MENTOR – Sara Benjamin Neelon, PhD, MPH, RD
Mentor Information Form

Sara Benjamin Neelon, PhD, MPH, RD
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https://globalhealth.duke.edu/people/faculty/benjamin-neelon-sara

Southwest Kenya – “Watch Me Grow”

1. Description of opportunities for projects: Please provide a brief description of the project, including its background, purpose and methods.
This study evaluates the effect of school gardens on children’s nutritional intake, cognitive performance, and body composition. The gardens will produce fresh fruits and vegetables, but will also provide the children, families and teachers with opportunities for learning agricultural practices. Children are recruited for this quasi-experimental study from primary schools in the Nyanza province, located in Southwest Kenya. We conduct 24-hour dietary recalls to assess intake and dietary diversity and brief measures of verbal fluency and attention to evaluate cognition. To assess body composition, we measure children’s heights, weights, and mid-upper arm circumference. We also assess food insecurity via brief questions about food availability.

Baseline data collection was completed in Muhuru Bay in summer 2013. A second baseline will take place in summer 2014, with gardens installed in two intervention schools later that year. In Lwala, baseline data collection is taking place this fall 2013, with gardens installed in two intervention centers later this year. Follow-up data collection will take place in Lwala in fall 2014.

2. What role(s) would a medical student have in the project(s)?
A medical student could assist with on-the-ground data collection in Muhuru Bay, Kenya or Lwala, Kenya (our two study sites in Kenya) during the summer of 2014. The student would work with the data collection team, which consists of one to two MScGH students, 6-8 undergraduate DukeEngage students, local Kenya translators and data collectors, and a faculty team leader.
3. Do you have any time restrictions - i.e. time of year, specific time frames - in which your mentee's project must be carried out?

The student would need to work in Kenya for four weeks from mid-June to mid-August, 2014.

4. For how long are you requiring a medical student to work on your project? Would you accept students for 1, 2 or 3 week projects?

The student would need to work in Kenya for four weeks within the study timeframe (mid-June to mid-August, 2014).

5. Are there any language requirements for your project?

No.

6. Are there any other special considerations for your project that you would like an applicant to be aware of before they contact you?

The study site locations are quite remote; accommodations are basic but not luxurious.

Durham, NC – “Nurture”

1. Description of opportunities for projects:

The Nurture study is an observational study that follows a southern cohort of 1,000 predominately black and white mothers and their infants in Durham, NC. The goal of the study is to assess weight gain in infants over their first year of life via home visiting. Frequent measurements throughout infancy will help us pinpoint when children begin to gain weight excessively and help identify risk factors such as energy intake, energy expenditure, stress, and sleep that may be associated with obesity in early life. We are measuring stress via salivary cortisol assay, energy intake through maternal questionnaire, and energy expenditure and sleep using an accelerometer. The study began in August 2012 and will continue through June 2017.

2. What role(s) would a medical student have in the project(s)?

A medical student could assist with the administration of subject surveys and medical chart abstractions as well as the management of these data.
3. Do you have any time restrictions - i.e. time of year, specific time frames - in which your mentee's project must be carried out?
We would need a medical center who could work on the study regularly throughout the academic year, and not just over spring break. We would consider working with a medical student for one month in the summer, but would prefer a longer commitment.

4. For how long are you requiring a medical student to work on your project? Would you accept students for 1, 2, or 3 week projects?
A student must commit to a minimum of one semester, but we prefer one academic year.

5. Are there any language requirements for your project?
No.

6. Are there any other special considerations for your project that you would like an applicant to be aware of before they contact you?
Conducting the medical chart abstractions requires access to Duke University Health System’s electronic medical record and a student must already have access to be considered for the project. In addition, participation in this research study requires approximately 15 hours of research ethics training prior to initiation that the study may or may not have already completed.