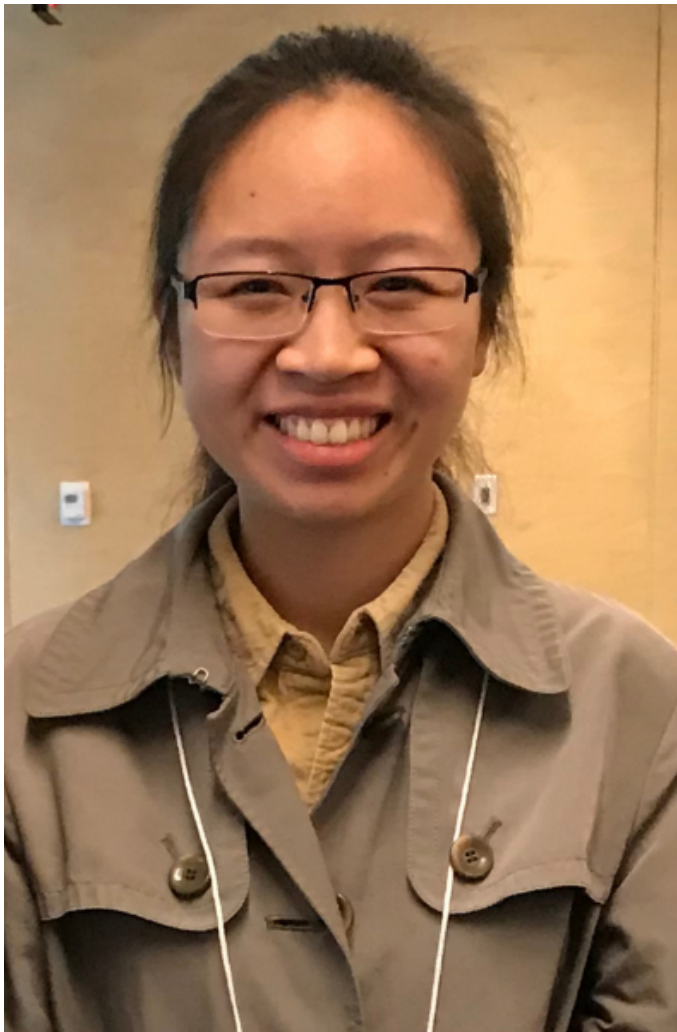


Tulane SPHTM Alumni Mentoring Program creates meaningful connections

|
Rebecca O'Malley Gipson & Abby Lukens romalley1@tulane.edu

[View PDF](#)



Photos of alumna Chen Peng (left) and her mentor Paula Buchanan (right)

In 2014, [Sue Griffey](#), DrPH, mentor emeritus and former member of the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine Alumni Association Board of Directors, launched the [Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine \(SPHTM\) Alumni Mentoring Program](#). The purpose of the program is to match graduate public health students looking for mentorship with experienced SPHTM alumni. In the program, alumni serve as mentors for one semester and provide guidance and assistance with students' career goals.

After first working with the Washington DC alumni chapter in 2014, Sue then partnered with the alumni chapter in Atlanta and the SPHTM Career Services Office to create a formal mentorship program for students and alumni the following year. She saw the program as a tangible way in which alumni could give back and make meaningful connections with graduate students and other alumni. At the same time, students were seeking guidance from public health professionals in their fields of interest to better define their career goals and specialties. The first matches were made in 2014, and more than 150 matches have been made since then.

Today, the program is managed by [SPHTM Career Services](#). All master's and doctoral students are eligible to be matched for any semester during their time at Tulane. All alumni are eligible to apply as mentors. Alumni mentors live all over the world but historically, alumni chapters from Washington DC/Baltimore, New Orleans, the San Francisco Bay Area, and Atlanta have participated. While the program is designed for short-term mentoring opportunities for one semester, some of these relationships have lasted longer.

Chen Peng joined the program in 2018 as a student when she was pursuing her Master's of Public Health in Epidemiology. Peng was matched with Paula Buchanan, MBA, MPH, CPH, a Tulane alumna. Buchanan is a disaster scientist and emergency management researcher with extensive experience in government, nonprofit, and corporate sectors. She is a previous co-president of the Tulane Club of Washington DC and currently serves on the board of directors of the [Newcomb Alumnae Association \(NAA\)](#).

“At the beginning of the mentoring program, I was new to putting myself in the U.S. job market; and as an international student I had no experience or orientation toward it,” said Peng. “Paula, my mentor, was so enthusiastic and patient to help me establish a comprehensive understanding of the job markets related to public health with the monthly phone sessions and any materials she shared with me.”

“Paula introduced me to some of her friends in the same major or working in the similar industries, from whom I got extremely helpful advice and received the opportunity to have mock interviews on the targeted jobs I was pursuing. The mentoring program was beyond my expectation!” Peng now works as a clinical statistician in the Greater Chicago area.

Peng and Buchanan still stay in touch with each other despite living in different cities. “Paula is always willing to offer me any advice if I have any questions about my career development or adapting to a new life after relocation.” They have only met once in person at the end of 2018 when Paula was in New Orleans for a NAA Board Meeting. Otherwise, they still often have phone calls or texts with each other. Recently, Buchanan offered to have Peng participate in a research study on public health.

Buchanan noted a valuable takeaway from her participation in the alumni mentoring program. “As a black person and person of color, I insisted on having a mentee who was either an international student or another person of color.” Buchanan also noted she made a secondary request for a female mentee. “These demographic characteristics (gender/sex, ethnicity, and resident status) are often overlooked in predominantly white institutions like Tulane. So, my takeaway was that it was important to give my time to someone who, because of their demographics, is more likely to be overlooked.”

The program is typically offered once during the fall semester and once during the spring semester. Students and alumni should be willing to commit to having at least 3-4 meetings, either in person or virtually throughout the semester. Students and alumni are matched most closely based on student career goals, student preferences, and alumni geographic locations and preferences.

Students who are interested will need to apply each semester through the SPHTM Alumni Mentoring Program Event on Handshake. Alumni are recruited year-round. If interested, please email Abby Lukens, career advisor, at alukens@tulane.edu.