Our Mission

The mission of the Social Science Environmental Health Research Institute (SSEHRI) is to conduct social science-oriented research, teaching, community engagement, and policy work in the area of environmental health. SSEHRI continues the legacy of the Contested Illnesses Research Group at Brown University, which began in 2000, and has had a long history of social science-environmental health collaborations and extensive grant portfolio (including extensive collaborations with Silent Spring Institute). SSEHRI is a hub for collaborative environmental health learning and interest at NU.

The Institute trains graduate students and postdocs for community-based participatory research aimed at transforming and improving environmental health. At the same time, it provides faculty with a resource to further their existing efforts in those approaches. Integrating environmental health science, science, sociology, science and technology studies, and social movements, SSEHRI aims to develop novel approaches to studying environmental health questions, communication of environmental health data and conceptualization of environmental health socially, politically, and scientifically.

A Great Second Year!

We’re excited to share another successful year of the Social Science Environmental Health Research Institute! In two short years we have grown rapidly to become a strong institute that now has 25 members, including faculty, postdoc fellows, and PhD students. Under the guidance of SSEHRI director Phil Brown, the institute has welcomed four new sociology doctoral students, and four new postdoctoral fellows to begin work in Fall 2014. We are pleased to announce that after a productive year with SSEHRI, postdoctoral research fellows, Bindu Panikkar, Dvera Saxton and Max Liboiron have moved on to new academic positions.

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A Great Second Year!
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Dvera Saxton is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at California State University, Fresno, Max Liboiron is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Memorial University of Newfoundland, and Bindu Panikkar is Research Associate at the Arctic Institute of North America at the University of Calgary. We congratulate them and wish them well in these exciting new stages of their careers!

The Fracking Research Group led by Dr. Sara Wylie entered its second year with a brand new STS/Sociology Graduate-level directed study course focusing on oil and gas issues – from historical, social, and environmental health perspectives. The Fracking Research Group works with communities in Colorado, Wyoming, Pennsylvania, and California, collaborating in low cost community monitoring initiatives around unconventional oil and gas activity.

SSEHRI collaborates with many local and national environmental justice and health groups including: Environmental Justice League of Rhode Island, Toxics Action Center, Alternatives for Community and Environment, Hospitals for a Healthy Environment in Rhode Island, Health Care Without Harm, The Endocrine Disrupter Exchange, Southwest Pennsylvania Environmental Health Project, The Center on Race, Policy, and the Environment, and New England Environmental Justice Research Network. We co-sponsored the Local Environmental Action Conference at NU with Toxic Action Center in March 2014.

We are proud to announce that SSEHRI member and graduate student Lauren Richter has joined the advisory board of Alternatives for Community and Environment, continuing SSEHRI’s relationship with the Roxbury environmental justice group. These partnerships are a critical aspect of SSEHRI’s mission.

We are also happy to welcome Dr. Elizabeth Hoover, Assistant Professor of American and Ethnic Studies at Brown University! Dr. Hoover is currently working on projects with RI indigenous organizations like the Rhode Island Indian Council and the Narragansett Tribe, and serving as the faculty mentor for the student group Native Americans at Brown (NAB). Over the next year she will be writing the book manuscript “‘The River is In Us;’ Fighting Toxins in a Mohawk Community,” about her research on the impact of environmental contamination and environmental health research on the Mohawk community of Akwesasne. Her work also includes, “From ‘Garden Warriors’ to ‘Good Seeds;’ Indigenizing the Local Food Movement,” and other community-based Native American and First Nations environmental health research projects.
SSEHRI Initiatives and Connections Across Campus

Health and sustainability have been integrated into the mission and activities of SSEHRI, which is a unique synthesis of medical sociology, environmental sociology, science and technology studies, and environmental health science.

SSEHRI Works On:

- Creating collaborations between life scientists and social scientists
- Integrating comprehensive doctoral training in environmental sociology
- Networking environmental health communities with faculty and students for research, collaborations, and internships
- Developing and studying the use of low-cost tools for community-based environmental monitoring
- Hosting speakers designed to integrate environmental health interests across campus
- Providing a campus-wide resource for teaching research ethics, cultural competence, and community-based participatory research

Active Grants:

**Northeast Ethics Education Partnership for Research Ethics/Cultural Competence Training (National Science Foundation)** - Provides ethics training for Central New York (SUNY-ESF) and Southeastern New England (Brown and Northeastern), including student mentoring, faculty mentoring, summer workshop sessions, train-the-trainer modules at national society meetings and on-line training and study resources.

**New Directions in Environmental Ethics: Emerging Contaminants, Emerging Technologies, and Beyond (National Science Foundation)** - Trains doctoral and postdoctoral students in Sociology, Environmental Health, and Science, Technology, and Society, in emerging contaminants and technologies, public participation in science, and reflexive research ethics.

**Ethical and Legal Challenges in Communicating Individual Biomonitoring and Personal Exposure Results to Study Participants: Guidance for Researchers and Institutional Review Boards (National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences)** - Examines the experiences, values, and attitudes of participants in personal exposure assessment studies, as well as the perspectives of IRB members, researchers, clinicians, and legal experts.

**Data Sharing and Privacy Protection in Digital-Age Environmental Health Studies (NIH)** - Evaluates privacy risks and develops solutions for environmental health studies through optimizing procedures to redact or mask data to improve privacy while retaining scientific utility for data sharing.

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Active Grants (cont’d from p. 4)

Virtual Consortium for Translational/Transdisciplinary Environmental Research - Ethical and Legal Challenges in Communicating Individual Biomonitoring and Personal Exposure Results to Study Participants: Guidance for Researchers and Institutional Review Boards. (National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences) - Extends the biomonitoring ethics project to include healthy homes interventions and to develop computerized approaches to report back data in large biomonitoring program.

Puerto Rico Testsite for Exploring Contamination Threats (PROTECT) Program (National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences’ Superfund Research Program) - Investigates preterm births in communities surrounding toxic waste and Superfund sites in Puerto Rico. Phil Brown and Mónica Ramirez Andreotta are part of the Community Engagement Core and Research Translation Core of this multi-project, multi-institution collaboration.

Grants Awarded this Year

Renewal of Northeast Ethics Education Partnership for Research Ethics Training Grant (National Science Foundation) – (described above)

Renewal of the Puerto Rico Testsite for Exploring Contamination Threats (PROTECT) Program (National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences’ Superfund Research Program) – (described above)

Highlights

SSEHRI members hosted, attended, and presented original research at many events throughout the year. From community garden parties to campus pop-up labs, it has been a busy year of public citizen science talks and demonstrations. For example, after presenting on the efficacy of citizen based science and community research to the National Institute of Environmental Health Science, Dr. Sara Wylie presented research at the first ever White House Maker Faire. On the White House Lawn she demonstrated DIY environmental monitoring tools developed by the grassroots initiative Public Lab – a citizen-science nonprofit she co-founded at MIT. Numerous U.S officials, including President Barack Obama were able to learn about DIY balloon mapping, hydrogen sulfide (H2S) monitoring, mapping of oil and gas activity, toxic waste monitoring, and other civic science tools and initiatives.

“Barriers in Translating Genomic Research into State Public Health Programs” (National Human Genome Research Institute) – Identifies common elements that enhance capacity in public health genomics across states, and will clarify which elements may be unique or would work only in a particular state. This research will identify guidelines that will help states modernize public health genetics programs in ways that are ethical, equitable, and cost-effective.
A Great Year for Postdocs!

The 2013-2014 academic year was very successful for SSEHRI post-doctoral fellows, Dr. Max Liboiron and Dr. Dvera Saxton. Both scholars engaged in original research for publication, mentored graduate students, presented their research at conferences, community events and lectures, presented job talks, and secured academic teaching/research positions. Dvera continued public anthropological work surrounding the biopoltics of pesticide exposure in farm worker communities in the Pájaro Valley, California. Max continued work surrounding industrial and consumer ocean plastic waste, and disaster research surrounding grassroots civic science in response to the Hurricane Sandy disaster in New York City.

Select SSEHRI Presentations


### Graduate Students

**Lauren Contorno** is an incoming PhD student from Illinois Wesleyan University interested in the environmental justice implications of the modern food system and its impact on the health of vulnerable communities.

**Danielle Falzon** is an incoming PhD student from Vassar College interested in globalization, inequality, capitalism’s impact on environmental justice and environmental health and social movements.

**J. Matthew Judge** is a Ph.D. candidate whose dissertation explores how biomonitoring studies and socio-economic factors influence local understanding of an emerging contaminant (PFOA) in an Appalachian community.

**Rachael Lee** is a 2nd year PhD student with research interests surrounding medical sociology and quantitative methodology. Her current research investigates the role of genomic research in state public health programs.

**Jacob Matz** is a 2nd year student interested in environmental sociology and environmental justice with a focus on rural areas of resource extraction. His current research focuses on community environmental monitoring of the unconventional natural gas industry in the Marcellus shale region.

**Alex Press** is an incoming PhD student from Boston University interested in environmental sociology, comparative sociology/globalization, health, and social movements with a focus on climate change politics and how it can lead to bridges between the environmental and labor movements.

**Mia Renauld** is a 2nd year PhD student whose current research focuses on California’s cumulative impacts and environmental policies, and investigates the oil complex’s influence the daily life of fence line communities of the largest oil refinery west of the Mississippi in California.

**Lauren Richter** is a 2nd year PhD student focused on environmental sociology, inequality and environmental justice. Her current research investigates environmental health controversies and community monitoring in California's San Joaquin Valley.

**Boris Templeton** is an incoming PhD student from Georgetown University. Boris is interested in environmental sociology, climate justice and social movements.

**Elisabeth Wilder** is a 2nd year PhD student whose areas of interest include environmental sociology, political economy, and globalization. Her current research explores citizen monitoring of the oil and gas industry in the American West.

### Postdoctoral Research Fellows

**Maryann Cairns** completed a PhD in Applied Anthropology at the University of South Florida. Her dissertation, entitled Environment, Rights, and Waste in Bolivia: Addressing Water and Sanitation Processes for Improved Infrastructure, builds on concepts of political ecology, human rights, and critical development to evaluate the human impact of water and sanitation infrastructure placement. Cairns is particularly interested in the use of open source solutions for data collection and mapping. She also works on emerging issues in wastewater management in the U.S.

**Jennifer Carrera** completed a PhD in sociology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. For her doctoral research she conducted ethnographic research on water and sanitation struggles in Detroit, Michigan and Lowndes County, Alabama. She also completed an MS in environmental engineering at Illinois and holds a Master of Science degree in biostatistics. Dr.Carrera’s future work will explore the health impacts of impaired water and sanitation access among low-income populations in economically developed settings, like the United States.

**Bridget Hanna** holds a PhD in anthropology from Harvard University. Her research focuses on the social construction of the science of risk, exposure, and harm, and her dissertation, Toxic Relief: science, uncertainty, and medicine after Bhopal examines the production of knowledge about illness in the aftermath of the world's worst industrial disaster. She has published on issues of environmental health, disaster relief, global health, and caregiving, and is co-author of the 2003 Bhopal Reader.

**Mercedes Lyson** holds a PhD in Sociology from Brown University. Her dissertation studied the class politics of Rhode Island’s alternative food movement, analyzing the tension between individual self-governance around health through lifestyle-based consumption habits, and the active policing of vulnerable and disadvantaged people who are unable or unwilling to achieve “optimum health.” She works with Professors Andrea Parker, Holly Jimison, and Misha Pavel on an evaluation of digital/mobile health interventions, with a focus on disadvantaged communities and the alleviation of health disparities.
Articles and Books Published this Year

1. Brody, Julia Green, Sarah C Dunagan, Rachel Morello-Frosch, Phil Brown, Sharley Patton and Ruthann A Rudel (2014) “Reporting individual results for biomonitoring and environmental exposures: lessons learned from environmental communication case studies”. Environmental Health, 13:40.


To find out more information about SSEHRI, please visit

http://www.northeastern.edu/environmentalhealth