

Student Spotlight!



Eric is pictured on the right with his husband Joseph

1. Tell us about yourself

My name is Eric Rochman and I am a part-time MPH student concentrating in Epidemiology and was recently accepted to the Advanced Certificate in Public Health Disaster Science, Policy, and Practice. I am a native New Yorker and I graduated from the University at Buffalo in 2010 with a B.S. in Biomedical Sciences and minors in Medical Anthropology and Theatre. After graduation, I began my 24 months of service as a Rural Health and Sanitation Volunteer in Paraguay, where I lived and worked in a rural farming community. After completion of my regular service, I was selected for a special volunteer assignment extension where I worked from the Peace Corps office in Paraguay's capital as the HIV/AIDS and Programming and Training Coordinator. In this role, I oversaw the HIV/AIDS Prevention and Educational program countrywide until August 2014 when I completed my service. After returning from the Peace Corps, I started working at VillageCare, an NYC-based health non-profit, a long-term care provider, and insurance company, with a history of serving people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA). I started at the company working on a CMS-funded technology-based treatment adherence and research study for PLWHA. I am currently the Senior Director

of Business Operations and Analytics for the Medical Management departments at VillageCareMAX, a managed care insurance company that provides home care services and support to nursing home eligible New Yorkers. I currently live with my husband, Joe, and our dog Luna in the neighborhood of Riverdale in the Bronx.

2. What do you like about public health?

I originally was planning on going to medical school after college but as a result of the Peace Corps decided to pivot to pursuing a career in public health. My Peace Corps experience introduced me to the importance and the impact that public health can have at the community level. The thing I like the most about public health is the opportunity to serve the public and improve the lives, health, and well-being of the community. I think public health is a very rewarding profession and I look forward to continuing to advance my career in the field.

3. Why are you interested in the field of emergency preparedness and response?

I am interested in the field of emergency preparedness and response because I enjoy working in fast-paced and high-intensity situations and environments. I first became interested in the field while frequenting the hospital with my father who is a general surgeon and I originally planned on going to medical school to become an emergency room physician. I think that this field continues to grow and will become more important over time, especially as we continue to see an increasing frequency of natural disasters and the globalization of society, creating the potential for a higher frequency of the spread of infectious disease and the need to be prepared for outbreaks in the future.

4. Can you describe a project or experience that helped you in making a decision to pursue a career in this particular field?

My recent experiences this past J-Term while taking Dr. Abramson's course in Israel, which included attending the International Conference on Preparedness & Response (IPRED) and the ability to learn from and interact with experts in the field helped to reignite my interest in this field. I am excited about the opportunity to pursue the advanced certificate and continue to learn about the different areas and applications specific to the field of Disaster Science.

5. Who do you consider to be vulnerable populations and why?

I consider any population that does not have equitable and affordable access to healthcare to be a vulnerable population as I am a firm believer that healthcare should be a basic human right. As future public health professionals, I believe we must continue to advocate for marginalized populations and to advance our public health system and infrastructure so that it serves everyone equally, irrespective of their race, sex, gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, or socioeconomic status.

6. What is a current emergency or disaster that you believe is critical to address?

I think that emerging and novel infectious diseases are critical for the global community to address and prepare for. The current pandemic has shown how ill-prepared we are to protect the public and we must work as a coordinated global society to plan, prepare, and educate the public for the emergence of such diseases in the future.

7. How do you handle stress and pressure?

Ever since I returned from the Peace Corps, I have carried with me a principle I learned from Paraguayan people which is the concept of being “Tranquilo”, which to them means to relax and live your life in the present, a moment at a time. During my time there, I learned from the Paraguayan friends and family that life is too precious to worry about all the little things and that sometimes we just need to go with the flow and relax. While of course, we all get stressed sometimes, I try my best to remind myself of this concept regularly, especially when I am under pressure, and to remind myself how lucky I am to have the life I have.

8. If you could cure a disease which would it be and why?

If I could cure any disease it would be HIV/AIDS. My interest in the field of HIV/AIDS research, prevention, and education began as a teenager when my brother informed me that he was HIV+. While it has become a manageable disease for PLWHA, I have witnessed from both my brother's point of view and during my work in Paraguay the immense stigma and discrimination that still affects people living with this disease to this day around the world. While we have come a long way, there still is a lot of work to be done in the areas of HIV/AIDS education and prevention and I am hopeful that we will one day have a cure.

9. Who is your favorite public health figure and why?

My favorite public health figure is John Snow, considered to be the father of epidemiology. His work with cholera in London in 1854 to help stop the outbreak was an important step forward for the field of public health and created public awareness of the presence of infectious diseases. His simple solution to show prove his theory regarding the spread of Cholera I think is a testament to how we need to continue to find straightforward and relatable ways to educate the population on public health principles and practices.

10. What is next for you after you complete your MPH degree?

After finishing my MPH, I plan on pursuing a DrPH so I can continue to grow professionally in the field, with the goal of running a major public health organization in the future. My dream career is to oversee the operations of an international public health institution.