



PARKINSON
SCHOOL of HEALTH SCIENCES
AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Bachelor of Science in Public Health Summer 2021 Newsletter

Talking With Lucia Garcia *by Maria Price*



Lucia Garcia, MEd, MPH

Lucia Garcia serves as the Director of Student Affairs and Registration for Loyola University Chicago's Parkinson School. A Rambler through and through, having received her undergraduate and graduate degrees from Loyola, she's developed an extensive career with the University through her previous roles serving as the Assistant Director of Education for the Stritch School of Medicine. With over 14 years of experience, she hopes to bolster resources for a diverse set of student activities and engagements and contribute her personal ethics and values as the Parkinson School continues to define its culture and identity.

Part 1

Since the Parkinson School's opening in 2019, what has excited you about its introduction to Loyola and the wider Chicagoland community?

By being a part of the Parkinson School, I am able to see that we are truly mission driven and oriented toward creating an environment for students to explore their public health interest at an individual level. The opening of our School of Health Sciences and Public Health in a city as diverse as Chicago positions us well to give our students appropriate learning opportunities to become professionals who are well equipped to create solutions to changing and emergent public health needs. I look forward to working collaboratively with our Parkinson community to create initiatives that support students' drives to create change, both locally and globally.

What was the scope of work you did in your previous positions at Loyola?

Previously, I was the Assistant Director for Loyola's Center for Community and Global Health. In this role, I facilitated many of the Center's day to day operations in addition to co-developing programs for current and incoming students related to Loyola's global health initiative. Many do not think of "global health" as being without borders, when in actuality, issues related to global health are just as present in our backyard communities as they are outside of our nation's borders. My personal commitment was to communicate this understanding to everyone in our student community. In this role, I also contributed to our program's curriculum development, incorporating topics of global health relevant to our student community, as well as topics that would prepare students to work with vulnerable populations. I was fortunate to work closely with local community partners who engaged our students in their important work, and opened their doors to students, providing experiential learning opportunities that shaped their personal and professional development.

What did you enjoy most about your previous work experience?

Having a role in higher education, it is critical that we are constantly learning. Constantly learning about emergent and chronic public health issues keeps my job interesting. I've greatly valued working in an environment with people who are dedicated to improving people's lives. This makes everything—the long days, long hours, time off the clock—all worth it. I know this is true for many of my colleagues as well, knowing we will make a difference in students' lives keeps us driven.

In your new position as Parkinson's Director of Student Affairs, what changes are you most looking forward to introducing to the Parkinson community?

One of my priorities is to aid in Parkinson's mission to create an innovative, inclusive, and supportive environment for our students. My goal is to enhance the Parkinson student experience and with my colleagues, help students really feel like they are a part of the "Parkinson Family." I hope to increase student opportunities that can supplement their academic, career and personal interests. I know this can take many forms, so I am excited to identify the resources needed to support the engaged learning interests of our Parkinson student community. The School's newness brings with it lots of opportunity to craft elements of the Parkinson learning environment to create real impact in the lives of our students. Drawing from past roles, I realize that relying on student input to inform the direction of Student Life, programs and initiatives is critical to supporting an empowered student community. Down the road, I would love to focus on growing our undergraduate and graduate opportunities for community engagement and global health.

What does the day to day look like in your position?

Because Parkinson is such a new school, my role continues to develop, so day to day my work is comprehensive in a lot of ways. In my role as Registrar, I manage and oversee class listings, course registrations, and student needs in LOCUS. There are periods of the academic year where this responsibility requires a lot of attention, but other periods where I am able to focus my time on my other roles more readily. In my role as Director of Student Affairs, I work closely with Parkinson leadership to establish processes across our School. I also focus on aspects of Student Life and opportunities for engagement of our student community. I appreciate both roles because they require that I maintain a holistic view of our student community and their needs. I am concerned with every aspect of our student population's health, wellness and, ultimately, academic expectations. I am also the chief facilitator of the Parkinson Scholars program and have enjoyed envisioning the details of this program with our inaugural student cohort throughout the 2021 spring semester. While I do have many formal responsibilities, I maintain a personal commitment to actively contribute to the culture of the Parkinson School. Asking critical questions like, "How are we meeting the needs of our students?" are essential as my colleagues and I facilitate the emergence of an authentic culture for our Parkinson School.

How is Parkinson's culture different than other schools, or departments, that you have worked with in Loyola?

Working among such passionate and dedicated colleagues, it is not hard to see innovation, forward-thinking and interdisciplinary practice, with a strong commitment to social justice. However, defining our culture will take time. Our leadership is truly committed to making this a great place to work and providing support and opportunities for development for faculty and staff.

Do you have particular academic foci, or interests, and how do these inform your work as Director of Student Affairs and Registration

I have a deep love of working with members of our community in the Chicagoland area. My personal and academic interests include gun violence and violence prevention. I was raised in a beautiful Chicago neighborhood that was rich in culture, but was plagued by the effects of historical disinvestment and gun violence. This experience has framed my academic research interests. I've participated in a Chicago Gun Violence Research Collaborative aiming to reduce the impact of gun violence among vulnerable communities in Chicago. I strongly believe that people like me, those who have experienced firsthand the public health issues that we strive to address, should be involved in academic research toward creating solutions. I am currently working with a team of Loyola faculty and staff, and Maywood community organizations toward the development of a youth engagement and job training social enterprise program with support from the Illinois Criminal Justice Authority (ICJA).

For current and future students studying at Parkinson, what is one insight or piece of wisdom you can share with students from your perspective as Director of Student Affairs?

We all have something valuable to share. Simply through each person's lived experience and personal attributes, we all bring an inherent level of valuable knowledge to the table. Equally important is maintaining the awareness to enter any situation with humility. It is important to understand that the field of public health works to provide solutions to issues which are deeply complex. It is essential to understand that a single person cannot create solutions alone and have all the answers. This is why diversity in academic settings, like that of Parkinson, is so essential.

Part 2

What is the one book you believe every university student should read before graduating?

During college I read "The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho. It was assigned for a course, but I really enjoyed it and shared with friends and family. The main character goes on a journey to find a treasure that came to him in a dream. He has pitfalls along the way and learns important lessons, and encounters people that shape his journey. The book's theme is about finding your destiny and calling. Your path may be lined with challenges, but the universe puts you in the right path. It's a very quick and easy read, but has resonated with me.

What do you think is a unique aspect of Chicago or its culture?

There is a reason why I've been here in Chicago my whole life and do not plan to leave. Our city is full of strength, culture, and history. I want my kids to grow up knowing the rich history of Chicago, being familiar with its vibrant cultures, wonderful foods, and diverse communities.

How does your academic knowledge of certain public health concepts or principles inform your daily life and routine?

In studying public health, we learn about social determinants of health which shape the trajectory of our health and disease. This knowledge has deeply informed how I see the world. I strive to maintain empathy and avoid judgement toward others. We truly do not know and cannot understand the depth of a person's health, circumstances, or experiences. The solutions to our population's challenges are so multilayered.

What was the last book you read for leisure?

I am currently listening to a few books on Audible including "Becoming," Michelle Obama's autobiography. She grew up in Chicago and is great at painting a picture of the city. I feel a connection to her stories about her childhood. She went to the same high school as I did (years before me!), and it's cool to hear about her experience and picturing the same hallways and classrooms. I'm also listening to Trevor Noah's book "Born a Crime" but am most interested in the current book I'm listening to. It's called "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao" by Junot Diaz. The main character is a Dominican-American boy who struggles with his awkwardness while trying to survive high school and then college. The author does an amazing job at interweaving the effects on dictatorship, colonialism, and the diaspora of the Dominican people.

What is your ideal breakfast? Why?

A very large cinnamon latte with almond milk or a large cup of café de olla, easy sugar. Coffee is my favorite breakfast. I don't really eat breakfast, but when I go out to a restaurant with friends or family, I order a spinach, mushroom and feta omelet with crispy hash browns.

If you need a laugh, where do you go/ what do you do?

I watch comedy sitcoms like Seinfeld or Chappelle's Show. I can watch them over and over and they never get old!

What positive or optimistic phenomena have you observed about yourself, or your community, in the time since that start of the COVID-19 pandemic? How does this give you hope as you consider the future?

Early on in the pandemic, I was incredibly impressed by our communities that came together to provide food for one another and showed gratitude toward healthcare and frontline workers. On almost a daily basis, I'm so proud and impressed by my kids (5, 6, and 15) who have adapted so well to sheltering in place and restrictions. The little ones are adamant about wearing their masks and understand COVID more than I could have imagined. They've been so cooperative and willing to follow the guidelines in order to keep others safe.

The oldest is doing really well with remote learning during her freshman year of high school. She has been incredibly independent and actually logs in for each class. I really doubt that 15-year-old me would have been patient and willing to sit in a room, in front of a computer, for 7+ hours a day and complete homework.

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Maria Price is a senior BSPH major and a 2021 Parkinson School Dean's Scholar.

BSPH Program Director's Note by Julie Darnell, PhD, MHSA



Last month we marked a significant milestone in the BSPH Program as we celebrated our first graduating class. I'd like to single out the three *brave* seniors (Angelica Gil, Eric Karney, and Sami Johnson) who took a chance on us and switched their majors to a brand new—untested—undergraduate major in public health. A bit of history: In 2019, we had just launched the new Parkinson School in July and had only just moved into our new office space in BVM Hall. We had yet to teach our first PUBH class. In spite of this uncertainty, these three students, who were rising juniors at the time, joined just six other freshman and sophomores as our first majors.

Let's fast forward two years. These graduates' career pathways illustrate the flexibility and in-demand skill set that our BSPH degree offers. Angelica leveraged the BSPH focus on quantitative analysis and earned a minor in biostatistics. She is now looking for employment opportunities as a clinical research coordinator—a job that requires proficiency in statistics—before pursuing an advanced degree in dietetics. Her career ambition is to become a diabetes educator. Eric is preparing to apply to medical school, paving the way for the many pre-health BSPH students who also dream of becoming a doctor. During his gap year, Eric is working at the Chicago Department of Public Health in the Communicable Disease Program on case investigations while educating patients about their health, adding to his public health *bona fides*. Sami is considering master's-level programs in the helping professions, either nursing or social work. Her pathway seems a natural extension of her training and experiences, having long worked in a hospital setting and having always been an active volunteer. It is both exciting and rewarding to imagine where they will take their public health degrees and the marks they will make across a wide array of professions. These students will forever hold a special place in my heart and in the history of our program.

I'm so proud of our inaugural graduates, and in our current BSPH students they leave behind. We invited students to brag about their accomplishments, and this newsletter highlights some of their awards, honors, recognition, and competitively-earned opportunities. Loyola challenges us to "Go forth and set the world on fire." Our BSPH graduates and current students are certainly up to the challenge.

Shout Outs to BSPH Students

We reached out to our BSPH students and asked them to let us know about their 2020-2021 academic year achievements and their summer plans. Here are some highlights:

- **Vinti Bakhsh** was accepted into the 35th Cohort for the Summer Enrichment Program (SEP) at the University of Michigan as a Public Health Policy/Management Intern.
- **Natalie Contreras's** abstract, **Community-based primary healthcare: A tool to improve maternal, neonatal, and child health**, has been accepted as part of APHA's 2021 Annual Meeting and Expo, Oct. 24-27.

- **Ellie Ernhart** is working as an intern with the **Northwest Mosquito Abatement District (NWMAD)**.
- **Maddie Grabow** was selected to the Inaugural 2021 Parkinson Scholars Cohort and is participating in the Hospitalist Project this summer.
- **Mikaela Lies** is a Provost Research Fellowship (mentor: Lara Dugas).
- **Melissa Madrangca** is a Social Justice Internship (SJI) Grant Recipient and 2021 Undergraduate Symposium Participant; Inducted Member of Loyola's Maroon and Gold Society; and plans to continue as an intern this summer with the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH).
- **Tatiana Pasewark** has been a vector-borne disease intern during the academic year and is working this summer with Dr. Justin Harbison. Tatiana is also beginning a new internship supporting the work of the Senior Epidemiologist for the Chicago Department of Public Health in community outreach and understanding vaccine hesitancy in black and brown communities in Chicago.
- **Christina Paskon** was selected to the Inaugural 2021 Parkinson Scholars Cohort and has been working as an intern at Hope for the Day, a non-profit proactive mental health awareness and suicide prevention organization. She was selected to be the Education Coordinator at Hope for the Day for the summer.
- **Maria Price** was named a 2021 Parkinson Dean's Scholar and is a Training Content Analyst this summer at Pfizer.
- **Maya Roytman** was selected to the Inaugural 2021 Parkinson Scholars Cohort; she was named "AMWA Student of the Year" for the American Medical Women's Association (AMWA) Premedical Division at the 106th Annual AMWA Conference and was elected National Co-Conference Chair of the AMWA Premedical Division for 2021-2022; Maya is an Alpha Sigma Nu Inductee (October 2020) and is a [George Washington Carver Summer Intern at the World Food Prize Foundation](#) this summer.
- **Sarah Strom** was named a 2021 Parkinson Dean's Scholar and is a Provost Research Fellowship (mentor: Julie Darnell); Sarah's abstract, ***Cancer care is not meant for young adults: A qualitative study of young women navigating a breast cancer diagnosis***, has been accepted as part of APHA's 2021 Annual Meeting and Expo, Oct. 24-27.

BSPH students, please continue to let us know how we can brag about you in our future editions of the *BSPH Newsletter!*

Parkinson Professional Development Workshop Series

(A collaboration between LUC Career Services and the BSPH Program)



The BSPH Program highly values our collaboration with our partner in Careers Services, **Christie Asif, Career Development Advisor**, and we appreciate all of her work in bringing an excellent workshop series to the Parkinson School. Christie was recently selected as a **staff recognition award recipient** by the University Staff Council. You can see Christie's profile [here](#).

A full listing of the 2020-2021 Parkinson Professional Development Workshop Series and their recordings is available on the [BSPH website](#) (scroll down).

Resources

Public Health Resources:

[BSPH Program Students Sakai Site](#)

[Public Health Job Board](#)

[Career Services](#), Christie Andersen Asif, Career Development Advisor (Health Sciences), casif@luc.edu

Librarian for the BSPH Program, Elise Aversa, Interim Subject Specialist Librarian for Parkinson,

eaversa@luc.edu; [Public Health Guide](#)

Parkinson Experiential Learning: ParkinsonEXPL@luc.edu

Parkinson Weekly Student Life Newsletter, contact: ParkinsonStudentLife@luc.edu

Student Support Resources:

[Parkinson School of Health Sciences and Public Health Student Handbook 2020-2021](#)

[Student Accessibility Center](#)

[Tutoring Center](#)

[Writing Center](#)

Interested in Contributing to the BSPH Newsletter?

We are always looking for new content for the BSPH Newsletter. Students may hone their communication skills, share their thoughts, interests, and ideas on a variety of public health topics. Email Keith Kramer, kkramer4@luc.edu.

For more information about the B.S. in Public Health program, please contact:

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Know someone who is interested in public health? Please share this newsletter.