


University at Buffalo

Health Impact

From the University at Buffalo School of Public Health and Health Professions

Fall 2025



*Meeting
Addiction
Where
It Lives*

UB researchers are paving new paths to recovery (p.10)

Plus:

Sports self-efficacy, faculty honors, more

IN THIS ISSUE

3

MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

4

TRENDING AT SPHHP

AT program reaccreditation, new academic affairs dean

7

INQUIRY AND SCHOLARSHIP

Noyes focused on health access, more

10

SPHHP IN DEPTH

Meeting Addiction Where It Lives

18

FACULTY AND STAFF UPDATES

Profile: Alison Haney, Recognitions

20

STUDENT CONNECTIONS

22

ALUMNI IN FOCUS

Deb Feltz believes in self-efficacy





Welcome to the Fall 2025 edition of *Health Impact*.

As we share this issue of *Health Impact*, I'm proud to highlight the many ways our faculty, students and alumni are advancing research that meets people where they are. From exploring addiction as a public health challenge to developing compassionate, evidence-based strategies for prevention and recovery, the work featured here reflects our commitment to addressing health in all its complexity.

Our school continues to grow in excellence and recognition. This year, we celebrate the reaccreditation of our Athletic Training program, faculty honored with SUNY Chancellor's and UB research awards, and leadership appointments that strengthen our academic and student experience. Each achievement reinforces our mission to educate the next generation of public health leaders and improve population health across disciplines.

At the same time, our researchers are tackling critical health issues—from disparities in care access to innovations in data-driven prevention—through collaboration and community engagement. Their efforts exemplify the translation of knowledge into real-world solutions.

Thank you for your continued support as we advance the School of Public Health and Health Professions' mission to promote health and equity for all.

Warm regards.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jean'.

Jean Wactawski-Wende, PhD
Dean and SUNY Distinguished Professor



Athletic Training Program Earns Full Reaccreditation

The School of Public Health and Health Professions' Athletic Training (AT) program has achieved full reaccreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE), marking a significant milestone in the program's development and excellence in education.

The program has been granted 10 years of continuing accreditation, the longest period possible, affirming its high standards in curriculum, faculty expertise and student training.

CAATE, the sole accreditor of athletic training programs in the United States, ensures that programs adhere to the rigorous educational requirements necessary for professional practice in the field.

"This achievement reflects the hard work and dedication of our faculty, staff, preceptors and students," says Ryan Krzyzanowicz, director of the AT program. "Earning the longest accreditation period available demonstrates the strength and quality of our program and validates the commitment we have to preparing our students for successful careers as athletic trainers."

Athletic training is a critical health care profession focused on the prevention, examination, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of injuries and medical conditions. As an allied health profession recognized by the American Medical Association, athletic training requires extensive education and hands-on experience to ensure professionals are ready with the skills and knowledge they need to excel. -----o

Temple Named Associate Dean for Student and Academic Affairs

The School of Public Health and Health Professions has appointed **Jennifer Temple, PhD**, as its associate dean for academic and student affairs. In her new position, Temple will play a critical role in advancing the school's academic excellence and supporting student success. Her primary responsibilities are:


- » Acting as the main liaison to the UB Provost's Offices, overseeing the development, assessment and support of undergraduate and graduate academic programs.
- » Overseeing the implementation of academic policies related to student grievances and academic integrity.

"Jenn is a talented member of our SPHHP faculty with tremendous experience as graduate director in the Department of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences (ENS)," said Jean Wactawski-Wende, PhD, SPHHP dean and SUNY Distinguished Professor. "I look forward to working with her in this expanded role."

Temple assumes the role from Gaspar Farkas, PhD, who served in the position since 2015.

Temple is a professor in ENS, and Community Health and Health Behavior. She also directs UB's Nutrition and Health Research Laboratory. Her research focuses on factors that influence ingestive behavior and the development of obesity in humans. Her work is widely published in journals related to nutrition, eating behavior and psychology, among others. She also is a frequent source of information to national media on topics related to her research.

Temple has served as ENS' director of graduate studies for over 10 years and acted as the department's interim chair last semester.

A neurobiologist by training, Temple joined UB in 2005 as an assistant professor. She was promoted to associate professor in 2013 and professor in 2020. She received her doctorate in neuroscience from the University of Virginia. 



2025 SUNY Chancellor's Awards for SPHHP Colleagues

Colleagues from the School of Public Health and Health Professions have been named recipients of the 2025 SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence. The award acknowledges and provides system-wide recognition for consistently superior professional achievement and the ongoing pursuit of excellence.

Michael J. LaMonte, research professor in the Department of Epidemiology and Environmental Health, received the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Scholarship and Creative Activities, which recognizes the work of those who engage actively in scholarly and creative pursuits beyond their teaching responsibilities. LaMonte is a prolific scholar, publishing 20 papers in 2024 alone, who "is widely considered a thought leader in his field for seminal contributions that have enhanced our understanding of the impact of physical activity on cardiovascular health and aging."



A leading researcher in the Women's Health Initiative (WHI), he has been principal investigator (PI) or co-investigator on more than \$23 million in research grants since 2002. He is one of two PIs on a five-year, \$1.7 million study examining measurements of physical activity in relation to healthy cardiovascular aging and resilience among women over the age of 80. The study has produced significant, novel scientific findings and, with LaMonte's creative leadership, developed a new approach to programming one of the most commonly used activity-tracking devices that is now a standard in the field.

His research has resulted in an impressive H-index of 67, according to Google Scholar, and his 256 peer-reviewed publications have been cited more than 35,500 times, including 13 papers that have been cited more than 500 times each.

Associate Dean for Strategy, Planning and Operations

Michael Redfern received the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Professional Service, which honors professional staff performance excellence "both within and beyond the position." His colleagues praise him for his unwavering commitment to professional excellence and his exemplary contributions, not only within the parameters of his role but also in service of the advancement of the university.



Redfern earned both his master's degree in higher education administration and his MBA from UB. He began his professional career at the university in 2003, serving 12 years in various roles within the School of Nursing before joining the School of Public Health and Health Professions in 2015 as an associate dean and chief operating and financial officer. In 2020, he was promoted to his current position.

Among his significant achievements are the development and implementation of four new academic programs that brought 850 new students to the public health school and generated an additional \$5 million in tuition. Colleagues note Redfern's "ability to translate vision into tangible outcomes that contribute to the growth and success of the university."

While with the School of Nursing, Redfern spearheaded and managed the school's first faculty workload database, working with faculty members to develop and deploy the school's first academic continuous quality improvement (CQI) program, which systematically reviewed all academic programs. Additionally, he helped co-author and manage a \$1.4 million training grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in support of the expanding undergraduate nursing enrollment and which established the school's accelerated BS in nursing program. ○-----○

Noyes Wants to Understand the Complexity of Human Behavior

Back when Professor **Katia Noyes, PhD, MPH**, was a graduate student doing preclinical basic science research at a university medical center, she came to a realization: the people in nearby economically disadvantaged neighborhoods used the center's ER for health care because they couldn't access preventive care, let alone take advantage of innovative treatments her research might lead to.

That opened her eyes to the issue of access and changed the course of her career. Today, her work is in health services research, focused on understanding how to deliver care most accessibly and conveniently. Her role as associate dean for translational and team science highlights another vital part of her work: multidisciplinary collaborations.

Those are important, she says, because "humans are complex, and their behavior is driven by a variety of intertwined factors."

Clearly proving her multidisciplinary bent is a sample of recent papers she's published: "Cross-sector collaboration in transitional care of people experiencing homelessness"; "Association between hospital participation in Medicare Shared Savings Program and hospital use of robotic surgical approach" and "Micro-credentials and translational workforce development: Motivation and benefits."

Noyes describes a project that, to her, captures her experience as a cross-disciplinary patient-centered researcher. Funded by M&T Bank, the study tried to understand various reasons that some people don't get screened for cancer. Focus groups and surveys conducted by UB and community partners engaged representatives of groups with the lowest screening rates and discovered surprising explanations why people don't get screened. Lack of health insurance might

seem a natural reason for not being screened, but the study uncovered a range of reasons.

Often, people don't want to know early that they might have cancer; they may be experiencing a rough patch and don't need another reason to worry. Or, they don't know that treatment for earlier stages of cancer is much more effective. Another group believes in cancer screening but doesn't think it's important enough—"today"—to allocate time to do it.

"Economists call this revealed preference,"

Noyes says. "It's not what you say but what you do. We realized that, as health professionals, we often don't appreciate the complexities of lives of everyone in community. People have immediate duties that might take priority. For instance, lots of women put their responsibilities to families and others first."

This small project turned out to be informative and eye-opening. Noyes learned that criticizing people for not adhering to medical advice isn't appropriate and only compounds pressure on them.

"We need to be very practical when we give health care advice," she says. "That's especially true regarding prevention." Asking people to prioritize some statistically valid future gain is too complicated: "We need to give very clear, doable solutions."



Noyes' journey into issues of health care access and quality proved to her that the answers were so diverse and complex that they require collaboration with researchers and non-researchers alike. Determining which factors can actually be modified to help is key. Take Wi-Fi, for example.

"Is Wi-Fi a modifiable health care factor?" Noyes asks. "What if we offer routers to people in studies so they can access learning materials, remote monitoring, etc.? A router is not a health care solution, but it is enabling."

Health care researchers and professionals need to be able to measure more than mortality, she says: "We need to determine how we measure quality of life, distinguish good quality of life from poor, and then design interventions to maximize quality of life, not just survival."

Considering the complex social, economic, behavioral and other factors that guide human behavior, she believes, will guide researchers to the right answers.

Her newest project from the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences/NIH, which she co-directs with another UB faculty, Dr. John Canty, SUNY Distinguished and Albert and Elizabeth Reigate Professor of Medicine at the Department of Medicine, Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, also evidences that affinity: It funds a program affiliated with UB's Clinical and Translational Science Institute that offers mentored research and career development opportunities to early-career faculty who want to advance clinical and translational science, improve health outcomes and address health disparities.



Assistant Professor **Cristian Cuadra**, Department of Rehabilitation Science, is working to characterize, for the first time, why people often have arm movement problems after a stroke. His study will look at how the spinal cord and balance reflexes in the brain communicate with arm muscles, and how this communication gets disrupted. By measuring reflex signals in the shoulder, arm, and forearm, he aims to get a better understanding of the causes of movement difficulties and to identify new ways to improve recovery. The American Heart Association is supporting this project, called "Rewiring Coordination: Spinal and Vestibulospinal Reflex Modulation in Upper Limb of Stroke Survivors."



Assistant Professor **Hayden Hess**, Department of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences, is identifying innovative strategies that lower the risk of decompression sickness risk and permit longer, deeper dives. The overall objective of his study is to test whether problems with small blood vessels in the skin (cutaneous microvascular dysfunction) can reveal when the body is under stress as when, for instance, divers return to the surface of the water. The project is titled "Interrogating the Pathophysiology of Decompression Sickness Through the Skin" and receives support from the United States Navy Office of Naval Research.



Gregory Homish, professor and chair, Department of Community Health and Health Behavior, is one of the principal investigators looking at several aspects in the lives of a subset of United States health care workers: the effects of moral injury on changes in substance use, substance use disorders, problematic mental health symptoms and risk of suicide; the impact of other individual, social and environmental factors on these outcomes over time; and the unique effects of workplace policies, programs and practices on the risk and resilience of these workers. The study, "A Longitudinal Examination of the Social and Environmental Influences on Substance Use among Non-Prescriber/Non-Executive Healthcare Workers in the United States," is funded by the University of Illinois/ National Institutes of Health.



Assistant Professor **Hang-Jin Jo**, Department of Rehabilitation Science, along with Professor Sue Ann Sisto, department chair, and Professor of Biostatistics Jeff Miecznikowski, are studying new treatments to help people recover movement after spinal cord injury in the neck area. One part of the study tests whether brain-to-spinal cord signals can be boosted with gentle stimulation. Another part looks at whether combining this stimulation with hand exercises can further improve recovery. The project, "Neuromodulation to Improve Grasping Function After Spinal Cord Injury," is funded by the New York State Department of Health.



Research Professor **Michael LaMonte**, Department of Epidemiology and Environmental Health, is studying why heart failure affects people differently based on their race, ethnicity and sex. By analyzing health data from 130,000 people in 10 studies, he is looking to understand the size of these differences and uncover the reasons behind them, with the goal of improving prevention and care for everyone. Kent County Memorial Hospital/National Institutes of Health is supporting the study, called "Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Heart Failure: A Cross Cohort Collaboration."



Douglas Landsittel, professor and chair, Department of Biostatistics, is developing new ways to help the body accept organ or tissue transplants on a long-term basis. One approach looks at blocking certain signals in the immune system to prevent rejection, and another explores why some immune cells stop responding when those signals are blocked. The University of Pittsburgh/ National Institutes of Health is funding the project called "Targeting Monocyte Allrecognition to Achieve Allograft Acceptance."



Assistant Professor **Jason Niu**, Department of Epidemiology and Environmental Health, is establishing a longitudinal study of refugee children and their families to improve children's health development, provide community support and advocate for refugee policy changes. The project, "Perception of Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals among Parents in the BEST-Kids Study (Buffalo Environmental and psychosocial Stressors: Targeting Health Disparities in Kids)" is supported by the University of California, Los Angeles.



Meeting Addiction Where It Lives

Researchers Paving New Paths to Recovery



Addiction has long been seen through a narrow lens—something to be hidden, stigmatized or explained away as a personal failing. But as the opioid epidemic, rising e-cigarette use and shifting cannabis laws prove, addiction is not only a medical condition but also a deeply complex public health issue. It's a crisis that cuts across biology, psychology, law, economics and social policy, affecting people, their families, communities and populations alike.

School of Public Health and Health Professions (SPHHP) researchers are reframing how we understand addiction. Their work highlights a central idea: addiction isn't just about abstinence or relapse. It's about harm reduction, meeting people where they are and developing solutions that recognize the many factors—social, biological, political and more—that shape substance use.

Through collaborations that span disciplines like engineering, psychology, social work and

more, SPHHP researchers are working to reduce stigma, understand recovery as more than just the absence of substance use, and build interventions that can change lives across diverse populations.

For **Dennis Daniels**, clinical assistant professor of health services, policy and practice, the stakes are personal and societal.

"Addiction-related outcomes devastate families, finances, and personal and public safety," Daniels said. "As scholars and practitioners, we have a duty to collaborate in developing effective prevention and treatment strategies."

This public health framing echoes across UB's research community. Addiction is a chronic condition, yes, but also a product of biology, environment, economics and culture. It is shaped by forces as varied as marketing campaigns for vaping products, the availability of treatment resources or the social rituals of young adulthood.

Research that matters

Jessica Kulak, assistant professor of community health and health behavior, is preparing to analyze multi-year survey data to see how the rollout of legal cannabis affects young adults' substance use. Those findings, she said, will be critical for shaping both policy and harm reduction education.

Kulak notes that addiction research must keep pace with how substance use itself is changing. "Drug use and misuse are becoming much more complicated," she says. "Products are evolving, access is easier, and the ways people misuse substances are more sophisticated." Her work underscores that research not only saves lives, but also informs public policy and equips clinicians with better tools.

Professor **Gregory Homish**, chair of the Department of Community Health and Health Behavior, asserts that it's not just the research itself that's significant. The research needs to help change the societal view of addiction.

"We need to reinforce the idea that people's social network is so very important," he says. "Focusing only on the individual is not effective. You need to focus on the broader peer network."



Dennis Daniels, PhD

Daniels' work focuses on harm perception of electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), marketing of ENDS and consumer behaviors. With collaborators at UB and Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center, he studies how exposure to ENDS marketing affects perceptions of harm, particularly among tobacco consumers and non-smokers. He mentors Master of Public Health (MPH) students researching generational differences in how e-cigarettes are understood, with findings to be presented nationally. His goal: reducing ENDS use to their intended purpose—helping people quit smoking—rather than fueling new addictions.



Jessica Kulak, PhD

Kulak examines how evolving drug markets—particularly for cannabis—shape young adults' substance use. Funded by the New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports, her current project surveys young adults to track how the rollout of the cannabis marketplace influences the prevalence of cannabis use and risk factors.



Gregory Homish, PhD

Homish brings a social and environmental lens to addiction research. His decade-long study of Army Reserve and National Guard members and their spouses showed how both deployment and non-deployment experiences their substance use. He is now studying stress, resilience and substance use among health care workers post-COVID. A central theme of his work: the importance of social networks in recovery. "A person's social network can be a powerful source of influence, which can mitigate or exacerbate substance use," he says.



R. Lorraine Collins, PhD

Collins' current research is expanding into cannabis use among older adults, a population with unique risks such as falls, cognitive decline and complex health conditions. She continues to advocate for moderation, evidence-based regulation and reducing stigma around substance use.

Reducing harm

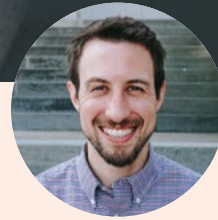
What unites UB's researchers is a commitment to collaboration—and to harm reduction. Whether studying how nicotine receptors drive cravings, examining how social networks support recovery, or testing interventions for chronic pain, they're seeking approaches that make substance use less dangerous and more treatable.

Harm reduction challenges the notion that abstinence is the only path to recovery. Instead, it emphasizes minimizing risk and supporting people's health where they are.

R. Lorraine Collins, associate dean for research and director of UB's Center for Cannabis and Cannabinoid Research, has long advanced this perspective.

"Some people assert that if you have trouble with substance use, the only solution is to abstain. I disagree," Collins said. "I help people to manage their use."

Her work—whether focused on malt liquor and cannabis among young adults or cannabis use among older adults—highlights the role of self-control and behavioral strategies. For Collins, moderation is key—encouraging young people to monitor their use or developing policy recommendations that regulate cannabis potency and marketing.



Nicholas Felicione, PhD

Felicione studies tobacco use, particularly the intersection of product design and behavior. His lab investigates how factors like flavoring, nicotine levels or co-use with cannabis affect dependence and exposure to harmful substances. He works closely in the field of regulatory science to inform FDA policy on emerging products, from e-cigarettes to synthetic nicotine alternatives. He also partners with colleagues to address health disparities in smoking cessation, asking how financial and social barriers affect people's ability to quit.

Although public awareness of addiction has more recently been on opioids and other drugs, **Nicholas Felicione**, assistant professor of community health and health behavior, reminds us that cigarette smoking remains the leading preventable cause of disease, disability and death in the United States. Even though rates of smoking have decreased over the years, it's still "one of the most harmful behaviors we can engage in," Felicione says. He looks for the connections between biology (how substances affect receptors in the brain, for instance) and behavior that produce and reinforce use.

Jessica Kulak's research also highlights how new cannabis products are shaping risk, particularly among young people. By surveying young adults as the cannabis marketplace expands in New York, she hopes to identify emerging patterns that can guide healthier engagement and prevention strategies.

The harm reduction lens resonates in the classroom, too. "We teach students that it's not just about categorizing someone, but asking, how do we meet people where they are?" says **Sarah Heavey**, clinical associate professor in Community Health and Health Behavior. "It's a person-centered approach."



Sarah Heavey, PhD

Heavey bridges epidemiology and community health practice. She analyzes millions of death records to distinguish between unintentional overdoses and suicides, with a focus on rising overdose rates among older adults. She also studies non-pharmaceutical interventions for chronic pain and collaborates with local agencies on suicide mortality. Her work underscores the idea that addiction and mental health are deeply intertwined—and that solutions must be culturally appropriate and system-wide.



UB's New MPH in Addictions

The School of Public Health and Health Professions recently launched a concentration in addictions to its Master of Public Health degree, making UB one of the few institutions nationwide to offer this focus. The need is obvious based on the numbers.

"Overdose and substance use have been increasing over the past 20 years," says Sarah Heavey, "so we view this as a national public health priority. Our department is well-placed to offer the program because of our expertise in the subject."

The program builds on UB's existing strengths in addictions research, drawing on faculty across public health, psychology, pharmacy and social work. Students explore topics like prevention, intervention and policy, preparing them to work in clinical, community and policy settings. The concentration equips graduates to bridge research and practice and ultimately contribute solutions to a field that urgently needs them.

"This is one of the first MPH programs in the country to take a public health perspective on substance use disorders," says Gregory Homish. "It emphasizes health promotion and prevention—areas that don't get enough attention."

A key aspect of the program is that it's offered online in addition to in person. That's a benefit for working professionals who might want to get advanced training but need flexibility in their schedules, Homish notes.

Leveraging technology

As addiction research evolves, so do its tools. UB researchers are increasingly taking advantage of ever-evolving technology to identify patterns in behavior and improve treatment.

Collins is collaborating with project lead and Assistant Professor of Community Health and Health Behavior **Alison Haney** (see her profile on page 18), on proposed research to use artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning and other sophisticated techniques to examine acute tolerance to alcohol.

Similarly, **Kyler Knapp**, assistant professor of community health and health behavior, is exploring how AI can analyze "ecological momentary assessments"—the method of gathering in-the-moment data from people in the context of their natural environment—from people in recovery. A pilot study he has proposed involves getting data from people in their own words about their current moods, experiences and other factors, and using AI to find patterns in what they say. Those patterns, he believes, could show how the process of recovery changes over time and reveal ways to better help people early in their recovery.



Alison Haney, PhD

Haney directs UB's Buffalo Addiction Research (BAR) Lab, a simulated environment outfitted with cameras and sensors to study people's behavior in an actual bar. Her work looks at acute tolerance—the phenomenon where people feel less impaired the longer they drink, even though their actual impairment remains. Because acute tolerance strongly predicts risky outcomes, Haney is testing ways to measure it in the lab and real-world settings. Her pilot project, in collaboration with UB emergency medicine, may lay the groundwork for adaptive interventions that help people recognize risk in the moment.



Kyler Knapp, PhD

Knapp's research emphasizes recovery as a dynamic, individualized process. By tracking people early in recovery through daily smartphone surveys, he seeks to understand moment-to-moment fluctuations in cravings and coping. His focus is on holistic well-being, not just substance use reduction.



Looking ahead

Addiction research at UB is moving into new and timely directions, shaped by emerging trends in substance use and the need for more effective interventions and policy.

Lorraine Collins' long-term vision is getting to policy that treats cannabis like alcohol or tobacco, with age restrictions and strict marketing controls. Nick Felicione is tracking the constantly shifting landscape of nicotine products, from synthetic compounds designed to sidestep regulation to new combinations of tobacco and cannabis that may worsen dependence. Sarah Heavey is pressing forward on work that examines rising overdose deaths among older adults and exploring culturally appropriate interventions for diverse populations.

Kyler Knapp is developing longer-term studies to understand which factors sustain recovery for years, not just months, and wants to broaden understanding of how researchers' and community partners' reciprocal relationships might better inform research and get vital data back to the community. Dennis Daniels is planning deeper dives into how vaping is marketed and perceived, with the goal of shifting electronic nicotine delivery

systems (e-cigs) back toward their intended role as cessation tools. And Gregory Homish is embarking on a new study of health care workers' stress and substance use, motivated by the extraordinary pressures revealed during COVID-19.

Together, these projects point to a future in which UB researchers are not only responding to today's challenges but also anticipating tomorrow's: new products, new populations at risk, and new opportunities to bring science and community together.

As Collins noted, the goal is not simply to eliminate substance use but to help people live healthier lives. "We have this perception as a society that substance use is horrible at the same time we're using substances. I hope that with better regulation and lessening of harm and negative consequences, we can lessen the stigma that can get in the way of people who need help." ○-----○



UB Honors Mendola and Chakraborty as Top Researchers

Two of UB's best and brightest teachers and researchers—**Pauline Mendola** and **Saptarshi Chakraborty**—have been named recipients of the university's 2025 UB Exceptional Scholar Research Recognition Awards.

These awards honor faculty members for outstanding research performance at different stages of their careers. The Sustained Achievement Awards highlight senior scholars; the Young Investigator Awards honor untenured scholars who received their terminal degree within the past eight years. Both recognize work that has “garnered public and/or professional accolades beyond the norm.”

Pauline Mendola, professor and chair of the Department of Epidemiology and Environmental Health (EEH), is the 2025 recipient of the Sustained Achievement Award. This award honors outstanding professional achievement that has been focused on a particular body of work over a number of years. It was created to recognize an unprecedented accomplishment in a senior scholar's career, distinguishing a body of work of enduring importance that has gone beyond the norm in a particular field of study.

Following completion of her doctorate, Mendola was appointed as a research instructor and then hired as an assistant professor on the tenure track in EEH. She was recruited back to Buffalo in 2020 after working at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development as a senior investigator. From the outset of her career, she has made significant contributions with her research and received recognition including two national awards for her dissertation research.

Mendola has also made significant contributions to research, publishing 220 peer-reviewed papers. Her work has been published in the highest impact journals in clinical medicine, environmental health and reproductive health. Mendola has also received several awards for her research including two Scientific and Technological Achievement Awards from the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

Saptarshi Chakraborty, assistant professor in the Department of Biostatistics, is the 2025 recipient of the Young Investigator Award, which celebrates recent superior achievement of a scholar in their field of study. This achievement distinguishes the recipient as an up-and-coming scholar.

Chakraborty was appointed as an assistant professor in the Department of Biostatistics in 2020. He has 34 peer-reviewed publications, including 19 methodology articles, most as first author in top statistics journals, including the *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, and *Biometrics*. He also has developed seven open-source statistical software packages including BAMBI (CV,1), which has been downloaded over 50,000 times. As further evidence of Chakraborty's reputation and impact, he has given 20 invited talks including to eight international conferences, four regional conferences and eight invited seminar talks. He also has established a track record in grant funding as a co-investigator on seven grants and a consultant on one additional grant since arriving at UB. [o-----o](#)



Millen Named Inaugural American Society for Nutrition Fellow

Amy Millen, associate professor in the Department of Epidemiology and Environmental Health, has been selected for the inaugural group of Excellence in Nutrition Fellows of the American Society for Nutrition (ASN).

ASN's Excellence in Nutrition Fellows program recognizes 55 distinguished national and international members for their ongoing contributions to the field and sustained engagement in the nutrition community. It honors outstanding nutrition professionals who are 10 or more years past their terminal degree and have been an ASN scientist, clinician or professional member for five or more years.

Chosen fellows have demonstrated significant impact in their career paths, as well as service to the society. The designation of ASN fellow is a mark of excellence in the field of nutrition, as it signifies fellows' significant contributions to advancing nutrition science and practice, and their dedication to the highest standards of the profession.

Millen's research focuses on understanding the role of nutrition in extending functional years of life and its impact on age-related diseases and other chronic diseases. For instance, her research on vitamin D in relation to age-related eye disease and periodontal disease have made substantial and impactful contributions to the field of nutrition research.

She has received nutrition-related funding from the National Institute on Aging; the National Eye Institute; the National Institute on Dental and Craniofacial Research; the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute; and the BrightFocus Foundation.

Millen has been a member of the ASN for 23 years as a nutritional scientist with a focus on epidemiologic research. She has served eight years on the Nutritional Epidemiology, Group Engaging Members (GEM) community and is currently its chair elect for 2024-25.

Through this engagement, she has contributed to ASN's conference programming through conference abstract review, co-chairing numerous mini-symposia, two symposia, a conference workshop and two years helping oversee ASN's Emerging Leaders in Nutrition Science Poster Competition. Millen has also made numerous contributions to ASN's scientific journal portfolio, including 106 peer-reviewed publications, as well as many other journal publications with an epidemiology focus.



Predicting Risk: How Alison Haney Is Rethinking Addiction Research

When she worked in the Cincinnati VA Hospital's residential substance abuse program, Alison Haney faced a quandary. As a clinical psychologist there, she met daily with patients struggling with addiction, many without stable housing or support.

"The VA has great post-treatment services, so patients do get connected to outpatient care and housing services. However, this transition is really hard for folks just starting their treatment journey, and I wished there was more we could do," she recalls.

And when the pandemic necessitated sending patients home in the middle of their stay, said Haney, "I thought there must be another way I could help."

That conviction led her away from one-on-one clinical work and into the emerging space where psychology, public health and technology meet. Today, as an assistant professor of community health and health behavior at UB, she's developing AI-powered tools to help people make safer decisions about alcohol use—tools that could reach far more people than she ever could in a clinic.



From individual sessions to populations

Haney's background in psychology still shapes her work, but the scale of addiction pushed her to think differently. "I could see a client every hour for the rest of my life and not make a dent," she says. "Addiction is a population-level problem, and AI is really good at predicting behavior. That's where public health comes in."

Her research often begins with "ecological momentary assessment"—brief, real-time surveys sent via smartphone to capture how people feel, where they are and who they're with. Add wearable data from Apple Watches or Bluetooth-enabled breathalyzers, and patterns emerge. "You can't wrap your head around all that data, but an algorithm can look at it and predict what might happen in a personalized way," Haney explains.

Timely nudges

One project Haney led paired a mobile breathalyzer with a machine-learning algorithm to notify participants when they were over the legal limit. "It can help us give a 'nudge' to help them make a better decision," she says. In early trials, the system reduced drinking and driving over six weeks.

The approach can also flag other risks, from relapse triggers to escalating arguments with a significant other. "Helping people recognize patterns they're already in is powerful," Haney says. "We have the technology now that can help predict when people might be vulnerable."






Collaboration and ethics

Haney came to UB because of its reputation in addiction science. “We have some of the best researchers in the world here,” she says, pointing to university colleagues across public health, psychology, computer science and social work. “Addiction by nature needs a multi-disciplinary approach.”

She also emphasizes responsible innovation in the classroom. In her public health ethics and public mental health courses, students explore questions of data, equity and AI. “It’s exciting that we can take what we know in clinical psychology, and in this burst of technology, we can leverage it for good,” Haney says.

Outside of academia, she’s a singer-songwriter and active in Buffalo’s LGBTQ+ community, working to create sober spaces. Music, she says, often helps her solve research problems.

Through it all, her focus remains: helping people make better choices, and now, with tools to reach many more of them. 

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Meet Shujie Chen, Biostatistics Champion

Part of the power of Bayesian statistics is that it allows understanding of a problem to change as new information emerges. In her work focusing on Bayesian variable selection analysis, biostatistics doctoral student Shujie Chen aims to take full advantage of that power to develop solutions to real-world public health problems.



Tell us a little about yourself and your studies.

I completed my undergraduate degree in statistics in China and master's degree in statistics in the United States. I'm currently a PhD student in biostatistics at UB and have finished two years of my PhD study here. I am doing my research about Bayesian methods with Professor Jihnhee Yu.

I am currently working on Bayesian variable selection analysis, focusing on developing the methodology and applying it to real datasets that align with the model assumptions. At this stage, I am still in the development phase, but I hope the method will ultimately perform well with real data.

Why is biostatistics a meaningful field in general and for you personally?

I think biostatistics is meaningful to improve public health by applying knowledge in statistics. It provides a scientific and quantitative foundation for addressing many public health problems. The Biostatistics program aligns with my career goals, such as working in the pharmaceutical industry or addressing health-related research questions in academia.

What's your impression of your program?

The Biostatistics PhD program here is both rigorous and diverse. It provides a strong theoretical foundation along with a variety of applied courses, such as Statistical Analysis System programming, linear models and specialized topics in areas like bioinformatics. I think the most important aspect of the program is my regular meetings with my advisor, Professor Yu. She listens to me attentively and provides thoughtful feedback and guidance, which has helped me improve both my communication skills and critical thinking through our research collaboration.

Would you recommend biostatistics as a field of study or as a career?

If you have an interest in statistics or statistics application, and you're interested in improving health, it is great to have a degree in biostatistics.

What has been the most rewarding part of your time at UB?

In addition to the professional growth I've achieved at the School of Public Health and Health Professions, the training I received and my life in Buffalo have also helped me develop personally, making me more confident and mature in my daily life.

What's the one impression you'd like to give readers of your profile?

I'd like them to see me as someone who is interested in applying biostatistics knowledge to solve real-world problems. ○-----○

It's raining balloons

Giant UB blue and white balloons float down from the rafters once again at the close of the 2025 School of Public Health and Health Professions commencement. Another record-breaking number of students received their diplomas and recognition for their dedication to successfully completing their work in their chosen majors.



Hooded and ready

Another Department of Rehabilitation Science milestone: the traditional hooding ceremony in which Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy graduates who have completed their advanced degrees receive their academic hoods. During the ceremony, faculty mentors placed ceremonial hoods over graduates' heads, signifying their academic achievement and successful completion of their program



On to the field

The Occupational Therapy (OT) program's Class of 2026 sits for a portrait after the program's traditional pinning ceremony. The event marks the transition of OT students from the classroom to clinical fieldwork and is a milestone recognizing their academic achievements and preparing them for their professional roles as occupational therapists. It also symbolizes students' commitment to the profession of occupational therapy.



For This Alumna, Success Starts with Belief

For **Deborah Feltz, BS '74**, success has always stemmed from one key idea: self-efficacy. It's also the concept she's spent years studying, shaping decades of research that has influenced athletes, coaches and exercise scientists.

What seems like a given when discussing their drive and passion for being the best, the psychological concept of self-efficacy was new in the sport niche when Feltz got to studying the impacts of the athlete's mind on their performance improvements.

It's all part of her passion for sport—she is a master's level runner—and for understanding a specific piece of human psychology: motivation. Yet, psychology was never really the avenue she sought. It just happened, she said, while studying in Colorado and Buffalo, both.

"I didn't want to be a psychologist, but I combined psychology with motor learning, anatomy, exercise physiology, and kinesiology [biomechanics]. That blend gave me the tools to help guide junior skiers I was coaching with muscle relaxation training, mental skills and technique," she says. "The physical education teacher training that I received at UB helped me with the pedagogical aspects of my coaching. Very soon after I graduated from the then Health, Physical Education and Recreation program, the major morphed into what it is now—exercise science."

In her quest to understand what motivated people, and specifically athletes and coaches, the concept of self-efficacy fell into her lap as a new pathway to understanding the mental aspect of sport.



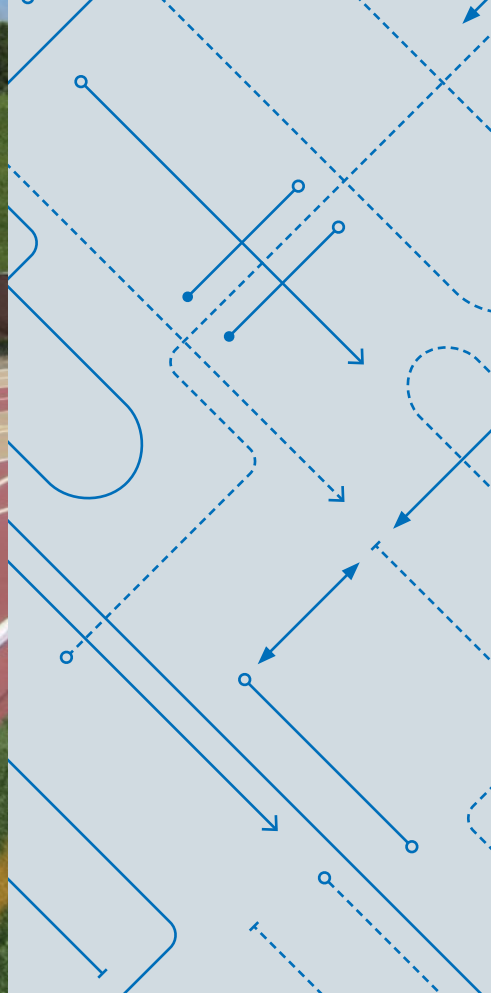
A journey to self-efficacy

The journey began in graduate school, where a mentor suggested she read a research paper on self-efficacy. It made her question herself and led her down a path familiar to many scientific researchers.

Feltz uses "mesearch," the colloquial term for when a researcher investigates a situation, be it a problem or a lack of understanding related to their own life, to describe her work then. For her, the mesearch led her directly to the question, "Am I good enough to do this?"

That question turned into a research career exploring how confidence and motivation affect performance, not only in sport, but in physical and occupational therapy, exercise, and even scientific research itself.

Over time, Feltz's work expanded from individual self-efficacy to teams and coaches. If a team has low motivation due to poor results, highlighting successes can change perceptions and lead to better future results. She has shown how small



successes, carefully highlighted, can lift an entire team's outlook. She has also offered insights into how athletes can avoid overconfidence by respecting their opponents and avoid overlooking an opponent's strengths.

One of Feltz's most innovative contributions came from exploring the power of partnered exercise, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the National Institutes of Health and NASA. Her research revealed that working out alongside a partner—even a virtual partner—can significantly boost motivation and performance. When paired with someone of equal or slightly higher ability, individuals push themselves harder and persist longer. The effect is so powerful that her findings have influenced the design of fitness apps, online training platforms and group-based wellness programs.


"It's about accountability and encouragement," she explains. "We're social creatures. When you exercise with someone else, you're more motivated to keep going—not just for yourself, but because you don't want to let your partner down."

Groundbreaker, professor, mentor

Feltz takes considerable pride in her career not only as a groundbreaking researcher, but also as a professor and mentor to those who have risen through the ranks in exercise science since she began teaching.

Under her mentorship while working at Michigan State University, she guided 47 PhD students and 60 master's students through their degrees. But she never saw mentorship as producing copies of herself.

"As I went further on in my career, I realized it wasn't about cloning me," she says. "Students had ideas of what they wanted to pursue. You need to let young people try to reach their own dreams."

For Feltz, the legacy is clear: she has not only helped athletes, teams and coaches believe in themselves but has also empowered the next generation of scholars to do the same. 

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