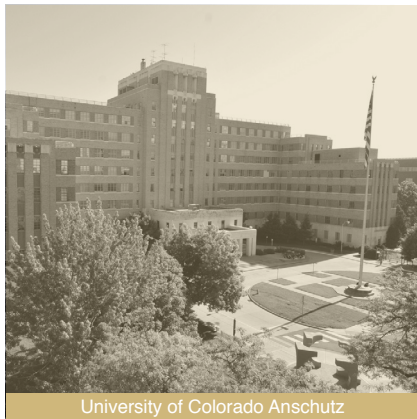


# colorado school of public health



University of Colorado Anschutz



Colorado State University



University of Northern Colorado



Charting new paths for a healthier future | 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 2008–2018



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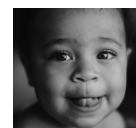
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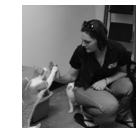
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## Charting a Path of Purpose

ColoradoSPH's first MPH graduate at CSU

This year, the Colorado School of Public Health has more than 600 graduate students with an alumni base of more than 2,000, most of whom reside in Colorado. When Ben White enrolled in 2008, he was one of four in the school's first cohort in the MPH program at Colorado State University. A year and a half later he earned his MPH and was the school's first graduate at CSU.

Some may think it's a risk to enroll in a brand-new graduate program, preferring to take classes at a more established school with all the kinks ironed out. But the newness of ColoradoSPH was one of the things that appealed to White. "I think because I was new to public health and the school was new; I thought they might be more open to diverse backgrounds like mine. I was learning about public health at the same time the school was developing, so it seemed like a good fit," White said.

He first came to Colorado State University to pursue a graduate degree in anthropology after graduating from Wisconsin's Marquette University, where

he majored in anthropology and minored in broadcasting communications. He had heard the Colorado School of Public Health was forming there and had an inkling that he would switch over.

"Archaeology is definitely my first love, but I felt that my skills would be better suited to influencing the health of living people as opposed to analyzing deceased populations," he explained.

White initially wanted to pursue an interdisciplinary certificate in GIS (geospatial information science), which was offered at Colorado State University and which he also completed in conjunction with his MPH. So, with a partially completed degree in anthropology, he applied and got into the school of public health—and he never looked back.

"I wanted to have a greater purpose," he says of why he pursued an MPH.

Back when White was taking classes, the ColoradoSPH staff and administrators wore many hats. Lorann Stallones, PhD, MPH, director of ColoradoSPH at Colorado State University, was his faculty advisor and instructor.

"Ben was very enthusiastic, wildly creative, and really willing to help us with the launch [of the school] where we had to be innovative to make it work," Stallones recalled.

His capstone project showcased his creativeness and willingness to be innovative. Not surprisingly, since White was in the first cohort of the school, the capstone project process was not well established at the time. He took it upon himself to forge ahead by cold calling and cold emailing numerous public health programs and officials in the surrounding area and basically asked them for an internship.

Boulder County Public Health responded. He worked with a variety of departments during his time in Boulder, including the zoonotic team, the environmental health division, and communicable disease control. His capstone was a Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) survey for their mosquito control district, which is the unincorporated area in Boulder County. This experience and the people he worked with laid the groundwork for future employment.

While Stallones was his advisor during his time at ColoradoSPH, White considers Ann Magennis, PhD, a now-retired CSU anthropology and public health professor, his mentor. She was his advisor as a graduate student in anthropology, and he also served as her teaching assistant. Magennis helped him through the transition to public health and, as a

professor in ColoradoSPH, she still advised him after he switched programs. They become close and, in fact, still keep in touch a decade later.

Magennis said that knowing what she knew about White's skills and interests, his switch to public health was the right move for him. "He and I talked about it a lot. Knowing his interest, at the time, in tracking infectious diseases and GIS, I thought the MPH was the right way to go for him. A PhD in anthropology would've taken 10 to 12 years, and he really wanted to get to work."

Immediately after graduation White diligently sent out resumes looking for meaningful full-time work while working part-time at the CSU Forestry Department. Within a couple of months, and based on the connections he'd made while completing his capstone project, Boulder County Public Health was able to offer him a part-time temporary job as a disease reporting technician.

With his growing network within the field of public health, he learned about a long-term part-time position at the

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE). He made the switch in August 2010 and soon became a full-time employee.

At the CDPHE White has been fortunate enough to work in different departments focusing on a variety of different projects. He first worked as an emerging infections program epidemiologist, reviewing hospital charts and looking at the database of reportable conditions. He moved on from there to look at foodborne outbreak data and waterborne diseases. He also did some GIS and health communications work during the Ebola scare.

"My role continued to expand over the years as [the CDPHE] utilized more of my skills," White said.

His wide-ranging responsibilities and exposure to different projects suited his learning style and career interests and helped him prepare for his current position as a GIS Health Analyst in CDPHE's Center for Health and Environmental Data (CHED). At CHED, he consults with all divisions including the Divisions of Air Quality, Water Quality,

Prevention Services, Disease Control, and more. He maps health surveys and fluctuations in outbreaks, air quality, and health access.

"Anything that has a spatial component, I map. I'm sort of a map and spatial data steward for the health department," White explains. "I like the versatility of what I do. I like how every week it tends to be a new project. I've really expanded my skills and knowledge base of public health action."

White said the broad scope of classes he took at ColoradoSPH were "incredibly eye-opening" and taught him many of the skills that he still uses today in his job. He shares that what he learned in class has helped him in real life applications when he occasionally guest lectures at ColoradoSPH on both the CSU and CU Anschutz campuses.

As for White's future in the public health field, the options are endless.

"I'm one of those people who doesn't think of work as a linear trajectory," he says. "I abide by the principles that I want to make a difference and feel like I'm helping people, and I want always to be learning."

— JK

“

I wanted to have a **greater purpose.**

— Ben White



Ben White