

# SOMMER SCHOLARS



OVERCOMING GLOBAL CHALLENGES 2020-2021  
JOHNS HOPKINS BLOOMBERG SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH





2020-2021

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## FROM THE FACULTY DIRECTOR



**Health equity. Social justice. Improving health systems so they work better for people around the world.**

These are driving passions that unite the sixteenth cohort of Sommer Scholars. And these are the things that the world needs now more than ever as we face the global crisis of COVID-19.

Laura Haskins brought her expertise in oncology nursing to cancer centers in Haiti and Rwanda, training other nurses in delivering high-quality care.

As an analyst for the Australia Treasury Department, Emily Stirzaker saw how economic and social policy decisions affected the health of millions, and how critical health economics and data were to these choices.

Chao Long, a plastic and reconstructive surgery resident, helped build Nepal's first skin bank, recognizing the gap in attention to surgery in the global health response.

These Sommer Scholars are continuing their public health journeys at a unique moment in history. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the inequities in our systems. It has also shown us, like never before, the importance of public health practitioners who can bring evidence-based authority and guidance to their work.

With the School operating virtually, we have moved our Sommer Scholars leadership activities online. While COVID-19 public health safety measures prevented me from hosting a welcome party at my house for this year's scholars, I have been amazed at the passion and dedication to making a difference that I see in the scholars through my screen.

As a future public health lawyer, Prashasti Bhatnagar will use her training to build systems that make health care an affordable and accessible human right for all. As a future pediatric hematologist and oncologist, Jeffrey Edwards will use his skills to help not only his individual patients, but to also effect systemic change.

The virtual space in which we are living has also opened new opportunities for connection. We held a virtual alumni happy hour with over 90 current and former Sommer Scholars logging in from Geneva to Nepal. And we have been able to invite public health leaders from around the world, such as Doctors Without Borders president Christos Christou, to our intimate conversations on leadership.

The formidable challenges of this year have impressed upon me the urgency of our mission in training and supporting this amazing group of scholars to bring their talents to the world.

Caitlin Kennedy, PhD '09, MPH '04  
Associate Professor, International Health  
Sommer Scholar Class of 2006

# MELANIE BECHARD

**FROM:** Ottawa, Canada

**DEGREES:** BS, Physiology and Psychology, University of Western Ontario, 2011; MD, University of Toronto, 2015

**PURSUING:** MPH

“THE EMERGENCY ROOM IS A BAROMETER OF A SOCIETY’S WELL-BEING.”



## WORKING UPSTREAM

A physician in pediatric emergency medicine, Melanie Bechard finds immense gratification in treating problems ranging from a stubborn splinter to life-threatening illness.

At the same time, she says that it's incredibly frustrating to see many of the same problems over and over—problems caused by systemic societal issues that don't have easy solutions.

“The emergency room is a barometer of a society's well-being,” she says.

To help break the troubling cycle, Bechard turned to advocacy. A first-generation college student, she credits her parents with imparting a strong sense of justice early on that shaped her world view.

Bechard got involved in public policy issues in medical school, becoming the vice president of Government Affairs of the Canadian

Federation of Medical Students, a two-year position in which she led other trainees in lobbying the government for public housing improvements and universal drug coverage.

While working as a senior pediatrics resident at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, she served on the Board of Resident Doctors of Canada, including a term as president. There, she and her colleagues advocated for national

licensure to improve physician mobility in underserved regions.

With an MPH, Bechard hopes to continue to influence health far beyond the hospital through policy to improve the health of disadvantaged populations.

“While I look forward to fixing many fractured bones and resolving countless migraines throughout my career,” she says, “I am excited at the

possibility of being able to impact the upstream determinants of health in a more profound way.”

# PRASHASTI BHATNAGAR

**FROM:** New Delhi, India

**DEGREES:** BS, Sociology, University of Minnesota Twin Cities, 2018

**PURSUING:** MPH/JD

## A HEALTH SYSTEM FOR ALL

The summer after her sophomore year at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities, Prashasti Bhatnagar experienced severe heart palpitations. Her doctors recommended cardiac monitoring.

But following that advice proved challenging.

As an international student from India, she needed to carefully manage her finances to pay for the monitoring device and medical care. However, doctor after doctor couldn't tell her how much her college insurance plan would reasonably cover—if anything. Unsure whether she could afford the expense, Bhatnagar delayed care, a decision that categorized her as a “difficult patient” in the eyes of her health care providers.

“Within two weeks, I went from being a pre-med student with extensive knowledge of medical sciences to another Brown noncompliant patient who didn't know what was right for her,” she says.

Bhatnagar's experience with health inequity reminded her of her uncle's story.

He lost his battle with muscular dystrophy when she was just a year old, she says, due to a U.S. health care system that didn't allow heart transplants for non-citizens.

Bhatnagar's and her uncle's experiences with health care in the U.S.—delayed treatment and ultimately death—changed her life plan.

“A ROBUST PUBLIC HEALTH EDUCATION FROM  
JOHNS HOPKINS WILL SET THE FOUNDATION FOR ME  
TO BUILD JUST SYSTEMS OF CARE.”

Instead of applying to medical school, she decided to enroll in a combined law and public health program at the Bloomberg School and Georgetown Law, and will graduate with an MPH/JD in 2022.

“A robust public health education from Johns Hopkins will set the foundation for me,” she says, “to build just systems of care that support historically disenfranchised communities and make health care an affordable and accessible human right for all.”



“MY PROFESSORS ENCOURAGED ME TO THINK OF LANGUAGE AS THE CAPITAL WITH WHICH PEOPLE EXCHANGE CULTURE.”



## JEFFREY EDWARDS

**FROM:** Arlington, Texas

**DEGREES:** BA, Neurobiology, 2015, Harvard College; Medical student, Stanford University School of Medicine, Graduation anticipated 2021

**PURSUING:** MPH

### BREAKING BARRIERS TO MEDICAL CARE

At age six, Jeffrey Edwards became fascinated with medicine when he would accompany his mother to her pediatric nurse practitioner night classes.

What started as a method of child care became a genuine interest in the tenth grade when he shadowed a neurosurgeon colleague of his mother's. By the time he entered Harvard College, he had decided to follow her footsteps into pediatrics.

Edwards majored in neurobiology, but also delved into some other interests. In a Swahili class, he fell in love with the language and culture of East Africa.

“My professors encouraged me to think of language as the capital with which people exchange culture,” he remembers. “How do you understand people unless you understand their language?”

Edwards studied in Kenya between his junior and senior year, developing a culturally relevant early childhood development curriculum with a local NGO composed of community members with HIV/AIDS.

Later, at Stanford University School of Medicine, he traveled to Sudan to study barriers that prevent patients with rheumatic heart disease from receiving necessary care to prevent life-threatening complications.

At the Bloomberg School, Edwards is studying obstacles to medical care, particularly in resource-poor populations in the U.S. and globally. He hopes to practice as a pediatric hematologist and

oncologist, helping break down barriers to care for his own patients and throughout the world.

“As a physician, I can have a limited impact based on my patient census,” he says. “However, this effect can be magnified by public health efforts to cause systemic change.”

# LAURA HASKINS

**FROM:** Portage, Michigan

**DEGREES:** BS, Health Science, Purdue University, West Lafayette, 2009; BSN, Nursing, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2011

**PURSUING:** MPH/MSN



“IF WE WANT TO IMPROVE GLOBAL HEALTH IN A SUSTAINABLE WAY, WE NEED TO INVEST IN NURSES.”

## AN INVESTMENT IN NURSES

When Laura Haskins graduated nursing school, she wasn't sure how to bring her passions for nursing, oncology, and global health together.

But with that goal in mind, she spent the next five years honing her clinical nursing skills in hospital oncology wards and outpatient chemotherapy clinics, and teaching nursing aide classes for recent immigrants.

Haskins also sought out community in the Oncology Nursing Society, an international organization for cancer nurses. Through the Society, she learned about a job that seemed a perfect opportunity to merge her interests: a nurse educator position at a cancer center in Haiti supported by the nonprofit Partners in Health.

She started there in January of 2018, teaching culturally adapted

oncology nursing classes and collaborating with the local cancer team on quality improvement projects at its rural teaching hospital. After nine months, she joined a larger cancer center in Rwanda, mentoring local oncology nurse educators to ensure sustainability.

After witnessing how challenges in the broader health system affected nurses' abilities to deliver quality cancer care, Haskins

realized that with more public health training—in implementation science, program evaluation, and medical anthropology—she could better serve her nursing colleagues and patients.

Haskins is now pursuing a dual MPH/MSN degree at the Bloomberg School and the Johns Hopkins School of Nursing.

“For me, it always comes back

to nursing,” she says. “If we want to improve global health in a sustainable way, we need to invest in nurses and build them up.”



“HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS WILL NOT BE ADEQUATE UNLESS THEY INCLUDE ROBUST SURGICAL SYSTEMS.”

## CHAO LONG

**FROM:** Taiyuan, China

**DEGREES:** BA, Anthropology, Princeton University, 2013; MD, Stanford University School of Medicine, 2018

**PURSUING:** MPH

### CLOSING THE SURGICAL GAP

Born in China to physician parents, Chao Long, a plastic and reconstructive surgery resident at Johns Hopkins Hospital, immigrated to the U.S. when she was seven. Growing up in Pittsburgh, Penn., she began to notice distinct differences between the American and Chinese health systems. One example: Her

grandmother, with several health conditions, was able to access care more easily in the U.S. than in China.

As an undergraduate at Princeton University, Long studied the health disparities she had witnessed firsthand through the lens of medical anthropology. In South Africa, while studying abroad at the University of Cape Town, she noticed a vast divide in resources

between households just a few miles apart, a key contributor to health disparities.

She followed her parents' paths, first becoming an emergency medical technician while at Princeton, and later studying at Stanford University School of Medicine.

Long began forging her own path at medical school, spending a summer in the surgical department

at Mbingo Baptist Hospital in Cameroon, where she developed a trauma registry. Later, to improve burn care, she helped build Nepal's first skin bank at Kirtipur Hospital.

The work inspired Long's interest in plastic and reconstructive surgery. While the wealthy can easily access these services, she explains, they're often out of reach for low-resource populations.

"I quickly realized that I'm not forcing an intersection between surgery and public health," she says. "There is a major need worldwide for access to safe, timely, and affordable surgery ..."

Earning an MPH at the Bloomberg School will ultimately help her work toward this goal.

"Health care systems will not be adequate unless they include robust surgical systems," she says. "I want to do my part to make this happen."



## THE POWER OF POLICY

Hannah Maniates grew up in a small Pennsylvania town that, like many rural areas, struggled with job loss, drug epidemics, and limited access to health care.

“I saw firsthand how economic conditions and access to resources can directly shape health outcomes,” Maniates says, “and how my family’s privilege protected us from the issues that many of our neighbors were facing.”

Driven to better understand the behavioral health issues she had seen growing up, Maniates studied neuroscience at college, and worked at a lab that investigated the neural circuits underlying addiction. After graduation, she joined the National Center for PTSD, a clinical research center at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. However, she continued to be drawn to the broader economic, political, and social structures that so often lead to mental health and substance use problems.

With a desire to better understand how policy impacts health, Maniates took a job at Boston’s Office of Recovery Services, the city agency focused on substance use. There, she contributed to the city’s efforts to increase access to harm reduction and treatment services, and promote public health approaches to substance use policy at the national and local levels.

“POLICY HAS AN INCREDIBLE POTENTIAL TO IMPROVE PEOPLE’S LIVES.”

Maniates hopes to make an even larger impact through her training at the Bloomberg School.

“Policy has an incredible potential to improve people’s lives,” she says. “I ultimately hope to work in behavioral health policy with the goal of building more accessible and equitable treatment systems, promoting diversion from the justice system, and increasing access to housing and economic opportunities.”

## HANNAH MANIATES

**FROM:** Meadville, Pennsylvania

**DEGREES:** BA, Biology and Neuroscience, Wesleyan University, 2016

**PURSUING:** MPH



“BODY-BASED INTERVENTIONS HOLD THE POTENTIAL TO REVOLUTIONIZE PUBLIC MENTAL HEALTH—AND WE ARE STARTING TO PROVE IT.”

## EMILY PANTALONE

**FROM:** Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

**DEGREES:** BA, International Relations, Tufts University, 2012

**PURSUING:** MPH/MBA

### HEALING A TRAUMATIZED WORLD

As an undergraduate at Tufts University, Emily Pantalone was captivated by the study of international relations—particularly transitional justice to address systematic human rights violations, reconciliation, and rebuilding in post-conflict settings.

She was continually puzzled, however, that mental health care wasn't a pivotal part of these discussions. Eventually, Pantalone realized that her passion was global mental health, though she wasn't sure how to best contribute to the field. Having dealt with her own mental health issues in college, she took time after graduating to

reconnect with herself through acting and yoga—avocations since childhood—planting a seed for her future career.

In her training as an instructor in trauma-informed yoga, a branch that emphasizes the mind-body connection for trauma healing, Pantalone met Samara Andrade, a fellow yoga practitioner with a

similar interest in body physiology. They founded Feet on the Ground (FotG), a nonprofit based in New York that promotes the use of holistic interventions for post-traumatic resilience and growth.

They created a trauma-informed yoga training, designed a 10-week intervention, and taught movement and mindfulness practices in U.S. and abroad, most recently at a refugee

camp in Amman, Jordan. Pantalone hopes that formal training in mental health interventions and research at the Bloomberg School will help her and Andrade to move their mission forward.

“Body-based interventions hold the potential to revolutionize public mental health—and we are starting to prove it.”

## PAUL REBMAN

**FROM:** Wheaton, Illinois

**DEGREES:** BA, Psychology, Macalester College, 2014

**PURSUING:** MPH

### FINDING EQUITY IN PUBLIC HEALTH

Growing up in Wheaton, Illinois, in a family with a social justice bent, Paul Rebman knew that he wanted a career that would focus on equity. Toward that end, he studied psychology and human rights and humanitarianism in college.

But the cognitive psychology research he worked on felt too academic. Yet the volunteer work he performed in his community, teaching English to adults and promoting early childhood literacy, didn't feel academic enough.

“IN GLOBAL HEALTH, IT TAKES A COMMUNITY TO DO THE WORK.”

Looking for a balance between the two, Rebman found an Americorps Vista position, developing and evaluating a hospital-based youth violence prevention program for the city of Minneapolis. “That’s where I found the field of public health,” he remembers.

Over the next several years, Rebman accumulated more experience in the field—through qualitative research projects on the state of youth and father involvement among unmarried parents in Minneapolis.

Later, he spent time in Kampala, Uganda, in a director-level position through Global Health Corps at Days for Girls, an international nonprofit that trains women’s groups to sew reusable menstrual pads and teach a reproductive health education curriculum in their communities.

Rebman felt like a valuable contributor to this organization, but he knew that with more training in development, implementation, evaluation, and policy at the Bloomberg School, he could be more effective.

“In global health, it takes a community to do the work,” he says. “With the training I’m receiving now, I’ll be even better at providing my piece of it.”



# SANDRA SMILEY

**FROM:** Chilliwack, British Columbia

**DEGREES:** BA, Environment, McGill University, 2007; MSc, International Relations, London School of Economics, 2010

**PURSUING:** MPH



“BEING A CLINICIAN WITH PUBLIC HEALTH APTITUDE IS A GREAT POSITION FROM WHICH TO MAKE CHANGE.”

## A JOURNEY TO PUBLIC HEALTH

Sandra Smiley took a winding road on her academic and professional paths, switching colleges once and majors three times until she finished with a degree in environmental studies. She then interned for a human rights organization, did public advocacy work, and volunteered with women's empowerment organizations.

In the fall of 2011, she joined the international humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders as a press officer in the U.K. She was dispatched to field hospitals around the world, where she met doctors doing critical work responding to disease epidemics, wars, and natural disasters.

It was in 2017, as a member of a Doctors Without Borders team running a hepatitis C care program in a settlement outside of Karachi, Pakistan, that she became serious about public health. Advocating for the program and influencing policy to expand hepatitis C care made a strong impression on her.

“I came to recognize just how powerful a vehicle public health is for helping people.”

Earning her MPH before starting an MD program at the University of British Columbia in August 2021 will give her the skills, she says, to serve far greater numbers of patients than she could in an individual practice.

“There are so many different forms of activism, and they're all important, but I'd like my own activism to be in science and medicine,” says Smiley. “Being a clinician with public health aptitude is a great position from which to make change.”

## HEALTH EQUITY THROUGH POLICY

Growing up in Australia but spending much of her childhood in South Africa, Emily Stirzaker has always been passionate about reducing inequality—both in economic well-being and in health. Having witnessed the disparities in health outcomes across different communities, she developed a keen interest in economics and public policy.

After college, she landed a job in Australia's Department of the Treasury where she helped analyze and implement funding for a variety of government services, including health and social services. After gaining experience in economic policy, she joined Deloitte as a senior economist in health economics and social policy. Here, she performed

health technology assessments, cost-benefit analyses, program evaluations, and policy design in the health care, pharmaceutical, and nonprofit sectors.

More recently, she studied population health interventions as a research coordinator at Rutgers University, helping design and run

studies on the health of underserved populations in New Jersey. She soon came to realize that a formal public health education, with training in biostatistics, epidemiology, and health policy would benefit her in such work.

With a Bloomberg School degree, she hopes to work on developing equitable and sustainable health

systems that are prepared to deal with rising challenges including climate change and an aging population.

"The Master of Public Health will give me the technical capabilities, content knowledge, and leadership skills to be successful in my career and make an impact in reducing health disparities through public policy," Stirzaker says.

## EMILY STIRZAKER

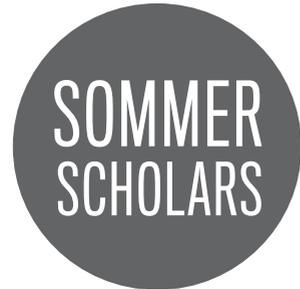
**FROM:** Canberra, Australia

**DEGREES:** Bachelor of Arts/  
Bachelor of Economics, Australian  
National University, 2014

**PURSUING:** MPH



“THE MPH WILL GIVE ME THE SKILLS TO MAKE AN IMPACT IN REDUCING HEALTH DISPARITIES THROUGH PUBLIC POLICY.”



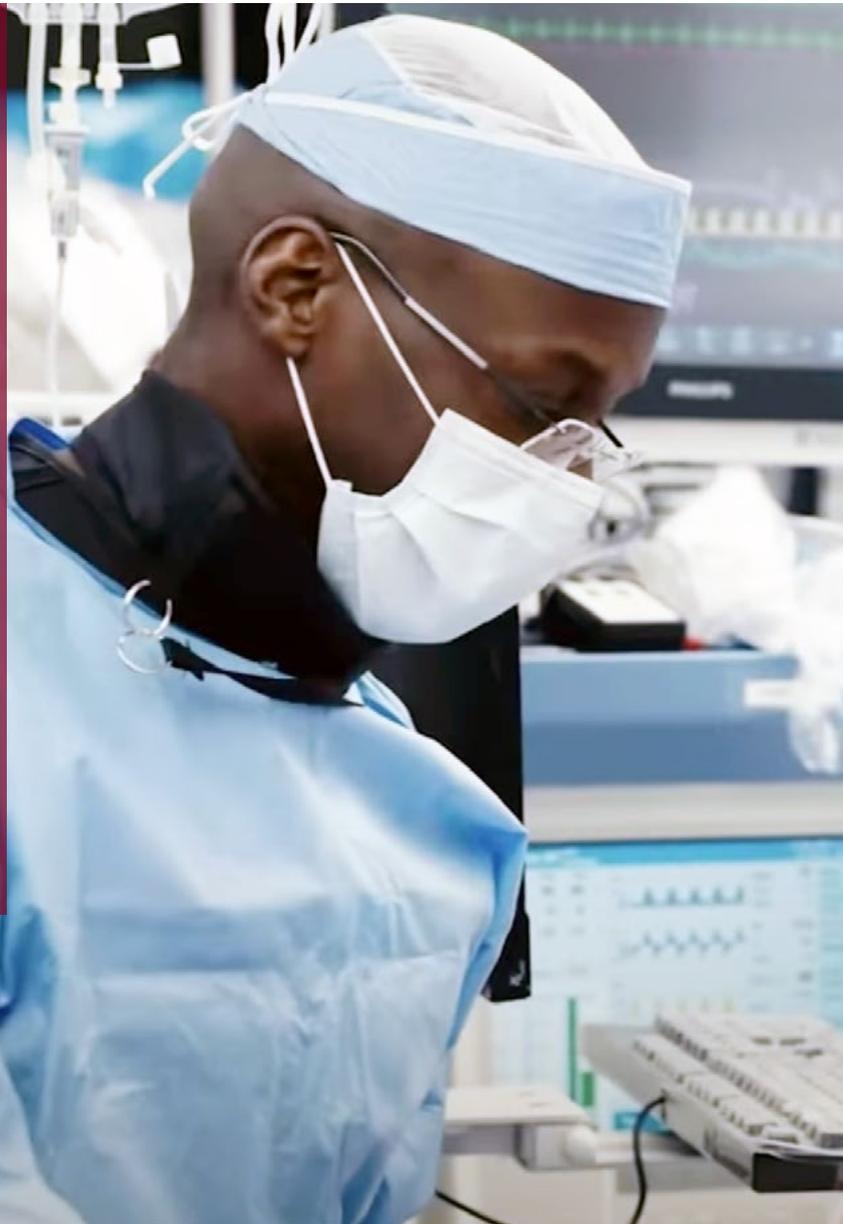
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A L U M N I

# THE PANDEMIC BROUGHT PUBLIC HEALTH TO THE FOREFRONT AND...

“ I coordinate the care of COVID-19 patients who are so sick that they have failed conventional therapy and require more aggressive support. This is provided through ECMO, which effectively is used to drain their blood, pump oxygen into it, and return it to their bodies.

This therapy is only provided to the sickest patients in West Virginia, and we serve a four-state catchment area. The WVU Program has thankfully seen outcomes that are two standard deviations above the international benchmark, and the coordination of this care serves as a confluence of clinical medicine, surgery, health policy, and disaster preparedness—the tenets of which I learned at the Bloomberg School and Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.”



“ My work focuses on improving public health policy and practice in order to reduce the health impacts of pandemics, disasters, and terrorism. Leveraging over a decade of work in the field of preparedness and response, I’ve recently focused much of my efforts on COVID-19. An area in which I have worked extensively is the COVID-19 “infodemic,” with an emphasis on understanding how to combat widespread misinformation and disinformation.

Another facet of my COVID-related work draws on my prior experience as a professional athlete. Using this experience, which includes winning a silver medal in the 2004 Olympics, I leveraged my understanding of COVID-19, sports, and risk to develop sport safety plans. My initial project, The Basketball Tournament, was the first successful large-scale and indoor contact sport event following nationwide lockdowns in the spring of 2020.”

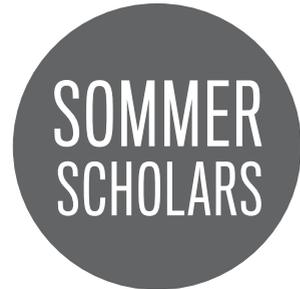


## J. W. AWORI HAYANGA MD, MPH '08, FACS

Associate Professor, Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgery  
Director, ECMO (extracorporeal membrane oxygenation) Program  
West Virginia University

## TARA KIRK SELL, PHD '16, MA

Senior Scholar, Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security  
Assistant Professor, Environmental Health and Engineering  
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health



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A L U M N I

# OUR ALUMNI BROUGHT EXPERTISE TO THE GLOBAL RESPONSE.

“I’m based in Brazil, but my pandemic work extends to other countries and encompasses several areas—from frontline health care to consulting on preparedness and response to training health department employees.

In Brazil, I work directly with patients and mentor physicians, and monitor and analyze pandemic data to inform decision-makers and the general population. As a global consultant, I provide technical support on health systems reform, pandemic preparedness and response strategies, and COVID-19 national immunization plans. I also train health workers in state and local health departments, including in the U.S.”



LUANA ARAUJO, MD, MPH '20

International Public Health Consultant  
World Bank Group

“Early in the pandemic, I volunteered at Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center as Emergency Department deputy area commander. As an international medical school graduate, I couldn’t treat patients, so my responsibilities included supporting the area commander, communicating with provider teams to ensure patient and staff safety, and setting up the surge tent for operations.

Currently, as a MENA researcher with Physicians for Human Rights, my role is to study the impact of conflicts on the right to health and the accessibility to health care amid the COVID-19 pandemic.”



HOUSSAM ALNAHHAS, MD, MPH '20

MENA (Middle East and North Africa) Researcher  
Physicians for Human Rights



# VISIONARY LEADER

ALFRED SOMMER, MD, MHS '73

Alfred Sommer, Dean of the Bloomberg School from 1990 to 2005, has made public health history throughout an unparalleled career.

His global health journey through epidemics, a cyclone, and civil war yielded seminal contributions to ophthalmology, epidemiology, micronutrient research, and disaster relief—contributions that earned him the 1997 Albert Lasker Clinical Medical Research Award and election

to both the National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Medicine.

Sommer's work relies on sound science. His progress was guided by an open mind and a willingness to explore and embrace unanticipated findings. This philosophy, as well as a good measure of grit and fortitude, ultimately led to the realization that

vitamin A deficiency dramatically increases childhood morbidity and mortality. Sommer made this unexpected discovery while reviewing his studies on childhood vision problems in Indonesia.

“Major insights usually come from unanticipated observations or thoughts, which most often bubble up at 2 in the morning,” he says. “Every so often, they provide a pearl worth pursuing.”

Based on his work, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and their partners distribute more than half a billion vitamin A supplements annually around the world, saving the eyesight and lives of hundreds of thousands of children each year.

His advice for these scholars whose award bears his name: “Think big thoughts. Worry about big issues. When an unanticipated

thought or piece of data occurs, stop. Write it down. Think HARD about the implications for human health. If this might be large, whether good or bad, act! It is your moral responsibility.”

## JOHNS HOPKINS SOMMER SCHOLARS

The Johns Hopkins Sommer Scholars program is designed to prepare and inspire the next generation of public health leaders.

The program provides intensive training in the context of a rich mentoring environment to embolden out-of-the-box thinking as it challenges the management and leadership skills of a highly select cohort. Sommer Scholars seeking master's degrees in public health are awarded full tuition and a stipend while enrolled in curricula designed to meet each individual's unique needs and interests. When they graduate, these scholars become members of an expansive global network of advocates, researchers, and scientists determined to make a difference in the health of individuals and communities.

As the world's largest, oldest, and most esteemed school of public health, the Bloomberg School attracts the very brightest and most committed. But excellent research alone will not improve health locally or globally. Dean Emeritus Alfred Sommer, MD, MHS '73, speaks from experience when he attests that even the best data are not enough to make real and lasting change. The translation of scholarship and research into groundbreaking policies and interventions that prevent disease and save lives demands, above all, bold, evidence-based leadership.

To date, the Sommer Scholars program has graduated 303 students with sharpened skills vital to their future careers and to the future health of the world's populations, many of which remain underserved and at risk.

Each Sommer Scholar arrives at our School with impressive experience and education. They leave with greater knowledge and enriched skills as well as the confidence to think grandly and act boldly, leading others into important public health frontiers.

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