

150<sup>th</sup> Video:

Throughout our nation's history, APHA has been there. We've been on the ground, fighting for the public's health since 1872, taking on diseases, poverty, and sanitation at the turn of the century. We were there when Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. called for equal rights, and continue today, fighting to end racism and counter all of its devastating health effects. We were there, encouraging auto safety standards and calling for seatbelt laws. Since then, we continue to support work to make our cars and roads safer and reduce injuries. APHA was there when women made their voices heard and supports their ongoing fight for equality and control over their own health.

We fought for access to care as AIDS spread across the country and continue working to ensure easy and equal access for all to vaccines for COVID-19, the flu, and other infectious disease. We've been sounding the alarm about climate change's impact on human health by raising awareness, and the world is listening. Change is happening, but these next years are so important. We need your help to shift the tide. By advocating for safe work, home, and school environments, access to care, nutritious food, and reducing gun violence, we've strengthened our nation's public health. And APHA continues to develop and advocate for policies and programs that support the public's health and the public health workforce. We were there, and we're here today, and together we are moving forward. Join us as we celebrate APHA's 150th anniversary and look to an even brighter future. Together, we will continue to improve health and achieve health equity for all.

Holly Plackemeier:

Hello everyone. I am Holly Plackemeier, affiliate affairs manager at American Public Health Association, and I'm very excited to welcome you to National Public Health Week Student Day, a day dedicated to supporting and uplifting all of you, the next generation of public health leaders. So, we are very excited to get into our discussion today with our panel. We will be talking about a lot of different topics, from networking to learning how folks got into their public health careers, different tips and tricks along the way.

And for folks who are new to National Public Health Week, we actually have a different National Public Health Week theme every year. So, this year's is public health is where you are, so really honoring the interconnected nature of public health and all of us. And another thing that you may not know, with each National Public Health Week, each day has a daily theme. So, since today's daily theme focuses on the public health workforce, we thought, what better way than to connect with all of you today, especially as you're about to start that journey yourselves.

So, another thank you I want to make sure that I make too is to the folks at Walden University who helped make this event possible as our student day sponsor, and also a thank you to our APHA student assembly who are always there along the way, helping make sure we ask the right questions that are helpful to students.

So, another thing I want to make sure that I touch on, and you may have seen it if you hopped onto the webinar a little bit early, if you saw our rolling slides as the intro, APHA is very excited to be celebrating our 150th anniversary this year, and we're celebrating in a number of ways.

So, we'll be hosting events every month leading up to our annual meeting happening in November in Boston. So, if you're interested in checking out more about the 150th, the different events going on, making plans to attend the annual meeting, you can check that out at [apha.org](http://apha.org). And of course, if you have any other questions about National Public Health Week, the different resources we've made available to you all, to celebrate in your communities, and also to register for any of the events that are

happening, both with APHA, we have events happening throughout the week, and then there are also events happening in communities around the country. So, if you want to learn more about that, go to [nphw.org](http://nphw.org).

So, a few housekeeping things before I go into introducing our panelists. So, on the platform that you're viewing this event, you'll see both a chat function and then also a Q&A function. So, in the chat, I really welcome you all to introduce yourselves. If you are a current student, what are you studying? What are you hoping to do in the future? Where are you attending? If you're looking at grad school, what does that look like for you? What kind of programs do you want to study? We would love to see what folks are doing, where you're visiting.

We know we have a number of people joining us today from across the country, and we're really happy to have you here. And then also, if you have any questions along the way, make sure you drop them into the Q&A tab, and we'll make sure to answer those, either in the moment or at the end. We'll have plenty of Q&A time. So, with all of that being said, I am very happy to jump into introducing our panelists today.

And I will start off with my colleague, Arianne Noorestani. So, Arianne is the project communication support specialist for the Healthiest Cities and Counties Challenge here at APHA. In her role, she curates and disseminates communication content, in addition to providing technical assistance. She earned her bachelor of arts degree in environmental studies with a minor in public health from the George Washington University in 2020. So, very happy to have you here, Arianne.

And next, I will introduce Aleigha Spaulding. So, Aleigha is an epidemiologist at the Tennessee Department of Health within the office of informatics and analytics. After graduating from East Tennessee State, or East Tennessee State University, in 2020 with her master's of public health in epidemiology and biostatistics, Aleigha joined the team at Tennessee Department of Health to support their work in statewide drug overdose surveillance. So, thank you, Aleigha, for being here.

And next, I will introduce Maddie Kinscher. So, Maddie is currently a Marshfield Clinic Health System Community Corps member, serving the Central Rivers Farmshed, a nonprofit whose mission is to build a resilient, local food economy. She supports community health efforts through program development, volunteer coordination, education, outreach, and development. She graduated from the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point with a bachelor of science in health promotion and a minor in biology. And she's also a previous APHA intern, so we are very happy to have her back here with us today.

And rounding out our panel, we also have Zamir Brown, who is a senior program associate with the de Beaumont Foundation. He also serves as a governing counselor for APHA, representing the community health planning and policy development section. Zamir holds a master of public health degree from the George Washington University Milken Institute School of Public Health and also earned a bachelor of arts and anthropology in chemistry from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and an associates of science degree from Durham Technical Community College in premedical studies. So, as you can see, we have a great group of panelists with us today, representing a number of different experiences, so hopefully you'll be able to pull from their experiences and their tips and tricks along the way. So, the opening question today that I have for our panelists is really to get to know a little bit more about you and what drew you to the public health field, understanding too, that sometimes people don't

have the most traditional route, and it doesn't always look so linear for folks. So for this question, I will throw it to Zamir to kick us off.

Zamir Brown: Great. Thank you, Holly, and glad to be here with everybody and to always support APHA, especially during National Public Health Week. And as you said, definitely not the most traditional, linear, or an intentional path to public health. That is definitely my case. I would say the thing that really drew me to public health was I've always been seeking opportunities to be of service to others. And it took me through a lot of different avenues, even through physical therapy, even med school for a while, but, all in all, I'm glad that I ended up in public health, and I think it really centered around trying to find opportunities to, like I said, serve, give back, recognizing that, without having one's health, there's not much else that can be accomplished and always trying to ensure that people are not being barred from the opportunities to achieve their healthiest life, and that's why I ended up coming to public health.

Holly Plackemeier All right. Arianne, if you want to go next.

Arianne Noorestani: So, I started undergrad as an environmental studies major, and I loved it. I loved the coursework, but, sometime during my sophomore year, I took a class. It was a very new class. It was taught by seven different professors, and each professor came from a different field of study, so there was an engineering professor, a bio professor, someone from the IA department, and the point of the class was to show the intersection of these different fields of study to the environmental field. And so, one of the professors was a public health one, and he taught one of our classes, and I was like, okay, this seems very, very interesting and something that I'd like to learn more about. And so, I took a few more environmental health classes until I finally decided and realized I really want to pursue public health.

And at that point, it was too late to do it as a double major, and so it became my minor, and yeah, my coursework was genuinely life changing. I found something I was really, really passionate about. It really opened my eyes to the fact that there were so many challenges and disparities that existed within my own backyard in Washington, D.C., and also made me think really critically about my own life and life experiences of my two immigrant parents who came from Afghanistan and the number, the multitude of public health challenges that exist back in my home country. And so, yeah, I think it was all of that combined together to really, really, just really open my eyes. And I was like, okay, this is definitely something I need to pursue for [inaudible 00:11:14] because [inaudible 00:11:19].

Holly Plackemeier Thank you, Arianne. All right, how about Aleigha?

Aleigha Spaulding: Hi, everyone. So happy to be here, talking with you all today about such an important topic and something that I wish I could have also experienced before I had gotten into the just huge world of careers in public health. For me, kind of similar to some others, I didn't have a super linear track to getting into public health. I was in my undergraduate program in microbiology, was super excited, just thinking about, "Oh, do I like to go to medical school?" and delved, really went down far in that path before I realized that I love the idea of public health and being able to focus on improving the quality of health for such a grand population of people. So, that's how I fell in love with public health, is thinking about all the possibilities. There are so many opportunities within the field of public health. I landed in one that I'm also really passionate about, but I think just the opportunities are endless of the things that you can do and focus on to really improve

the quality of health around your community and also on a grander scale of the country, internationally. So, I think it's just all around a really, really great career field to get into.

Holly Plackemeier Thank you, Aleigha. And how about you, Maddie?

Maddie Kinscher: Oh, I also didn't come from a direct public health background. I have a degree in health promotion, and based on the education I received, we didn't really talk a lot about the social or systemic determinants of health. And it wasn't until I interned with a public health department and at APHA that I realized I had so much desire and drive to work in settings that acknowledge those things and help guide people through those barriers and aspects and then participate with organizations that actually work to diminish them. For me, it is just a lot more fulfilling to work in an area of health that really acknowledges the root causes of health, whereas, from what I was gathering from my education, it was more catering to those who did not have to worry about financials as much or if their community is safe or pollution. So, for me, it just brought a lot more drive and passion and excitement to actually work with organizations and other people who do acknowledge those root causes. And like it has been said, public health is pretty broad, so even if you didn't come from a direct public health background, you can be integrated into it in many different ways.

Holly Plackemeier I really love that, Maddie. I think that's another thing that's important to keep in mind too because there may be folks listening to this call thinking, "Well, I'm not ... Maybe my undergrad isn't directly in what public health is or what you think public health is." But I think there really is a space for everyone in this work. Speaking for myself, I didn't really know what public health was when I was going through school, and there wasn't really a major for that as someone who comes from a communication and development background. And you can kind of find your way. And the one thing too that I've heard a couple of people say is that openness to different experiences, trying different classes, different internships, that can really show you what you hope to do in the future. So, one thing that I want to ask our panelists, digging a little bit deeper into how you got your current roles, because I'm sure people watching this, if they're about to graduate in May, they're thinking, "Oh, maybe I do have an idea of the job that I want to get into, but I'm not sure how to get my foot in the door." So, for folks who are really thinking about that, like, "What can I do to stand out? What can I do to get my foot in the door?" what would you say to them? And let's start with Aleigha.

Aleigha Spaulding: So, for me, it was mostly about the experiences that I created for myself in my undergraduate career and then also in graduate school. So, I did graduate with my master's right after COVID. It was May 2020, and things felt very uncertain and a little bit confusing. So, I think maneuvering the job market at that time was difficult for a lot of people. So, for me, I didn't have necessarily a foot in the door where I work now. I got really lucky in that I found something that I was really passionate about, and I think that definitely translated through in my interview. So, for me, I worked a lot on just interview skills and being sure that I had those really solid. And then, all of the experiences that I had during undergrad, during graduate school, I really pulled out those skills I developed from those and utilized those when I was interviewing.

So, for me, that was working with big data, and I'm kind of a data person. I work mostly with data, so just all those research skills I developed in undergrad and graduate school helped me a lot in getting my job now. And that's what I do mostly. I work with data. I do surveillance. I actually really enjoy it. So, for me, it's a little bit different, but I think overall just really utilizing the skills that you've created during your experience is going to help you a lot when looking for your first job. And I'm still in my first job, so I'm still

very new in my career. I just started in 2020, and I'm coming up on my two-year anniversary at my job. So, that's been my story, is just really utilizing the skills that you've created.

Holly Plackemeier

All right. And Zamir, how about you go next?

Zamir Brown:

Yes. I'm only going to talk about one of my jobs. I guess that's probably to save us all a little of the time. So, for the de Beaumont, it actually, I think, probably started at an APHA speed mentoring event, maybe ... What is it? A year or two ago. And so, I was speed mentoring with the CEO of de Beaumont Foundation, and we hit it off, and then, after it was all said and done, we parted ways and basically never spoke again, except maybe a couple of interactions on LinkedIn and on Twitter. So, this isn't one of those fairy tale stories, oh, speed mentoring session, got a job right after it. This is not that situation. I started just out of curiosity and just wanting to understand more about what our CEO, Brian, did and also to connect with someone else in staff, just to really know just how did they achieve the heights and the successes that they had in public health.

I had informational interviews with them, and then some several months later, just after maybe just a lot of work still being in my other role at that time for the National Health Law Program, I was being recruited for a director level position for the de Beaumont Foundation. I did not get that position. I had procrastinated actually going through the process of getting a resume writer and someone to help me with my cover letter. And so, this opportunity came knocking, and I did not have my materials together. So, an opportunity passed me by yet again. And so, after a while, I'm like, I really am finding more interest in this de Beaumont Foundation. And so, I applied to some other positions. Again, still did not capitalize off of the resume writer and the cover letters, and I did not get those positions either. And so, I kept doing research on the organization.

Finally actually went through the process with a resume writer, got my materials together, found out I had way more experience than what I was actually relaying, applied to the job, and got the job. Great experience, much less daunting. And I had a whole lot more confidence in actually showing up because I could actually look at my resume and my cover letter, and I could say, "I'm proud of this. I'm proud of myself. I'm proud of my accomplishments," because I was really looking at things in a manner saying, "Okay, I only have ... I just graduated. I only have a few months of postgraduate experience, but I worked the entire time that I was getting my graduate degree." And then, even before that, I had so much other experience. And so, it actually added up to a lot. So, it built up a lot of confidence in me.

And then, I think the other thing that I would really say is that I talked my butt off, and I just really showed up as myself because I had a revelation that censoring myself and dampening who I am and my personality, if I don't fit here, for who I am, then I guess I don't need to be here. So, I showed up as my authentic self, and I made a lot of great relationships, and I'm really enjoying the job. And I think another thing that really I would say got my foot in the door was that I showed a lot of gratitude through every single step of the interview process. It wasn't a tactic or just some sort of technique. I was like, I'm a person that really is appreciative of the connections that I have, so I'm going to actually give them a virtual e-card and just say, "Thank you for this opportunity to interview. I took a lot away from it." And I'm thinking that possibly had something to do with things too. But I would say really being diligent, networking, informational interviews, and being authentic in who you are.

Holly Plackemeier

And how about you, Maddie?

Maddie Kinscher:

So, specifically for me, networking played a huge role. I was a former intern of Farmshed during my undergraduate. And when I applied through AmeriCorps to be a part of them, the former executive director recognized my name, and she remembered the quality of work I've done and was really excited to have me coming back, which allowed me to more easily integrate myself into the organization with new staff members. So, building those connections and then showing up to an internship, a volunteer opportunity with an organization you're super interested in and giving it your full work ethic a hundred percent and having people remember you, I think, is incredibly important and building those connections. And it can be ... It doesn't have to be super formal. It can be informal as well.

Another thing in regards to interviewing to make an impact, let's just say, if you apply for a job where you didn't have an in with the company, my golden rule is to always ask them three questions after they're done asking you questions, and make sure they're genuine and shows that you're really invested in this opportunity and that you are genuinely trying to learn more to determine if it's right for you. Asking questions, I think, is really important because, for those who say, "Oh, no, I don't have any other questions," from what I've gathered of my interviewing experience, they move on to the next person. And then, kind of echoing Zamir's experience with being denied a job but doing more research and keep going at it, if you do get denied jobs, you just take it as a learning experience and an opportunity to continue to learn more and take notes in a running list of where you could have done better, what you would've answered instead. Yeah. That's what I would say.

Holly Plackemeier

Thank you, Maddie. And how about you, Arianne? How did you get your start at APHA?

Arianne Noorestani:

So, I was also one of those unfortunate 2020 graduates. Honestly, 2020 was so rough for me. I was so obsessed with school and succeeding all throughout high school and college. And then 2020 hit, and I really, really lost a lot of my motivation, my inspiration to get a start in a career that I felt really passionate about. And so, when I moved back home, I honestly only applied to five jobs, I remember, in March of 2020. And then I gave up, and I was like, "I'm going to try and extend my current internship," that I had at the time. And I was just very pessimistic about being able to find a job at the start of the pandemic, which I wish I wasn't, and I regret doing that because I don't think anyone should go in with that sort of mentality.

I wish I was a bit more positive, but one of the five jobs that I had applied to was with APHA, and I remember interviewing, and the interview process took longer than I expected, but, at the end of June, I found out I had got the job, and I was so, so, so thrilled. It was a communications specialist position, which was something that I didn't really even have much experience in. But I was, at that point, I like felt a shift in my attitude and was just in this mindset of I'm open to a new experience, and I'm really, really willing to learn, and I'm so glad I did. The Healthiest Cities and Counties Challenge, which is the project I'm currently working on, focuses on food insecurity and improving access to health services. Those are two things that I wasn't well versed in at all. Even communications, I came in thinking that I might be posting on Facebook and Instagram and writing a blog post, but it's so much more than that. It was about learning how to make information accessible and being able to get the right information out to the people who need it. And so, yeah, it was a really, really great learning experience for me, and I'm so glad I accepted this position.

And one thing about the interview process that I think really helped me was I was very candid about my experience, or my lack of experience, and really, really try to hone in on the fact that I was really open to learning more and to making mistakes and to just really getting my hands dirty so I can figure out, so I could succeed in this role. And I think that being candid and being honest and being vocal about what skills you do have and what skills you don't but would like to have, I think that's really important, and I think it worked in my favor.

Holly Plackemeier: Thank you so much, everyone. So, I do want to quickly make a plug here to talk a little bit about our APHA student assembly. So, if there's anyone on our team who can drop something in the chat, talking a little bit more about that, I think it is such an incredible opportunity for current students to gain professional development opportunities, present at conferences. I know they do a lot with mentoring, and mentoring is something we're going to talk about a little bit later, but a lot of really great opportunities there, so I highly recommend you check that out and talk to the leaders there. I think they'll help you along the way. So, the next question that I want to focus on is specific skills that you all have gained that you think have been helpful in your roles and helped you secure your roles. But, before I get to that, actually I have a question that I think I'm going to field to Aleigha first because I know that I heard you talk a little bit about research, and there was a question that came in from the chat. How did you get started in research? So, if you could talk a little bit more about that and then if any of our panelists have any experience there, you can jump in.

Aleigha Spaulding: Sure. Yeah. So, for me, I was super interested in research in undergrad, so I did an honors program where I was able to basically develop my own research project and do an undergraduate thesis. So, that's how I got started initially with research. In my graduate program, I did an internship with the American Cancer Society and did even more research there and got more experience with just larger data sets than what I had ever had the opportunity of working with before. So, for me, it was just really taking risks, I think, and reaching out to people who I knew would be supportive of me and my ideas and things that I wanted to pursue was really helpful. I know later we might talk a bit more about this, but I had really great mentors, both in my undergraduate degree and my graduate school program, that really helped me along the way and helped support me in succeeding in that. So, yeah, I think, for me, it was mostly just being super open with my professors, my mentors, about, "Hey, these are ideas that I have, and how can I pursue these?" So, it's been really helpful to me now in my first job out of school too. So, hopefully that answers the question. I don't know if I'm answering it very well, but definitely the mentors I had helped me so much.

Holly Plackemeier: All right. Thank you. So, opening that up then broader to skills that you all have gained, specific skills or projects that you worked on that you know were the thing that helped you get your job and even skills that you gained outside of past work experience, outside of the classroom, that really helped you in your professional development, would love to hear about that. And I will pass it to Maddie to kick us off.

Maddie Kinscher: So, in the classroom, I had a great opportunity to take two motivational interviewing classes, and that's a form of health coaching that's super patient-centered. So, it's 75% of the time, they're doing the talking. You're listening and reflecting back to them, and you're really more of a guide to lead them towards the goal or the behavior they want to change, rather than telling them what to do, what you think is best for them. It's really making sure they focus on their intrinsic values, and they work towards that goal themselves to build that health potential and that capacity within themselves so they no longer have to go to you as a coach. And even though I'm not a health coach, it helps

you teach empathy, active listening, reflecting, and really going in with an unassuming presence when you do talk to people, especially for those who may have had different experiences than you. It's really important to go into those thinking that everybody has the potential to give themselves the best they can, but see where you can help guide them or help them out in any way.

Outside the classroom, something really important that I've learned through public health internships especially is how to communicate, be the liaison between scientists or healthcare professionals with the general public and being able to construct comprehensive and accessible communication in order to convey the importance of a lot of public health issues and health promotion in a way that can reach everybody, so everybody can participate.

Holly Plackemeier

Thank you, Maddie. And how about you, Zamir?

Zamir Brown:

Yeah, I can definitely resonate with that, Maddie. I actually studied anthropology for undergrad, and my mom did not think that I would ever find a job for getting an anthropology degree, but apparently I did, several times over at this point. But I think the biggest thing that I took away from anthropology was cultural humility, not cultural competence, because you never just want to hit a certain level of proficiency with just knowing somebody else's culture. Right? But being humble in knowing that I don't know is something I think I use every single day, and it's, ironically, I know we're here on a speaking panel, but it really has caused me to be quiet way more and just to listen to what other people are saying. And so, I honestly thought in my last job that it would be a mark against me because I was so quiet the majority of the time, but then, during my exit interviews, when I was leaving, they actually said that they appreciated how intentional I was in actually listening and then synthesizing the information because I actually was not just in there trying to just get a word in, but actually speaking when I had something to say, but, most importantly, just taking things in.

And so, to some extent, I learned that from the classroom, but I also just learned that from actually being in community because when you're in spaces, and it's different, and you're the outlier, and you're just watching, it causes you to start to be more mindful and to try to take in more and to see that there's other ways that things can be done. So, going back more specifically to classrooms situations, there's always the technical things that we can explicitly learn. So, let's say, policy analysis, research, program development, I think all of those things are extremely relevant to me in my work life, but also just in my personal life because you have to manage your outside of work experience so you don't find yourself in a situation where you're burnt out and exhausted. But I think another piece was just really dealing with and managing the course loads, the deadlines.

And I did my MPH entirely online through GW. And so, I feel like I was already teed up for the pandemic, but then also just living in this hybrid, virtual workspace. So, I was able to ... I started my first job in the pandemic April 1st, and I seemingly didn't miss a step because I had been virtual the entire time.

Now, outside of the classroom, I think the thing that was a major, major thing for me was really being diligent, innovating and creating opportunities because, when you're in a virtual program ... So, I did GW online while I was in North Carolina, and there weren't really that many opportunities to do practicums and to get field experience and to do internships, so I really had to push and communicate and reach out and network and develop opportunities. And so, on my LinkedIn, a lot of the opportunities and positions



that I've had, I've honestly had to make those by presenting and proposing ideas to state representatives or going to policy advisors for the governor of North Carolina to say, "Hey, I need to do a fellowship. This is what I can do. Will you take me?" and also getting a lot of support from mentors that I've met through networking as well.

Holly Plackemeier: That's great. Thank you, Zamir. So, Aleigha, I know that you talked a little bit about research, but are there anything else there that you would like to add?

Aleigha Spaulding: Yes. I think another thing that was important for me, not only the work that I was doing within my programs, but the work that I did outside of school. And in undergrad, I did so many things that weren't all super relevant to what I do now. Every job that you have or experience that you have is important, and you'll definitely utilize those skills later. I worked as a server for a couple of years in undergrad and never thought about just that experience. Obviously, it's not something I'd put on my resume, but it's something that, the skills that I developed during that time, just interacting with people, people of very diverse backgrounds and different experiences from me, that helps me in my job every day now. So, I think really just looking at your experiences and things that you've done and that viewpoint of, "This is something that could help me down the road," is important.

So I did ... Let's see. During graduate school, I did an assistantship that wasn't really related at all, or at least I didn't think at the time. I was basically an editor for all of the graduate and dissertations and theses for the graduate school. And during that time, I liked what I did, but it was very tedious. And I thought, "Oh, I don't know that this is really relevant. I want to be doing more research-focused things." But, again, those are super important skills that I learned as to how to be super detail-oriented and how to manage a lot of different things at once, and I use that with my job every day. And now, I'm the main editor for our reports that we create from my office. So, our statewide reports are always like, "Aleigha, will you look over this? Will you pick out, make sure, use your eagle eye to pick out anything that we've maybe overlooked?" So, even the smallest of experiences could be really beneficial to you, so don't overlook those, I guess, would be my advice.

Holly Plackemeier: Thank you so much. And Arianne, do you want to round us out?

Arianne Noorestani: Yeah. I'll just very quickly say don't overlook student orgs. I was so against student orgs in high school. I was so obsessed with getting good grades that I just participated in things that I could throw on a college application, but came to college, joined one student org. It was a cultural student org at GW, and it changed my life. I, not only ... There was a whole shift in how I viewed myself and my cultural identity and the relationships I made, but I also just learned so many relevant and important skills. I had to manage budgets. I had to plan events that had hundreds of people who were going to attend. I had to ... I can't even think of the number, the hundreds of things that I had to do through my student org experiences, but they were so, so important.

And I think I learned more from those experiences than I did from some of my internships, and I used some of those skills more than the skills I learned from my internships. So, don't overlook that. It's a great way of building relationships and making connections in college but also a great way to expand your skillset. And yeah, I feel like it really gives you a taste of the real world because it's all student run, and you have very minimal adult supervision, if any, at all, I mean, as a college student. So, definitely would recommend joining a student org.

Holly Plackemeier Thank you all. I really loved what a lot of you said about especially those skills that you gain outside of the classroom. I think that's incredibly helpful, especially those people skills, working with different kinds of people who come from different kinds of communities. That is very important. So, next question I want to touch on is more geared toward grad programs. So, Zamir and Aleigha, these are more for you two. So, it's a two-part question, and I'm actually going to fold in a question from the chat here as well. So, what experiences did you highlight when you were applying to grad school? How did you choose those programs? And do you have any advice on if someone's thinking about going right in from undergrad or if they should take a few years to gain some work experience? So, whoever wants to go.

Aleigha Spaulding: Okay, sure. Yeah, I'll answer this one first. For me, I did a lot of different, varied type of experiences in undergrad with different student organizations, different jobs I had worked, research I had done. So, I really tried to pinpoint the experiences that I felt were the most relevant to the kind of work I wanted to do in public health and why I wanted to pursue a Masters of Public Health. So, I definitely highlighted those in my applications. I only applied to a few different schools. I think, for me coming out of undergrad, I was very much just surprised, I guess, by my change in career direction, and I think that definitely and, I guess, my experience affected the effort I put into just wanting to apply to different places. I think I could have applied more places, but overall I'm really happy with I ended up staying at the school that I went to for undergrad for my graduate degree, and I had really great experiences there. So, I was lucky in that, but I think that's something that I would have done differently, looking back now, is maybe just applying to more broad places and just having different experiences. And I'm forgetting which other question you asked. I'm looking now. Oh, I think-

Holly Plackemeier [crosstalk 00:41:19]. Oh, go ahead.

Aleigha Spaulding: I chose-

Holly Plackemeier Yeah. Yeah.

Aleigha Spaulding: So, definitely, for me, it was finances and location and just personal experiences that I had at my school that made me want to stay. But I think, like I said, looking back, I wouldn't let that limit you and the opportunities that you search for and the programs that you look into. I wouldn't let that limit you. In terms of getting experience before you apply, I've definitely found most people that I work with now are a little bit older than me, and they definitely took some time to gain some working experience before they applied to graduate school. And then they've done that again and have applied to their doctorate program. So, I work with mostly PhDs, and I think I can definitely see how that helped them in their career and building their skills and what they do. And when I was applying, I definitely saw that a lot of positions did want some experience along with an MPH. So, that's something that I wasn't really aware of when I went into my degree program. So, but I definitely, I think, either way you do it, like you're going, as long as you really focus on experiences that you can get out of your graduate program and really optimizing on those, then you can definitely succeed. But those are things that I didn't know going into it that I would have definitely considered.

Holly Plackemeier All right. And you can go ahead, Zamir.

Zamir Brown: Yeah. Great. Thank you. Yeah. I actually had to go back and find my application material to the schools. And I was reading this. I was like, "What was I talking about?" But, quite honestly, I think the thing that I highlighted most was my own lived experience and who

I was, but also who I am. One thing that I encounter a lot in my personal business, consulting and coaching, is people suffering from imposter syndrome and not feeling that they have done enough, that they don't have any experience. And the majority of the time, after I've finished speaking with them, and we go through their experience, they realize like, "Oh my gosh, that's something that I should have brought up."

And so, one thing that really I think helped me through this process was being, I guess, ruthlessly true to myself and my lived experience, instead of saying, "Oh, I needed to get this technical program," because that wasn't really not an option for me. That wasn't my situation. It was just in the weeds, trying to help out wherever I could. So, I highlighted that, and I showed my dedication to service, leadership, and my creativity. I think I wrote my letter of intent in a very interesting way. And I detailed my ... I don't know ... plans. I just call them that. And I was like, hopefully they're going to ... not even if they're going to like it, but this is just the real ... This is the truth for me. And so, that's what I did.

As it related to applying to schools, I was actually in an MPH program, so, I guess, more context. After I got out of undergrad, I went straight into medical school. And so, I was there for two years, doing my medical training, as well as pursuing a public health degree, closer to the latter half of my duration. And while I was there, I just was like, this is great. This is good and all, but I really want to do more. There were a lot of things that I realized, especially as it related to addressing health inequities and issues related to racial justice and discrimination. And I felt that the best way that that was going to happen was through addressing policy, and I felt that I needed to go elsewhere. It was a big decision, and it was a very big move halfway through an MPH program already, committed to this medical program.

But I felt that I had to be true to what I felt, was the most appropriate thing for me to do. And so, I took that leap of faith, and I applied to three programs, and I got into two out of those three. I opted for a virtual opportunity because I wanted to still be engaged in the community as much as possible while obtaining a high level degree. And the thing that I think really solidified my decision to go to GW over UNC, even though I'm a Tar Heel through and through, it was about actually building a network even more because I was like, if I'm going to be living in North Carolina, I can still make relationships here myself, but I can also make relationships in D.C. So, I felt like I could get a two for one special, while staying local and not having to deal with D.C. traffic. And that worked out for me, made a lot of relationships there.

So, I was reflecting the other day, talking with my wife. I was like, "There's people that I have very close ties with and close relationships with that are in D.C., Maryland, Virginia, that I have never, ever, ever met." And so, now we're moving up to Maryland, but it feels like I'm going home. And so, that was something that was very important for me because it was about looking to the future because I knew that I wanted to go to the DMV. And so, I was tactful in saying, "Okay, let me go to a program that's going to help me build those relationships and allow me to do that networking."

And as it relates to going straight through or getting experience, I think it definitely depends on the situation and what you're trying to do. For some people, the best thing to do is to just go straight into it. Other times, it's to take some downtime, figuring out your bearings and get some more experience. I think that's something I could have benefited from and could have definitely saved myself a whole lot of money than moving to Seattle straight out of undergrad. But I was rushing because, quite honestly, I was scared, and I thought that, if I stopped, then I wouldn't start again, and it would be

practically impossible. But the last thing I'll say about this particular point is I've always operated in a situation or from under the pretense of thinking that why not do both? I don't think that you always have to just pick and choose and say, "Oh, I have to be an undergrad and I don't get experience. Or I have to get experience after." I made sure that I was getting experience during undergrad.

I made sure I was getting experience during grad school. Maybe I was getting a little too much experience and running myself into the ground. I wouldn't recommend that, but find opportunities to actually engage and learn and volunteer and intern and maybe get a little bit of a side job, if you can, because, if I'm being absolutely honest, and I think we've all, to some extent, have gone through undergrad, and I think we can go back and look at our experience and say that we actually had a whole lot of free time on our hands, and we just did not use it effectively. I know that's the truth for me. Even though I was doing a whole lot, I was like, I could have definitely had more of a social life, capitalized off this experience more, but, for some reason, the time just was evaporating, just being wasted. And so, I would say definitely seize those moments and those opportunities.

Holly Plackemeier Thank you both for sharing and for sharing the virtual versus in-person too. I appreciate that perspective. And Maddie, I was distracted earlier by your dog jumping on you, so I hope he's doing okay. So, I actually have a follow-up question for you, Aleigha, something that came through the chat. So, this is as an individual who's interested in getting their MPH, but there's only one course offered in biostats, and that, I guess, they've seen in job applications that SAS and our experience is what's really valued. So, would you recommend experience in those programs when they're applying?

Aleigha Spaulding: I would say definitely. R is something I work in every day. Even though I work for a state health department, and we have access to any software that you could think of or want to learn, R is something we use constantly because so many other local entities use it. It's free. It's available online. You can download it and start learning it at any point. Even if it's not part of your class in biostatistics, I would definitely encourage you to learn it. There's several free resources. There are free books online that you can find to actually learn R. It's super versatile. So, definitely would recommend that.

In my program, actually the biostatistics part of my program, we solely focused on SAS, and although that's useful to me now and I still do use it pretty often in my job, a lot of the focus is shifting more to R. So, I would say that's something in my program I didn't get any experience about, and no one really talked about R. It was all SAS, SAS, SAS, get the base SAS certification and really just dive in deep into SAS coding and understanding it. But I think it's super important to learn R and have that experience, if you can, but don't be discouraged if, in that particular class, you don't get that experience because there's always experiences to learn and opportunities to learn that outside of the classroom too. So, yeah, that's something I didn't do in grad school. And I've had to do that on the job, is teach myself different things that I didn't focus on in grad school. So, if you can do that early, I would definitely say do it.

Holly Plackemeier So, the next thing I want to talk about with you all is talk a little bit about networking and the impact that that had on all of you because I know, thinking back to undergrad, that was one of those words that sent shivers down my spine, like, "You need to network. You need to go to all of these career events." And it scared me so much, and I thought, "Oh, how ... What am I going to say? How do I pitch myself? How do I have those conversations so it isn't super awkward?" So, I would love to hear from your

perspectives, how you went about networking and any advice that you have. So, anyone who wants to jump in can start.

Maddie Kinscher: I can go first really quick. I think I said this earlier, but my approach is to ... It doesn't necessarily have to be super formal. There are the career fairs where networking is the primary thing they encourage students to do. But I would say my first networking experience was going into my botany teacher's office hours and asking for help on homework. And just me asking for help led to her asking about like in my personal life, like my education, my career goals, which led her recommending me to be a tutor for botany eventually the next semester. Networking with a professor, from being a research participant in their study, has now led me to being a co-planner for a half marathon with his wife who's also a professor. So, it doesn't have to necessarily be this really scary thing. It's just spending time with those within your field, whether they are professors, former supervisors of an organization, or an organization you're new to, you're volunteering with, and just asking questions while you're there. And also, reiterating what I said before, being memorable, just showing up, working hard, looking, seeming, being genuinely interested in it. It does not have to be this big, scary, formal thing. Just make sure that they remember you, and give it your all when you show up.

Holly Plackemeier All right. Anybody else have anything to say on networking?

Zamir Brown: Yeah, I'll definitely get into some networking conversation. I think this is probably my favorite thing to talk about and possibly do. So, believe it or not, first of all, I'm an introvert. I definitely don't even talk to people that much or that consistently. So, being in the virtual environment and being able to build relationships at will is phenomenal because I get to choose how I want engage and what duration, and then I get to go back to my little hut. But I definitely agree with Maddie. Networking does not have to be this big, scary, daunting thing.

Now, I know it's easier to say than to actually do and to feel because, when you're there and there's this professional, this professor, this teacher, this whoever, that anxiety gets to going. And so, everything that you're thinking, or like, "Oh, I should just be cool," you just want to leave straight out of your head until you just keep practicing it. I think the biggest thing, for me, was really acknowledging, okay, these are people. They're human beings, and they have value, but I also have value. Yeah, they might be further along in their journey than me, but I have value. Right? So, instead of creating just such a hierarchy and automatically diminishing where I'm at in my life or what I'm going to accomplish, to really say, okay, this is somebody that I can look at as a mentor, but also as a colleague. You're just older than me. Let's go ahead and build a relationship. There's still going to be respect, and, but respect should go to anybody. You should always be respectful.

And so, also I feel like I'm building off of what Maddie said, point for point. But another thing like that, leaving that impression, I have had business cards since I started undergrad just because I just started making them on Vistaprint. Turned into a bit of an obsession, but I just had business cards for different stages in my life. Even internships, I would make my own business card. I'm just like, "Is it okay for me to use the school logo? Okay, cool." And then I would use it. And then, when I would go and make a relationship, I would make sure to leave people with a business card. I always made sure that I had a briefcase. Everybody else is wearing backpacks. I have a briefcase. So, then, when I message somebody, I can tell them, "I'm the guy that left you a business card, and I had the briefcase." "Oh, that guy," because they're just like, "Why do you have a

briefcase?" And I didn't even have anything that was briefcase worthy, but it was all about really leaving that lasting impression.

But I think the biggest thing that I definitely learned through time was just being authentic and genuine. If you're really interested in what that person's doing, then you're interested in what they're doing. I stopped trying to build a relationship with people just because of their title or just because I thought that they would have some sort of ... that they would just serve some ulterior motive for me or to just give me a leg up. If I don't really care about what you're doing, I will go to the mixing event, and I will just go to the places where I feel pulled and grabbed, that, where I'll just normally gravitate towards, and I'll be there. I'm not going to try to force myself to be dishonest and like, "Oh, yeah, I read your book. I read your book." I didn't, so I'm not going to pretend like I did.

And so, I think all of those things are very important. And so, I think it's like, don't be afraid to approach. Don't be afraid to be authentic. And I think another key thing for me, especially, in this social media of metaverse type reality that we're in, is to really develop your networking system. The business cards were already outdated, which gave them the edge before, but now they're completely irrelevant because I can't give anybody one. And so, the thing for me now is I have a calendar booking system through Microsoft. It's free, Calendly. So, it makes it a lot easier to go ahead and get those informational interviews, to have those conversations, to network with colleagues, and actually get on the phone, get on Zoom and, or teams, and just go through that way. But it ends up being a lot less daunting because I actually have a system that I can follow, but it just allows you to just be so much more genuine, and it cuts down on a whole lot of stress, and you essentially build up a phone book, once you go back to your Calendly invites and your bookings as well.

Holly Plackemeier      So, I know we're getting down to the wire, but Arianna and Aleigha, anything else you want to add about networking?

Arianne Noorestani:      Honestly, no. I was really, really bad at networking in college. I hated it. It was really hard for me to step outside my shell. And I also thought it was grimy for some reason, which is so not at all how you should be looking at networking, and I really regret not doing it. I had some really, really amazing professors that I really connected with, and I wish, just like Maddie said, taking the time after class to just talk to your professor is an excellent way of making a connection. And it's just small things like that, that I wish I had done, that I didn't do. Another thing is that, even once you're hired and you're in your professional role, don't think you have to stop networking. I constantly have conversations with my current boss about professional development opportunities, trainings, conferences, things that I can do to continue learning and growing. And something I've been meaning to do, because APHA just has such great connections and so many great employees, is I really want to take the time before my time here at APHA ends to talk to people and to ask them questions, ask for advice, ask for what worked, what didn't, all the questions that we've been talking about today, to just do that with current staff and employees. So, yeah.

Holly Plackemeier      So, before we get ready to close out. ... Oh, Aleigha, did you have anything to add? Okay. So, there's one question that came through the chat that I thought would be interesting to end on, and I'll give our panelists a little bit to ponder it before I start giving a few resources to our audience. But the question that came through the chat is, how did you know you had chosen the right profession? I would love to end on that. So, if you can think of a 30-second answer to that one, I'll come back to you. But for

everyone that's viewing, there are a couple of resources that I wanted to make sure that you had, so any of the APHA staff working on the backend, if you could drop that into the chat for them. I recommend that you check out Public Health CareerMart, and that's a great database full of different public health jobs for you to check out, see what's open in your state, or in the state that you hope to move to post-grad.

Also, if you are looking for an internship for the fall, APHA's application closes July 1st, and there are so many different opportunities, depending on what you want to do. If you want to work in policy, government relations, communications, publications, really anything that you can think of. That's a great opportunity that I recommend that you check out. Or if you're looking for full-time employment, APHA is hiring, so I recommend that you check us out and see if any of those jobs are what you're looking for.

So, I want to go back to my panelists, and now that you've had a little bit of time to think about that, about how you knew that your position was the right role for you, I would love to hear a little bit about that. So, Maddie.

Maddie Kinscher: Well, super inconvenient for me. I didn't know I wanted to work in public health until my final semester of college. So, I was very intimidated trying to apply for jobs, and I honestly didn't think my AmeriCorps role was the right role for me. I felt like I had to validate my education through getting a job right after graduation. I eventually stuck up for myself and molded it into a position that is incredibly useful and that I do enjoy. And for me, knowing I wanted to work into public health, it's because I was excited to show up as an intern to APHA every single day, and I continuously learned so many things. And for me, that's really what is keeping me going, and especially just with the idea of helping other people as well. And if this person is asking this question because they just don't know, that's okay. You don't have to know everything right out of college. I still don't know exactly what I'm going to be doing. I have a general idea, but we're young professionals. We have plenty of time to figure it out, so there's absolutely no pressure to rush into things.

Holly Plackemeier All right. Anybody else? Closing thoughts.

Aleigha Spaulding: I'd like to definitely just agree with what Maddie has just said. I learn new things about myself every single day. Although I'm in a position that I do love, I think definitely speaking up for yourself and things that you want to see happen, goals you want to achieve, for your company, for yourself are very important. And just realizing that, yes, we're young professionals. Your ideas are going to change. Your interests might change a little bit, or you might discover new things, and that is okay, but just definitely, just showing up and being your true self, trying your best and just taking it as it comes, I think, is the best advice I can give someone.

Zamir Brown: Yeah. And for me, as it relates to knowing that public health was the field to be in, I actually, one of our summer readings at UNC was Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson, and closer to the end of the book, he actually expresses his journey to becoming the social justice activist and fighting for prison reform. And it was being proximal to an issue that lights a fire inside of you, and I'm paraphrasing. And so, I was doing all these things that made an undergrad ... All these things, they made sense. I should have enjoyed them, and I should have been passionate about them, but I wasn't. But, until I started actually seeing what made me well up inside, of what lit that fire, it was not until I got into public health, started focusing on policy in racial equity and justice, did that fire actually ignite within myself.

Holly Plackemeier

Great. Thank you all so much. A huge thank you to all of our panelists who went there, amazing perspectives today. Thank you to the APHA staff working on the backend to help make this event possible. Thank you to the APHA student assembly for collaborating with us. Thank you to Walden University for helping make this event possible through their support. And most importantly, thank you to all of you, joining us at home or wherever you happen to be, because you all truly are the future of public health, and we wish you the very best on your public health journey. And also, don't forget that there are many different National Public Health Week events happening throughout the week. And of course, the siren is going as I am saying this, but we really hope that you join us for the Twitter chat tomorrow at 2:00 PM Eastern and all of the different events happening throughout the week. So, we wish you all the best. Bye, everyone. Happy National Public Health Week.