



CAIRHE

CENTER FOR AMERICAN INDIAN AND RURAL HEALTH EQUITY



MONTANA STATE AND CAIRHE: PARTNERS FOR A HEALTHY FUTURE



Alex Adams

Montana State University's president, Dr. Waded Cruzado, is often heard extolling the virtues of the state's land-grant institution dedicated to excellence in teaching and learning, research and creativity, and service and outreach. We at CAIRHE like to think we contribute to each piece of that three-part mission. We're a center designed to *serve* the people of our state through community-based *research* led by outstanding *teachers*, our faculty.

Earlier this spring, CAIRHE relocated

to the university's new Health Sciences Building (see p. 6), a state-of-the-art office and laboratory facility that will house our center, our close partners (including Montana INBRE and the American Indian/Alaska Native Clinical and Translational Research Program), the Center for Mental Health Research and Recovery, the Department of Microbiology and Immunology, and others. For CAIRHE, our new home is a large increase in our office space—a huge show of support from MSU and Vice President of Research and Economic Development Dr. Renee Reijo Pera. In addition to the elbow room, being next door to our kindred researchers for the first time will make collaboration much easier.

As we prepare to apply for the renewal of our grant from the National Institutes of Health (see p. 7), we're grateful for support from MSU that will be more important than ever.

We're excited to be a vibrant and growing center at MSU, engaged with faculty from seven departments and colleges, multiple students, and outreach to diverse tribal and rural communities across the state. Our commitment to health equity research is unique in Montana, and we're rapidly building a statewide network of partners that will help us disseminate and implement our important research from one corner of the state to the other.

We look forward to seeing you out there on the road this summer!

Alexandra Adams, M.D., Ph.D.
Director and Principal Investigator

“As we prepare to apply for the renewal of our grant from the NIH, we're grateful for support from MSU that will be more important than ever.”

For Healthy Communities Under the Big Sky

RESEARCH

RINK WINS FULBRIGHT, R01 GRANT TO CONTINUE CBPR PROJECTS

By Anne Cantrell
MSU News Service

CAIRHE investigator **Elizabeth Rink**, Ph.D., MSW, has won a pair of awards to continue her work with Indigenous communities in Montana, Greenland, and Finland.

In March Rink won a five-year, \$3.12 million R01 grant from the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities of the National Institutes of Health for *Nen UnkUmbi/EdaHiYedo* (“We Are Here Now”): *A Multi-Level, Multi-Component Sexual and Reproductive Health Intervention for American Indian Youth*. The project is a direct outgrowth of her CAIRHE research of the past four years and will continue her work among American Indian youth and their families on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in northeastern Montana.

In addition, in January Rink was named a Fulbright Arctic Initiative Scholar to help advance Arctic nations’ shared interest in building resilient communities and sustainable economies.

“We Are Here Now” is a term the Assiniboine and Sioux—the home tribes of the Fort Peck Reservation—used for coming-of-age ceremonies in traditional times, Rink said. Rink’s research study of the same name has four components, including a school-based curriculum called *Native Stand* that is designed to address individual factors that lead to sexual risk behaviors; a family-level curriculum called *Native Voices* that is tailored to increase communication between adult family members and youth about sexual and reproductive health topics; a community-level cultural mentoring component that pairs youth with adults and elders to help connect them with their cultures and traditions; and a systems-level component to adapt and coordinate tribal sexual and reproductive health services provided to youth.

Rink said she hopes the research study results in a positive impact on the sexual and reproductive health of American Indian youth at Fort Peck, as well as an increased connection to the youths’ traditional culture.

She also hopes the research—which is the first of its kind in the United States—can serve as a model for how researchers and tribal communities can work on a complex, integrated research study.

“Our short-term goal is to integrate (this research study) into the existing Fort Peck infrastructure to ensure local sustainability,” Rink said. “Our long-term goal is to produce a toolkit, including curriculum manuals, a cultural mentoring program, and specific systems-level actions suitable for replication in other tribal communities.”

Rink said *We Are Here Now* builds on a collaborative research relationship between the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of the Fort Peck Reservation and MSU researchers that dates back to 2006. That work has focused on preventing sexually transmitted infections, HIV, hepatitis C, and teen pregnancy among American Indians at Fort Peck.

Rink’s [CAIRHE project](#), funded by the Center’s NIH Centers of Biomedical Research Excellence grant since 2014, will wrap up in August, at which time all of her work on the Fort Peck Reservation will fall under her R01 grant. As a new independent investigator,



Beth Rink

Photo by Kelly Gorham

she will remain part of CAIRHE, which will administer the new study.

“Beth is our first success story of helping one of our faculty make the transition to sustainable research funding of her own,” said CAIRHE’s director, **Alex Adams**, M.D., Ph.D. “She’s a great role model for other researchers for how this kind of work is done well.”

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Rink’s research at Fort Peck has relied on a method known as community-based participatory research, or CBPR. It’s important to Rink that her work follows CBPR principles and practices because the CBPR framework ensures tribal oversight and guidance in all phases of the research study. It also ensures that the study embraces the relevant cultural, linguistic, group identity, and health needs as defined by the Fort Peck community members themselves, she said.

“This grant award isn’t about me; it’s about Fort Peck,” she said. “If it weren’t for the people in Fort Peck believing in this research and wanting to work with me, it wouldn’t happen.”

We Are Here Now will have a significant impact on the lives of the future leaders of the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of the Fort Peck Reservation, according to Paula Brien-FireMoon, project director for *We Are Here Now*. She noted that the Fort Peck Tribes have been the driving force for addressing health disparities occurring with the tribes’ young people. In collaboration with MSU and Fort Peck Community College, the research study provides an opportunity to foster healthy changes within the community.

“High school-age tribal members will be given the knowledge necessary for making positive and healthy decisions about their lifestyle choices,” Brien-FireMoon said. “The approach to educating them will be a community effort with Fort Peck Community College through collaboration with other agencies. The sustainability of this (program) will be embedded within the agencies through institutional policy change.”

Ramey Growing Thunder, Fort Peck Tribes’ Language and Cultural Resource Department director, said she is delighted that a portion of the grant will allow the department to work to reach the community’s students from a cultural foundation.

“This is great, as the cultural mentors will consist of various



Dakota and Nakoda elders from our Fort Peck homeland communities that carry our traditional knowledge,” she said. “It will be our ancestors’ traditional teachings that will guide us through our engaged cultural activities through the duration of this project. I’m happy to be a part of a dynamic and culturally grounded initiative.”

HEALTH AT THE TOP OF THE WORLD

Rink’s other recent award, through the Fulbright Arctic Initiative, will enable her to conduct a comparative analysis of sexual and reproductive health, services, and systems in two Arctic communities. The Fulbright Arctic Initiative is designed to enable scholars to help policymakers address critical challenges facing the Arctic and create opportunities for Arctic populations.

For her Fulbright research, Rink will work with researchers from the Thule Institute at the University of Oulu in Finland and members of the Sami community in Utsjoki, Finland, to examine sexual and reproductive health disparities of the Finnish Sami, an Indigenous group in Northern Finland. She will then compare that information with similar data she has gathered in Greenland for more than a decade. Since 2007, Rink has conducted research in Greenland examining sexual and reproductive health among the Inuit.

Rink said she chose to work with the Finnish Sami because the sexual and reproductive health outcomes of that group related to sexually transmitted infections, preterm births, and miscarriages are known as the healthiest for an Indigenous group in the Arctic. On the other hand, she said, the Inuit in Greenland are known for having the poorest outcomes for Arctic Indigenous groups. Health care systems among both groups are very similar, Rink said, which leads to additional questions of why the outcomes are different.

“I want to try to figure out why things are better among the Finnish Sami than among the Inuit in Greenland, because it’s pretty much the same system,” she said.

In addition to her individual research project, Rink—who is one of only 16 Fulbright Arctic Initiative Scholars from around the world—will also work with the other program researchers on a team project. In all, eight scholar groups will research questions related to resilient communities and energy in the Arctic.

Most of that work will be done remotely, Rink said, although the scholars will come together to meet as a group at least three or four times over the course of the 18 month-long Fulbright.

“We’ve got pretty diverse experiences and backgrounds so that we can look at these super-complex problems around Arctic health and climate change through an interdisciplinary lens, which is what the Arctic needs,” Rink said. “When the ice melts, that starts to shift everything. But it’s more than just ice. The winds change and the sea warms up, which shifts hunting and fishing. And, when hunting and fishing shift, their whole lives change.”

Rink said she hopes her work through the Fulbright Arctic Initiative will help draw much-needed attention to Arctic communities’ health.

“I really hope this particular work will highlight the need for Arctic countries and the rest of the world to pay attention to reproductive health in these very fragile Indigenous communities in the Arctic,” Rink said.

Ross Virginia, co-lead scholar for the Fulbright Arctic Initiative

and director of the Institute of Arctic Studies at Dartmouth College, said Rink’s history of cutting-edge community health research focused on Indigenous communities in Greenland and the United States will be important in exploring the determinants of community health and well-being.

“Dr. Rink is well-known for her work on models for the ethical conduct of research and on approaches to encourage community participation in research,” Virginia said. “I am thankful for Dr. Rink’s commitment to conducting policy-relevant research that matters to the peoples of the Arctic.”

SUPPORT FROM ALL CORNERS

In addition to her work as an associate professor in the College of Education, Health and Human Development and as a researcher with CAIRHE, Rink is also a research mentor in the [American Indian/Alaska Native Clinical and Translational Research Program](#). She has previously received research funding from the U.S. Office



Kullorsuaq, Greenland, is just one Arctic locale where Rink spends many days each year.

Photo by Beth Rink

of Population Affairs, the National Science Foundation, and the National Institutes of Health.

“Dr. Rink has spent years thoughtfully and meticulously working to advance health among Indigenous communities,” said Alison Harmon, dean of the College of Education, Health and Human Development. “We’re delighted that these awards will help this important work continue.”

Jovanka Voyich, Montana director of the American Indian/Alaska Native Clinical and Translational Research Program, said the program benefits from Rink’s involvement as a mentor.

“She teaches investigators to work with communities to design culturally appropriate studies and makes certain researchers know the findings belong to the sovereign nations,” Voyich said. “She is an invaluable resource for young investigators interested in CBPR.”

Rink said support from MSU administrators, including Harmon, Provost Bob Mokwa, Vice President of Research and Economic Development Renee Reijo Pera, President Waded Cruzado, and Deborah Haynes, head of the Department of Health and Human Development, has been crucial to her work.

“I couldn’t do what I do if it weren’t for the people like them supporting me,” she said. “I’m very grateful.” ☀️

RESEARCH

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Here's just a sampling of what CAIRHE's faculty investigators have been up to during the winter and spring months.

Elizabeth Rink, Ph.D., MSW ([The Fort Peck Sexual Health Project](#)), is preparing to enter the next phase of her research on the Fort Peck Reservation with support from her new NIH R01 grant (see article on page 2). Funding from CAIRHE will end in August. In recent months, Rink and her team have worked on completing the pilot test of three of the four components of their intervention, "We Are Here Now." The intervention, piloted in the Brockton School District, was designed jointly by researchers and the study's community advisory board (CAB).

The [Guardians of the Living Water](#) project, under the direction of **Vanessa Simonds**, Sc.D., implemented its latest after-school program through the winter and spring, and it will stage its next summer camp in July. This year researchers focused on critical literacy among the after-school students while working with the students as "co-researchers." Students developed their own research projects and presented them at a community dinner in May. Throughout the process the students expanded their public speaking skills, research skills, and environmental health literacy. Simonds also submitted an NIH R21 grant proposal in May that is currently under review.

Elizabeth Kinion, Ed.D., MSN ([Increasing Access to Oral Health Care ...](#)), drew her work on the Fort Belknap Reservation to a close prior to her retirement from MSU in May. Final project operations, led by **Frances Kim**, MPH, will continue this summer and conclude by the end of August.

Kaylin Greene, Ph.D. ([Substance Use and Driving Among Rural Young Adults](#)), has spent a large part of the year working with research assistants and collaborators to analyze qualitative data from 11 focus groups with Montana young adults. In addition, her team has been analyzing the quantitative data gathered from an online survey of rural young adults to understand the prevalence of substance use. Greene's work this year has contributed greatly to researchers' understanding of when, where, and why young Montanans drink and drive, and this year her work has also explored young people's opinions about marijuana use and driving.

Colter Ellis, Ph.D., and **Kelly Knight**, Ph.D. ([Responding to Secondary Trauma ...](#)), implemented two separate culturally responsive secondary trauma interventions for victim service providers working in rural Montana (see article on page 5). Now the team and their community advisory boards have begun a three-part evaluation to document the effectiveness of the interventions, beginning with data collection at their two spring conferences. A forthcoming comparison of tribal and nontribal intervention data will be the first step in developing an epidemiological study of secondary trauma.

Maggie Thorsen, Ph.D., and **Andreas Thorsen**, Ph.D. ([Multi-Criteria Evaluation of Efficiency, Access, and Outcomes at Health Centers](#)), are using data from the Health Resources and Services Administration to create a novel typology of federally-qualified health centers using a method called latent class analysis. Results point to significant heterogeneity across health centers. In particular, health centers tend to cluster into five distinct groups:

two rural, two urban, and one comprised of centers that largely serve uninsured patients. Results of analyses suggest that there is significant variation in the operations and health outcomes across these groups. In addition to the team's focus on prenatal health care and birth outcomes, they have begun extending their work to consider variation across health centers in outcomes and health care delivery related to chronic diseases.

Monica Skewes, Ph.D. ([The Fort Peck Substance Abuse and Resilience Project](#)), along with her local partners and CAB, continues to work with quantitative survey data collected from Fort Peck tribal members. Soon Skewes and her team will tackle the second phase of this project: to refine a culturally adapted relapse prevention intervention with the community and train community members to be facilitators. In March and April, Skewes worked for a month as a resident at the prestigious Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center on the shores of Italy's Lake Como. She and her mentor Art Blume, Ph.D., wrote the first draft of a treatment manual for her study's intervention. The book is now undergoing community feedback and adjustment. "It was a wonderful experience," Skewes said. "I saw some amazing things and met some fantastic new friends. We worked hard and got a ton accomplished."



Monica Skewes with Art Blume

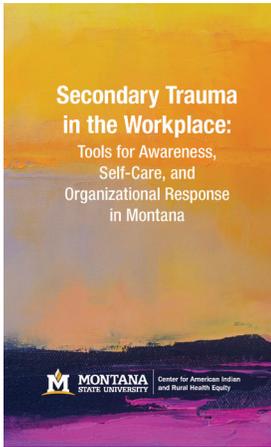
Photo by Scott Gardner

Neha John-Henderson, Ph.D. ([Understanding the Relationship Between Sense of Belonging and Health in the Blackfeet Tribal Community](#)), continues to meet monthly with her project's Blackfeet community advisory board, and her collaboration continues with Blackfeet Community College student interns who are analyzing stress and health data focusing on relationships between early life experiences, belonging to the tribal community, and health-relevant biomarkers. This mentoring of students has included helping them develop summer projects.

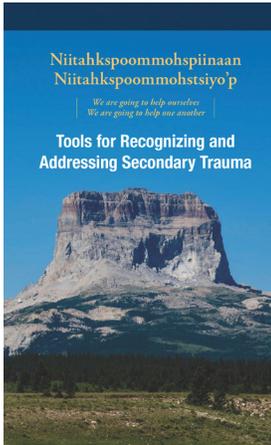
Carmen Byker Shanks, Ph.D. ([Promoting Dietary Quality...](#)), and her team implemented a fresh fruit and vegetable intervention and have collected food environment data, dietary data, and food security data at the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) facility on the Flathead Reservation. Preliminary results show improvement in the food environment at FDPIR and in the dietary quality of participants. The team will analyze food security data this summer. Now the research team has begun discussion of sustainable interventions to improve the food environment at FDPIR with increased fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as the diets and food security of participants at FDPIR with more fresh fruits and vegetables and nutrition education. 🌱

ELLIS AND KNIGHT PUBLISH SECONDARY TRAUMA TOOLKITS, CONDUCT TRAININGS

Several years of research and dedicated collaboration with community partners have come to fruition this spring for CAIRHE investigators **Colter Ellis**, Ph.D., and **Kelly Knight**, Ph.D. ([Responding to Secondary Trauma ...](#)), both of MSU's Department of Sociology and Anthropology.



First, with a large team of collaborators, Ellis and Knight co-authored and published two books—“toolkits” for recognizing and addressing secondary trauma among victim service providers. Their simultaneous projects in rural Southwest Montana and on the Blackfeet Reservation resulted in two different books shaped by local community advisory boards and their co-authors. *Secondary Trauma in the Workplace: Tools for Awareness, Self-Care, and Organizational Response in Montana* is designed for providers working in nontribal settings, while *Niitahkspoommohspiinaan Niitahkspoommohstsiyo’p* (“*We are going to help ourselves, We are going to help one another*”) resulted from the expertise and specific knowledge of the co-authors working on the Blackfeet Reservation. Both will be available in electronic form on the CAIRHE website later this summer.



In May and June, each research team held a training on secondary trauma in the workplace based on their respective toolkit: first an all-day training on May 17 at the Blackfeet Eagle Shield Senior Center in Browning, Montana, which

Ellis and Knight called a “great success,” followed by a training



Dr. Floyd Fantelli addresses participants at the training conference in Bozeman on June 8.

on June 8 in Bozeman. A third half-day event hosted by Blackfeet Community College took place later in June. All three events attracted dozens of participants and were designed not only to help individuals attending, but also to give them tools to take back to their organizations.

“We’re really excited about how the toolkits turned out,” Ellis said, “and we think the conferences went really well.”

CENTER FACULTY IN THE MEDIA

CAIRHE investigators have made a splash in local and national media over the past several months, highlighting the diversity of their research and business interests.

Vanessa Simonds, Sc.D., and her *Guardians of the Living Water* project were the subject of a feature article, “[Partners in Change](#),” in the Fall 2017 edition of MSU’s *Mountains & Minds* magazine,



Project manager Velma Pickett works with students at the *Guardians of the Living Water* camp.

which appeared in December. The feature also prominently included the work of CAIRHE as a whole, the most extensive coverage of the Center to date among the MSU community.

Also in December, *Southwest—The Magazine*, the inflight magazine of Southwest Airlines, included a [cover story](#) about Shoots & Roots Bitters, a company run by **Selena Ahmed**, Ph.D., and two botanist co-partners in their spare time. Ahmed was featured on the cover (*right*).



Monica Skewes, Ph.D., and her mentor Art Blume, Ph.D., of Washington State University were quoted extensively in the American Psychological Association’s monthly magazine, *Monitor on Psychology*, in an article “[The Healing Power of Heritage](#)” (February 2018). “When Native Americans think about all that they have lost, from land to culture to language to religion and traditions, it increases sadness, anxiety and anger—all things that contribute to relapse,” Skewes said in the article.

One of Skewes’s papers, co-authored with Vivian Gonzalez, also is mentioned in the article’s “Additional Reading” suggestions—as is a paper co-authored by CAIRHE External Advisory Committee member **Dennis Donovan**, Ph.D.

CENTER NEWS

CAIRHE INVESTIGATORS SHINE DURING 2018 AWARDS SEASON AT MSU, BEYOND

Several CAIRHE investigators received awards during the first half of 2018.

In January, **Elizabeth Rink**, Ph.D., MSW ([The Fort Peck Sexual Health Project](#)), was selected for the Fulbright Arctic Initiative, a special section of the prestigious Fulbright Scholar Program (see article on page 2). The award largely recognizes Rink's research in Greenland examining sexual and reproductive health among the Inuit for the past 11 years—work that has earned her an international reputation.

The Arctic Initiative brings together a network of 12 scholars, professionals, and applied researchers from the United States, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden for a series of three seminars and a Fulbright exchange experience. Rink also will complete an independent research project titled *Reproductive Health Justice in Arctic Indigenous Communities: A Comparative Analysis of Reproductive Health Traditional Knowledge, Resources, Systems and Policies*. That work, spanning 18 months, will take place in North Finland with the Sami population and in Greenland.

"The Fulbright Arctic Initiative award is, of course, a gift to my professional development and career," Rink said. "It's also, however, a reflection of the support I've received from so many at MSU that have provided me with the ability to pursue my passion for my work. For this I am grateful."

Elizabeth Bird, Ph.D., project development and grants specialist for the College of Education, Health and Human Development, was named the Women's Faculty Caucus Distinguished Mentor



Elizabeth Bird

for 2018 in recognition of her efforts in mentoring junior women faculty. Until recently Bird served as the program specialist for Elizabeth Rink's CAIRHE project. Bird received the award "for her breadth of influence, depth of mentoring activities, the above-and-beyond creativity and insight demonstrated, and the effectiveness of efforts in outcomes." She was recognized on January 9 at MSU's Spring Convocation.

At the same event, CAIRHE mentor **Suzanne Held**, Ph.D., received the Women in Science Distinguished Professor Award, which recognizes outstanding female faculty in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and the social and behavioral sciences. Held has achieved national and international recognition as a scholar in community-based participatory research and community service. For more than 20 years, she has partnered with the Crow Nation on Messengers for Health, a nonprofit organization aimed at improving the health of its tribal members, and she is currently co-PI of the NIH-funded Báannilah Project.



Suzanne Held

On May 1, CAIRHE investigator **Kelly Knight**, Ph.D. ([Responding to Secondary Trauma ...](#)), was recognized at MSU's Spring

awards banquet for achieving tenure and promotion to associate professor.

"Professor Knight is nationally recognized for her research in criminology, in particular her research on individuals who have suffered adverse childhood experiences," said Vice Provost David Singel in his introduction of Knight. "Her focus has been on victimology, including studies on developmental, life course, and intergenerational effects of victimization. She has published numerous peer-reviewed articles and has supported her work with grants from the Montana Healthcare Foundation and CAIRHE."



Kelly Knight

CAIRHE Director **Alex Adams** praised the Center's faculty for their multifaceted accomplishments. "Our investigators are involved in research and service that extends beyond the scope of their work for CAIRHE," she said. "That's what makes them the fine scholars they are, and we're proud to support them in all they do."

CAIRHE RELOCATES TO NEW OFFICES

In April CAIRHE relocated from its former offices in AJM Johnson Hall to the university's new Health Sciences Building at 2155 Analysis Dr., just west of the main MSU campus in the Technology Park. The building was formerly occupied by the Takeda Vaccines company, but that company's consolidation of nationwide operations to the Boston area created an opportunity for MSU to purchase the building.

CAIRHE and the Department of Microbiology and Immunology, the first two tenants to move in, will share the building with Montana INBRE, the American Indian/Alaska Native Clinical and Translational Research Program, the Center for Mental Health Research and Recovery, and others. Most tenants will be moved in by the end of the summer.

"For CAIRHE, this move represents a more than three-fold increase in our office space, which is a significant show of institutional support," said Program Coordinator **James Burroughs**.



CAIRHE's new home at the corner of Research Dr. and Analysis Dr. in Bozeman.

“Having our campus partners so close will also be a significant boost to our ability to work and plan together.”

In addition to office space, mostly on the ground floor, the building features extensive laboratory facilities on the second floor, including CAIRHE’s new Nutrition and Biomarkers Core Lab. “Ample free parking is another bonus,” Burroughs said.

CAIRHE’s mailing address will remain unchanged: P.O. Box 173485; Montana State University; Bozeman, MT 59717-3485. The physical address of the building is 2155 Analysis Dr.; Bozeman, MT 59718.

CENTER PREPARES COBRE RENEWAL APPLICATION FOR SEPTEMBER DEADLINE

As CAIRHE’s fourth year of its inaugural National Institutes of Health grant nears its end, the Center is looking toward the renewal of its funding for a second five-year period beginning in 2019.

The final year of CAIRHE’s current \$10.6 million Centers of Biomedical Research Excellence (COBRE) grant from the National Institute of General Medical Sciences will conclude in August 2019. Before that happens, though, the Center can compete for a renewal grant—COBRE Phase II—that would fund operations for the five-year period of 2019-24.

“The application is enormous, so its development will take up most of this year,” said Director **Alex Adams**. The submission deadline is September 28.

In addition to application components for the Center overall, CAIRHE must submit plans for the Administrative Core, the Montana IDEa Community Engagement Core, and the Nutrition and Biomarkers Core. Three research projects also anchor the application and are evaluated by reviewers like any other major NIH research project application. Those three projects will be led by **Monica Skewes, Ph.D.**, **Carmen Byker Shanks, Ph.D.**, and **Andreas Thorsen, Ph.D.** Skewes and Byker Shanks will get a jumpstart on their Phase II projects by starting their work in 2018-19—Skewes as a replacement for Elizabeth Rink, who won her first R01 grant earlier this year, and Byker Shanks as a replacement for Elizabeth Kinion, who retired in May.

“CAIRHE is one of only two COBRE centers nationwide doing the work we do—namely community-based participatory research with tribal and rural communities,” said Program Coordinator **James Burroughs**. “And we’re the only one eligible this year for a Phase II grant.” But Burroughs is quick to point out that the Center isn’t taking anything for granted. “We have a lot of hard work to do between now and September 28,” he added.

Review of CAIRHE’s application will take place in early 2019, and the Center should know its scores—and its prospects for funding after its first renewal attempt—by next spring.

“We’ve come so far in four short years,” Adams said, “and we have so much great work ahead of us. This grueling application is all part of the process for NIH-funded centers, but once we get past this step, we’re going to do great things over the next five years.”

VERNON GRANT JOINS CAIRHE AS NEW RESEARCH FACULTY MEMBER

Vernon Grant, Ph.D., a University of Montana–trained scientist and former University of Wisconsin post-doc, joined CAIRHE in January as its first assistant research professor. Grant, a member of the Blackfeet Nation, has used the first half of 2018 to develop an NIH K01 grant proposal that would study sleep among children on the Blackfeet Reservation. He submitted that application in mid-June.

Prior to joining CAIRHE, Grant served as a post-doctoral researcher on the team for **Alex Adams’s** R01 project, *Healthy Children, Strong Families*, which she ran from her position at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health before relocating to MSU. Last year Grant also received funding from the American Indian/Alaska Native Clinical and Translational Research Program at MSU.

“It was clear from the outset that Vernon has a bright future ahead as an independent researcher in his field,” Adams said. “This K grant is the first step. Meanwhile, he can learn a lot from us at CAIRHE, and vice versa. We’re delighted to have him as part of our center.”

Grant says he has already benefited greatly from the support he’s received from CAIRHE, including assistance with his K01 grant application. “I’m happy to be here,” he said, “and I’m looking forward to doing some important work together.” ☀️



Vernon Grant



CAIRHE sponsored the Tiny Tot Dancers at the 43rd Annual American Indian Council Pow Wow on March 30 at MSU. **Maya Bronston** (foreground), **Sue Higgins** (in red) and **Frances Kim** handed each dancer a book and a bag of other prizes promoting good health.

OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

INTRODUCING THE MONTANA IDEa COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CORE

Three NIH grants at MSU are pooling resources and sharing access to a unique research core.

By **Bill Stadwiser**

Montana INBRE

Starting in 2017, the three National Institutes of Health (NIH) Institutional Development Award (IDeA) programs housed at Montana State University—CAIRHE, Montana INBRE, and the newer American Indian/Alaska Native Clinical and Translational Research Program (CTRP)—began sharing a single Community Engagement Core.

“CAIRHE and Montana INBRE have both contributed funding to the same Core since CAIRHE’s inception in 2014,” explained CAIRHE’s Director **Alex Adams**, M.D., Ph.D., who leads CAIRHE’s portion of the shared Core. “But with the creation of the CTRP in late 2016, we decided to formalize closer cooperation between the three programs.”



Alex Adams

Dubbed the Montana IDeA Community Engagement Core (CEC), the new shared Core is tasked with fostering and enhancing equitable tribal and rural community-researcher partnerships aimed at mitigating health disparities within these communities.

Although each IDeA program retains its own unique research priorities, project portfolio, and program identity, the consolidation is part of a larger effort to reduce redundancy, improve access to resources, and maximize the impacts and value of NIH investment in the state, said Montana INBRE Program Coordinator Ann Bertagnolli.

“In the past, the separate Community Engagement Cores functioned more or less autonomously on paper, but because we already shared key personnel, big-picture goals, and commitment to community-based participatory research principles, all three programs began seeing real opportunities to coordinate efforts,” Bertagnolli said.

Topmost among those shared goals is providing better access to expertise and training opportunities for Montana researchers, Bertagnolli added.

“Trainings and consultations will help investigators develop and sustain respectful community-academic research partnerships, discuss respectful agreements regarding data ownership and results dissemination, and identify strategies for addressing potential barriers proactively,” she said.

According to Adams, the shared Core’s methodological approach will be grounded in community-based participatory

research (CBPR) principles—a community-academic partnership approach that involves community members in all aspects of the research process.

“Communities need to be equitable collaborators in the research from the very beginning and continue in that role throughout the entire research cycle,” said Adams, who in addition to directing CAIRHE is a nationally renowned CBPR researcher. “CBPR principles have a long track record of building those equitable partnerships successfully in Montana and elsewhere, so they’re central to the CEC’s work.”



Emily Salois

Implementing the Core’s mission will be a team of Community Research Associates (CRAs)—experts at using CBPR principles to engage rural and Native communities and create mutually beneficial research initiatives. **Emily Salois**, MSW, and **Susan Higgins**, M.S., work most closely with CAIRHE’s investigators. Salois has been part of CAIRHE since the



Susan Higgins

Center’s inception in 2014 (and affiliated with INBRE before then), while Higgins joined both programs late in 2017.

“Researchers should know that they don’t need to go it alone or reinvent the wheel when building community research partnerships,” said CTRP Director Jovanka Voyich-Kane, Ph.D. “CRAs know the landscape. They have a working roadmap, and they’re positioned to help researchers begin dialogues, solve problems collectively, and ensure the research is in the best interest of the community.”

In addition to being a resource for Montana-based communities and researchers, the shared Core should serve as a model for other IDeA Program states.

“The CTRP already partners closely with Alaska, and INBRE is looking at opportunities for our IDeA colleagues in New Mexico and Idaho to tap into CEC trainings and potentially develop their own CRAs,” said Montana INBRE Director Brian Bothner, Ph.D. “The Montana model works, and we’d be thrilled to see parts of it adopted by other states with similar research opportunities and needs.” ☀️

(This article originally appeared in the Montana INBRE Winter 2018 Newsletter.)

DID YOU KNOW ?

The Montana IDeA Community Engagement Core maintains community-academic relationships on all seven American Indian reservations in Montana, whether or not a research project is currently active there.

OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT



CAIRHE PROFILE: SUSAN HIGGINS

Name: Susan Higgins, M.S.

Home: Bozeman, Mont.

Position: Community Research Associate (CRA) in the Montana IDEA Community Engagement Core, shared by CAIRHE, Montana INBRE, and the American Indian/Alaska Native Clinical and Translational Research Program.

What have you been focusing on during your first months on the job?

The first order of business was to meet all of the CAIRHE and INBRE researchers. These amazing investigators are exploring answers to many critical questions around depression, nutrition, substance abuse, trauma, osteoarthritis, health literacy, and impacts of climate change on health. And that's just a sample. I also prioritized meeting with thought leaders who could offer me advice and perspective. So many programs on campuses and beyond can and do inform each other, and I received profound insight on the best ways CAIRHE and INBRE can add value to good ideas already on the table. For me it's all about connecting these dots to make something even better.

Why is community engagement so important to the work we do?

Without it, research is distanced from, and often not invited by, the community of study. Without it, there is no community ownership. People want to know: what does all of this research mean to me personally? Our talented researchers are elevating the body of scientific knowledge, but they would also agree that engaging communities through community-based participatory research is critical to success and application in daily lives.

You're also very active in environmental issues. How do those issues and public health intersect, and how are you involved?

I've been lucky in my career to focus on water issues and landscape connectivity in communities and believe there are direct correlations to human health. The known impacts of climate change in Montana—earlier spring runoff, higher incidence of wildfire, higher water temperatures—directly affect food security, pulmonary health, stress, and disease outbreak, to name a few. Unless these links are intentionally made in research and policy circles, we're missing out on a healthy future.

What's next for the Core in the coming year?

Our big news is the retrofitting and deployment this summer of a new mobile research unit that can access rural Montana. All members of the INBRE and CAIRHE research family can use this mobile lab to conduct interviews, provide outreach, perform screenings, and collect data. I see it not only as a golden opportunity to get out and listen to what rural and tribal Montana has to say about health issues and inequities, but also as a fantastic venue for offering information and elevating awareness. Also this year, our team of CRAs will build trainings for researchers on proposal development, cultural sensitivity, and health data acquisition.

How do you like to spend your spare time?

When I'm not inside, I'm in the canoe or backcountry and Nordic trail-skiing with friends, my husband, and our two daughters. I enjoy gardening, but I have a long way to go in the green thumb department. My mother was born and raised in the Fiji Islands, which makes me want to travel to extended family when time and funds permit. But for now, the corners and communities of Montana have so much to offer. 🌻

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