*Photo: A pro-abortion activist participating in the September 25th, 2012 demonstration in favor of legalization of abortion in Montevideo, Uruguay. This action was a protest of the decriminalization law which passed in October 2012, because the law (currently in place) is so restrictive. More than a dozen women were part of the nude demonstration, painted orange with flowers, while others were dressed in orange. Demonstrators held signs saying "Aborto Legal" (Legal Abortion). Marta Agunin, who directs Women and Health [MYSU], a non-governmental organization in Uruguay, complained “This is not the law for which we fought for more than 25 years”
Mission

The GEMMA Fund supports Emory University graduate students’ research and their collaborations with public health organizations to contribute to the prevention of maternal deaths from abortion.

Background

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that 21 million women worldwide receive unsafe abortions every year, resulting in 47,000 maternal deaths annually (13% of all maternal deaths). Nearly all (98%) of unsafe abortions take place in developing countries. The WHO estimates that if all women were able to attain the same quality of abortion services available in the United States, fewer than 100 women would die from abortions each year, but for most women, quality abortion services are restricted, unavailable or completely inaccessible.*

The most recent WHO report on unsafe abortion incidence and mortality concludes:

“The number of unsafe abortions is likely to continue to increase unless women's access to safe abortion and contraception—and support to empower women (including their freedom to decide whether and when to have a child)—are put in place and further strengthened.”

To encourage scholarship in this specific area in public health, Dr. Roger and Susan Rochat of the Rollins School of Public Health (RSPH) established an endowed fund, the Global Elimination of Maternal Mortality due to Abortion (GEMMA) Fund, dedicated to the prevention of maternal deaths from abortion. By encouraging study of the surveillance and prevention of maternal deaths, the complications associated with abortion, and the monitoring and evaluation of appropriate interventions, the GEMMA Fund aims to help eliminate abortion-related maternal mortality.

This year, RSPH is celebrating the twelfth anniversary of the GEMMA Fund. Over the twelve years of its existence and the five years of student-driven GEMMA funded research, the fund has grown dramatically, propelled forward by the work of students, the support of donors, and the ceaseless leadership and guidance of Dr. Rochat, Dr. Lathrop and others.

This report presents the highlights of GEMMA related activities from the 2013 -2014 academic year.

Donor Support

From spring of 2013 through fall of 2014, nearly 120 donors contributed to the endowment of the GEMMA fund. The Emory Reproductive Health Association (ERHA) and GEMMA co-chairs contributed in exchange for donations to the fund.

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GEMMA at a Glance

Here are some of the highlights of GEMMA activities from the 2013-2014 academic year.

Teaching

**GEMMA Seminar (Spring 2014)**
The GEMMA Seminar was met with overwhelming popularity for a fifth consecutive year since its inauguration. Taught by Drs. Eva Lathrop, Andreea Creanga and Roger Rochat. The two-credit course covers the medical, legal and ethical aspects of abortion. Last year the course attracted diverse guest lecturers and included an abortion Values Clarification and Attitude Transformation workshop (VCAT). Although the GEMMA Seminar is unique to Emory, the faculty aims for the course to be a model for other schools.

Service

**Community Collaborations**
RPSH offers GEMMA relevant work experiences through the Rollins Earn and Learn (REAL) program at organizations like Planned Parenthood Southeast, Atlanta Feminist Women's Health Center, the Georgia OB/GYN Society, and the Georgia State Health Department, among others.

Consulting

Students, faculty and alumni affiliated with GEMMA have advised research and informed public health practice external to Emory over the past year and consulted with outside experts from all over the world:
- Megan O'Connor, Katie Trocin, Mary Claire Worrell, Sarah Divya, Kenisha Peters, Jeff Freeman and Pari Chowdhary assisted the CEO of the Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa, in analyzing maternal and infant mortality data systems.
- In January of 2014, Dr. Rochat gave a keynote presentation on Rollins' students GEMMA practicum innovations at the University of Florida.
- Dr. Maria Auxiliadora Vertamatti of the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, consulted with Dr. Rochat and professor Dabney Evans on research regarding sexual violence against young children.
- In March of 2014, Emory alumnus Dr. Orawee Chinkathanan invited Emory sophomore and Woodruff Scholar Alexa Dantzler for a practicum in obstetrics and gynecology at Chiang Mai University, Thailand.
- Dr. Lathrop has the opportunity to regularly consult with several NGOs working in reproductive health that focus on family planning, safe abortion access, and post-abortion care. She has consulted with organizations such as Save the Children, American Refugee Committee, Population Services International's Women's Health Program, Konbit Sante, and the Women's Refugee Commission, among others. Her work has taken her to Haiti, Pakistan, El Salvador, Nepal, Democratic Republic of Congo and Yemen.

Evaluating Sexual and Reproductive Health Programs in the South

Led by Dr. Roger Rochat and Anna Newton-Levinson in conjunction with the Emory Hubert Department of Global Health, this project seeks to evaluate a sexual and reproductive health program that functions across multiple southern states. The evaluation assess program activities across multiple sectors including health services, community engagement and partnerships, health policy work, and program operations. This project involves multidisciplinary advisors and advisory board members from faculty at RSPH in HPM and BSHE as well as at CDC and UCSF. The current evaluation team also includes five MPH student researchers across departments at RSPH including GH, HPM, and BSHE. Student work includes assessments of program data systems, contextual factors related to sexual and reproductive health and abortion, family planning and abortion policy, and the development of indicators to measure program outcomes. Baseline data collection will begin in Summer 2015.
Events

Emory Reproductive Health Association and GEMMA Events

In partnership with the Emory Reproductive Health Association (ERHA), the GEMMA Co-Chairs helped organize numerous fund- and awareness-raising events throughout the 2012-2013 school year. Some highlights included:

- A display at RSPH celebrating the 40th Anniversary of Roe v. Wade
- Sex and pleasure educational evening
- Collaborations with professionals from the Feminist Women’s Health Center in Atlanta
- National Public Health Week breakfast
- GEMMA table at career fairs and Visit Emory
- Presentation by Diana Greene Foster of UCSF’s ANSIRH on The Turnaway Study
- Sex trivia night with HOLA, Law Students for Reproductive Justice, and Medical Students for Choice
- Reproductive Health Practicum session for 1st year students

Annual GEMMA Evening 2014

GEMMA recipients who conduct research over the summer return to Emory in the fall to present their findings at the Annual Evening with GEMMA. Donors, students, and faculty attend this event to celebrate the work that Rollins GEMMA recipients do to combat the stigma, injury, and mortality associated with abortion and to find ways to improve the dignity, health and rights of women around the world. This past year’s Annual Evening with GEMMA was held in October 2014 and included presentations from 2014 GEMMA recipients from Rollins and other Emory institutions, such as the Candler School of Theology, Woodruff School of Nursing, and Emory Law.

GEMMA Research, 2013-2014

Student Practicum Research – GEMMA Awards

A primary objective of the GEMMA Fund is to support student research on the causes, consequences, and solutions to maternal mortality, particularly as it relates to abortion. Since GEMMA’s founding, 40 students have received grants to conduct research on these issues. During the summer of 2014, the GEMMA Fund sponsored eight public health students with awards of up to $500 each to support their GEMMA-related projects. Through their work, these students demonstrated their dedication to combating the stigma, injury, and mortality associated with abortion and to finding ways to improve the dignity, health and rights of women around the world. The individual projects conducted by these GEMMA-supported students are highlighted in the next several pages.
Long drives and overburdened clinics: The problem of limiting access to abortion services in Alabama
Victoria DeMartelly

Victoria’s research focuses on abortion in Alabama, using data collected during my work with the Alabama Women’s Access Study. As of July 2014, only three clinics remained in operation in the entire state of Alabama in response to the passing of many laws around this time pertaining to building codes. Additionally, a recent law was passed requiring that women attend a state-mandated counseling session, followed by a wait time between receiving the counseling and the abortion procedure, which was increased from 24 to 48 hours. Victoria recruited women at two of these clinics and conducted phone interviews with 25 women who had to travel a distance greater than 35 miles or 30 minutes in order to arrive at the clinic so that she could better understand the experiences had by these women and barriers they faced attempting to arrive at the clinic. Analysis is ongoing, but there are many interesting findings on the barriers faced by women due to the extended distance they now have to drive both for women in Alabama and women coming from surrounding states.

Assessment of illegal abortion practices in urban Haiti
Erin Berry-Bibee MD MPH/Cap Haitien, Haiti

In Haiti, abortion is illegal except to save the life of the mother. Anecdotally, however, self-induced illegal abortion is thought to be widely practiced. Funded through a research grant from the National Family Planning Fellowship, Erin’s GEMMA-focused study used mixed methods to investigate the illegal abortion experience in urban Haiti. Together with her team, she conducted 8 focus groups with 64 women in the community and 13 in-depth interviews with key informants in women’s health. Discussions focused knowledge sharing about contraception and abortion, abortion methods used, abortion access, post-abortion care and abortion related stigma. They then surveyed over 260 pregnant women presenting to the public teaching hospital for care about current and past experiences with abortion and contraception. The qualitative phase of the research served as Erin’s Master’s thesis in 2014. Full results of both phases are being submitted for publication.
Client satisfaction with WINGS’ services provided by community-based volunteer promoters in Alta Verapaz, Guatemala
Katherine Nystrom

This summer Katherine traveled to Cobán, Guatemala to work with the Women’s International Network for Guatemalan Solutions (WINGS) to assess client satisfaction of the association’s network of volunteer promoters. WINGS focuses its program in the department of Alta Verapaz, where access to reproductive health services is particularly limited due to geographic isolation, lack of education, poverty, and cultural and linguistic issues. Contraception use is low in Alta Verapaz, with only 34.1% of married women using modern family planning methods. WINGS’ volunteer promoters distribute short-term contraceptives at low costs to women and men in rural poor communities. To assess client satisfaction, she developed a mixed-method survey that assessed promoter-client interaction, barriers to promoter and contraceptive utilization, client education, and overall client satisfaction. The data Katherine gathered from this evaluation will help WINGS improve its instruction and management of the volunteer promoters. By improving its program, WINGS will be able to help more women and men gain access to modern contraceptives, avert unintended pregnancies, stay in school longer, and reduce poverty in the region.

Siempre me critica: Barriers to reproductive health in Ocotal, Nicaragua
Samantha Luffy

With assistance from the Global Field Experience (GFE) Fund and the GEMMA Fund, Samantha had the amazing opportunity to conduct a qualitative research study on women’s experiences with unintended pregnancy in Ocotal, Nicaragua. She conducted 3 focus group discussions and 10 in-depth interviews in Spanish with young women from neighborhoods throughout Ocotal. Women in Nicaragua do not have access to safe and legal abortion services to terminate an unintended pregnancy. Due to religious and cultural ideologies, the majority of participants supported the country’s total ban on abortion in most circumstances, with the possible exception of rape. Participants also identified other barriers that limit their ability to make personal sexual and reproductive health decisions, such as criticism by others in the community when receiving family planning services; gender inequality and machismo, violence against women, particularly femicide; a lack of open communication with their partners and parents; and insufficient sexual education. This project could not have been possible without the guidance and expertise provided by Samantha’s in-country mentor, Dochyta Falcon. Dochyta has been a nurse in Ocotal for over 30 years and is an influential and well-respected member of the community. As a lifelong advocate for women’s rights and safe abortion access, Samantha admires Dochyta’s strength, perseverance, and, most of all, her loving heart.
In the summer of 2014, the GHI team traveled to Bogotá, Colombia to examine the barriers to safe, legal abortion access that remain in the wake of partial decriminalization. In 2006, the Colombian constitutional court ruled to partially decriminalize abortion services under a right to health and women’s rights framework, acknowledging abortion access as a component of women’s rights to health. The team spent two months in Bogotá, Colombia collecting data. The team employed mixed methods and a multidisciplinary perspective. They began their research by meeting with and learning from Colombian activists and advocates who have spent years on the front lines of this struggle, facing fervent and sometimes violent opposition. Team members also interviewed anti-abortion scholars and physicians. After gaining a better understanding of the context surrounding abortion access in Colombia, we qualitatively explored barriers to access from the patient’s perspective and conscientious objection from the provider’s perspective. The team also conducted a quantitative two-stage cluster survey of public hospital providers, and continued interviewing lawyers, legal advocates, and social activists. Our project yielded interesting preliminary and exploratory results. Another team is set to return in summer 2015 and they hope that future generations of GEMMA students will continue to build on this foundation.

Abortion in Montevideo, Uruguay 18 Months After Decriminalization: Evaluating Access, Acceptability and Implementation
Yonah Et-Shalom, Bethany Kotlar & Heidi Schroffel

In October 2012, Uruguay passed Latin America’s most liberal abortion law by decriminalizing abortion up to 12 weeks of gestation and up to 14 weeks for rape victims, allowing later procedures for women facing health risks. A three-person multidisciplinary team conducted three interrelated studies in order to fill the data gap.
Heidi Schroffel, MPH candidate, carried out a satisfaction survey of abortion services with the reproductive health organization Iniciativas Sanitarias in order to evaluate how satisfied women were with the abortion services provided at the Hospital Pereira Rossell and how factors of satisfaction/dissatisfaction were distributed among the four required patient visits. Yonah EtShalom and Bethany Kotlar worked with Mujer Y Salud, Uruguay to conduct two related studies. Bethany Kotlar, MPH candidate, conducted 11 in-depth interviews with gynecologists to explore the relationship between participants’ religious, spiritual, and moral beliefs and attitudes towards abortion. Yonah EtShalom, MPH/MSN candidate, collected survey data from approximately 45% of gynecologists in Montevideo. Surveys focused on gynecologist training, experience, and comfort in techniques of induced abortion.

South Africa

Barriers and facilitators of contraceptive use among young people in Manila, Philippines
Kristi Allen

Kristi’s summer practicum was with Likhaan Center for Women’s Health Inc. in Manila, Philippines. Likhaan provides free reproductive health services, including contraceptives, through five clinics located around metro Manila. Kristi and her research team conducted in-depth interviews with young people aged 16-20 about their perceptions of and experiences with contraceptive access and use. Sixteen young people, including males and females with and without children and in a relationship or single, were interviewed for the project. The preliminary results were presented to both Likhaan’s management team and Likhaan’s community health workers to inform Likhaan’s efforts to engage with young people and encourage them to seek services. Results will also be presented at the Psychosocial Workshop in San Diego, California.
Moving towards legitimacy: Sex worker advocacy in Cape Town, South Africa
Kate Nelson

Between June and August 2015, an Emory University GHI team partnered with the Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT) in Cape Town, South Africa to conduct various community needs assessments. SWEAT is a nonprofit organization that addresses the health, human rights, and advocacy needs of sex workers in South Africa. In the hopes of reaching new vulnerable sub-populations, SWEAT requested Kate to assess the needs, resources, barriers, and facilitators sex workers face in their role as mothers. Her project included structured observation; 10 in-depth qualitative interviews with sex workers to explore their experiences as mothers; and 5 key-informant interviews to gain expert insight into the sub-population. In relation to GEMMA, experiences with abortion, unintended pregnancy, reproductive health, and contraception were cited almost unanimously during in-depth interviews with both sex workers and key informants. Kate used these findings to guide the development of a social support group entitled Mothers of the Future. This group aims to provide sex workers who are mothers with the social support and parenting education needed to thrive as mothers. Mothers of the Future is now being expanded nationwide with funding from the South African Department of Health, and Kate’s thesis is focused on developing the program’s curriculum to support this expansion.

Developing and assessing a fitted condom sizing system in Cape Town, South Africa
Kenisha Peters & Cho Hee Shrader

The 2014 research project was a follow-up to research conducted by the 2013 GHI Cape Town team. Working with the Human Research Sciences Council of South Africa, the team (1) designed a sizing tool for men to choose their condom size; (2) identified how newly designed condoms may increase condom use among men and women in South Africa; and (3) identified risk factors for condom non-use and shifts in attitudes toward condoms. Specific tasks involved with achieving each of these goals included: conducting seven focus groups with men; interviewing 13 men and women, at four pre-assigned clinics throughout the City of Cape Town; and administering an on-line survey to 200 men and women (100 men and 100 women). The survey included questions about men and women’s condom preferences, reasons for condom non-use and use, as well as women’s knowledge and attitudes toward abortion.
The following are recent publications and pending publications and projects inspired by, or created in the spirit of, GEMMA. Many of the authors are GEMMA alumni.


Current Highlights from GEMMA Recipients of the Past
Where Are They Now?

Helen Baker, MsC, RN
Helen is in her third year in the PhD/Family Nurse Practitioner program at the Nell Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing at Emory. She is pursuing grants from the National Institutes of Health F31 award, the Boren Fellowship, and the Fulbright Research Grant for her dissertation research on the implementation of the 2007 Reproductive Health Law in Togo, West Africa. In March of 2014 she conducted dissertation research in Togo with partial support from the GEMMA fund.

Kellie Corcoran, MPH
Kellie is finishing up her medical degree at the UC Davis School of Medicine, and will graduate in May 2015. She is applying into Obstetrics & Gynecology and hopes to match at her dream program. She spent her final year of medical school doing rotations in reproductive health, including Family Planning at UCSF’s Women’s Options Center and Adolescent Medicine at UCSF Benioff’s Children’s Hospital of Oakland.

Sarah Fisher, MPH
Sarah began a new position as an epidemiologist for the New York State Department of Health in 2014. Specifically, she is involved in implementing the CDC-led Birth Defects Study to Evaluate Pregnancy Exposures (BD-STEPs) and conducting research to identify risk factors associated with birth defects and other negative birth outcomes. When the temperature rises above freezing in Albany, she can still be seen proudly sporting her “Health Dignity Justice” t-shirt!

Amanda Geller, MPH
Amanda works for ICF International in Atlanta, where she focuses on global HIV prevention and monitoring and evaluation. Her work portfolio consists of assessments of linkage to care in Mozambique and The Bahamas; writing a family planning curriculum to serve people living with HIV; and providing targeted country support for PEPFAR reporting in Cameroon and DRC.

Aimee Leidich, MPH
Aimee is rounding her fourth year at UCSF Global Health Sciences, Global Strategic Information based in San Francisco, CA. She is a Program Manager for the South Africa HIV Data Use project aimed at developing and implementing tools to improve evidence-based strategic planning of HIV programs in South Africa through graph and map (GIS) data science. She also helped found the Global Health Innovative Technologies Initiative at UCSF.

Maria Presley, MPH
Maria Presley currently works as a Technical Officer of Program Design and Innovation at FHI 360 in Washington, DC. For her job, Maria travels throughout Africa, Asia, and Latin America designing international development programs focused on civil society strengthening, conflict mitigation, and youth engagement. Recently, Maria’s work has taken her to South Sudan, Kenya, Mali, Thailand, and Nepal.
What lies ahead?

With generous contributions from donors and the Rochats, the GEMMA Fund has continued to grow, making possible new research, service, and advocacy projects. Dr. Rochat, Dr. Lathrop, and the GEMMA co-chairs continue to look for new GEMMA-related research opportunities worldwide, and to support students by providing funding for research, publications, and travel to conferences. The GEMMA fund also continues to explore new ways to broaden GEMMA course’s reach, both within the Emory community and across the globe. Emory’s Office of Development and Alumni Relations has contributed enormously in assisting Dr. Rochat with fundraising efforts.

As GEMMA grows, we would like to be able to diversify in the types of support we offer to rising professionals in the field. In order to encourage the dissemination of information on abortion and maternal mortality, GEMMA will also be supporting student travel to the annual psychosocial workshop that precedes the Population Association of America (PAA) conference in San Diego this April. Rollins’ own Kaitlyn Stanhope is one of the co-organizers of the workshop this year and she, along with six other students will be presenting on their GEMMA-related work. Featured presentations are listed below:

- **Kristi Allen**: Barriers and Facilitators of Contraceptive Use among Young People in Manila, Philippines
- **Pari Chowdhary**: An Assessment of the Challenges for Practice and Creative Opportunities for Recruitment and Retention for Abortion Providers in the Southern United States
- **Yonah Et-Shalom**: Knowledge and Practice of Induced Abortion among Gynecologists in Uruguay
- **Lauren Fink**: Conscientious objection to abortion provision in Bogota, Colombia: religion, respect, and referral
- **Bethany Kotlar**: “No te puedo acompañar”: gynecologist decision-making regarding conscientious objection to abortion provision in Montevideo, Uruguay
- **Samantha Luffy**: Siempre me critican: Barriers to Reproductive Health in Ocotal, Nicaragua
- **Kaitlyn Stanhope**: Determinants of Physician Abortion Provision in Colombia

We are excited for our ever expanding network of collaborations with new projects beginning in Brazil, Malawi and Thailand. As always, we look forward to expanding our support of GEMMA projects and to creating more opportunities for students to share their research through presentations, workshops and publications in years to come.

To make a contribution to the GEMMA Fund:

1) Donate online: http://www.sph.emory.edu/departments/centers/gemma/contact/index.html
2) Mail a check made out to Emory University (with GEMMA Fund on the subject line):
   
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