

## July 2013



### Laura Rosella, MHSc 2005, PhD 2009

Scientist, Public Health Ontario

Adjunct Scientist, ICES

Assistant Professor, Dalla Lana School of Public Health

#### **How did you become interested in your field of public health? What led you to DLSPH?**

In high school I wanted to work for the CDC, like something from the movie “Contagion” – I naively thought “that would be awesome!” During my undergraduate degree my interests in disease control and prevention remained, however I developed a concurrent focus in mathematics and statistics, a combination well suited to the discipline of epidemiology. I had the opportunity to work in a lab for a summer, studying the epidemiology of a pathogenic fungus, which was my first flavor of epidemiology and introduction to research. I loved everything about the methods and the challenges of research, but I became more interested in applying the methods to chronic disease prevention. I looked into clinical epidemiology but didn’t feel like that was the right fit given my desire to focus on prevention and population health. When I found UofT’s program in Community Health and Epidemiology, I knew it was THE program for me.

#### **In what ways has your DLSPH experience had an impact on your career?**

The best thing about doing my Masters at DLSPH was the faculty. From their guidance, I not only developed excellent technical skills but the vision of what was possible. I recall introductory lectures given by Drs. John Frank, David Butler-Jones, Vivek Goel, and Cam Mustard. In those first few weeks of the program, I became instantly inspired by their work and impact on population health. I knew then I had chosen the right school and the right career path. Training at DLSPH has connected me to the brightest public health minds in Canada and the world. Add to the fact that I was able to obtain two amazing practica, one at CancerCare Ontario, and another at the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES). I was able to learn and practice in world class research institutions surrounded by inspirational public health researchers.

**Was there a specific faculty member or course that was particularly influential?**

My first epidemiology course taught by Prof. Gail Eysen was very influential. The learning environment was really positive, shaped by her passion for the discipline, and the rigor was extremely high. I would say we definitely got pushed as graduate students! Nothing was “easy” but I appreciated that and have benefited from that rigor in my career today. In addition to the teaching faculty, my classmates were wonderful and remain some of my closest friends and colleagues. We really were comrades in the program together, which taught me the importance of collaboration and mutual respect, an essential skill for succeeding in academia.

**What have you been doing since leaving DLSPH?**

After completing my doctoral degree in epidemiology at DLSPH based out of ICES, I completed a postdoctoral fellowship within the CIHR strategic training program in public health policy and was given the opportunity to carry out research at the then Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion. I am currently a Scientist at Public Health Ontario, an adjunct Scientist at ICES, and an Assistant Professor at DLSPH. My main responsibilities are to conduct scientific research. I specialize in studying population based approaches to reducing diabetes and obesity, but I also work as a methodologist in multiple content areas. My research is motivated by my policy interest focused on the integration of scientific evidence and tools into public health decision-making.

**What advice would you give to younger alumni or current students who aspire to follow a similar career path?**

First, seek good mentors early in your training. At DLSPH you truly have the best to choose from. I’ve been so fortunate to benefit from outstanding mentors, who have been my source of inspiration and provided me with many opportunities to develop as a researcher (and still do to this day). Second, find your source of motivation beyond academic achievement. This inspiration will facilitate your success, even during the challenging times, and ensure a meaningful contribution to public health. Finally, find the intellectual time and space to be creative, because solving today’s complex public health problems requires innovation and collaboration.

**What would you say to a prospective student who is considering DLSPH?**

The DLSPH at the University of Toronto is truly unique. The concentration of public health leaders both within and associated through the various affiliated institutes is unparalleled in Canada. In addition to a strong training program, the DLSPH will offer many opportunities for an exciting career in public health.

*Dr. Rosella is a new investigator with over 35 publications and 3 funded CIHR grants as Principal Investigator, and multiple as co-investigator. Her list of achievements include the 2012 Robin Badgley Teaching award, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto; the 2011 Zollikofer Award (Switzerland); Post-doctoral fellowship award in the CIHR Strategic Training Program in Public Health Policy; the Canadian Public Health Association Population and Public Health PhD level student award; and the 2003 University of Toronto Leadership Award*