

SOURCE Champion of the Month  
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**Nina Martin**

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**What do you do as your community engagement activity?**

JHSPH American Public Health Association Campus Liaison  
JHSPH Student Assembly Vice President of Community Affairs & Public Health Promotion  
Digital Communications Intern, Baltimore City Health Department  
Gordis Teaching Fellow (Spring & Fall, 2016)  
Founder, Public Health United

**How much time do you spend on service per week/month?**

20+ hours per week

**How did you begin to work with your community-based organization (CBO)?**

When I started my PhD in Immunology at JHSPH, I was so excited to share my research and all of the cool science I was learning with family and friends. After a few short moments, I quickly saw the glazed looks set over my friends’ faces: no one could understand the language I was using and I didn’t know how to translate it into understandable and interesting terms. I soon realized that the more you specialize in the sciences, the more you forget what scientific vocabulary and ideas people know and don’t know. Since we scientists rarely receive any formal training in science communication and are first and foremost preoccupied with the doing of science (a highly competitive cycle of producing and publishing data and competing for grants), this translation skill remains extremely challenging to acquire. Because of this difficulty, other entities have taken over the business of translating science for public consumption: media and politicians. This has led to a dangerous situation: these entities, however well meaning, often come with biases and misinformation...which has in turn led to public mistrust and even rejection of the very interventions and research we scientists have spent decades working on. This is why I started Public Health United, or PHU for short. At PHU, our main goals are to

improve public health and science communication through podcasts, articles, and outreach and to make health science accessible and interesting for all.

**What do you enjoy about or gain through community service?**

I absolutely love doing podcasts, talking to people about science communication, and teaching people about Immunology (how the body fights off disease). My work through PHU therefore doesn't feel like work. It's fun, gets me up in the morning, and keeps me excited. I'm always expanding what we do, which keeps it fresh and interesting as well. One of my favorite things to do is to speak publicly about science communication and how we can get better. In September, I spoke at TEDxMidAtlantic and I met so many great people and was able to get the message out in a very positive way. I hope to more events like that!

**How do you find time for service in your busy schedule?**

I was out for dinner the other night with friends and the classic question came up: do you work to live or do you live to work? I honestly replied that I've always felt a calling to serve the community—in my own, introverted and science geek way—and that I love giving back to my community so much that it doesn't feel like work. I make time for service no matter what because it brings me a lot of satisfaction (and I hope to make this my career after I graduate). I try to make it easier on my schedule to plan things that fit in with my career path, so I'm not straying too far from my main academic goals. Public health and science communication is a large field and I've been able to do many things to serve the community in this regard. I do podcasts where I interview experts and people I admire to learn about how they communicate with the public. I also organize events in the community to share health information. For example, PHU is currently organizing an event to benefit Moveable Feast (a Baltimore non-profit that provides free meals and nutrition counseling to people with HIV and other chronic diseases) and we'll be providing free testing and sex ed to attendees. I'm also volunteering as the Digital Communications Intern at the Baltimore City Health Department to gain direct experience with health communication in Baltimore, outside of the lab. I'm also excited to serve in the upcoming Spring as a Gordis Teaching Fellow where I'll be teaching a course of my own design on science communication to Hopkins undergraduate students. All of these service projects fit in with my career goals and will hopefully lead me to a great job after I finish my thesis!

**Besides finding the time, what barriers related to your service have you had to overcome?**

Time management! I'm in an academic basic science program. My main academic goal is to perform enough experiments in the lab to get enough data to write a thesis and publish a few first author papers. Service has absolutely nothing to do with my degree and, within my department, there are zero rewards or benefits to doing service. I have to be excellent at time management and make sure that the majority of my time is spent on school and lab, while I maintain my service projects. The other biggest difficulty for myself has been to learn how to grow PHU's audience and to get our science communication message out. Marketing, shocker, is a field unto itself. It's been a slow process to learn how to do this effectively (actually, still learning and always looking for advice!).

**How has your training in Hopkins influenced the way you approach service?**

My training has given me an excellent foundation in immunology and the basis for understanding important health topics like vaccines, climate science, GMO's, the flu, evolution...basically every topic that is often miscommunicated to public and I have the

knowledge to understand it because of Hopkins. What I've been working on by myself is how to translate that for the public. My training has also given me the opportunity to meet the leaders in all of these fields and to share a podcast interview with them. I've been able to interview, for example, Daniel Webster (JHSPH gun control expert), Ralph Cicerone (National Academy of Sciences President & Climate Science expert), Peter Agre (JHSPH, Nobel Laureate), Al Sommer (JHSPH Public Health Champion), and Paul Offit (Educator, Vaccinologist). JHSPH has opened up all of these doors for me and has made it easier to connect with these top notch communicators and public health professionals.

**How does your service shape your development as a health care professional?**

The goals of PHU are my own career goals, so the service and career development are one and the same. I'm very lucky to be able to do what I love and at the same time to serve the community. Hopefully, someday, I'll be paid to do this! But for now, I'm happy to serve as an addition to my scientific training.

**What advice do you have for prospective students who are interested in community service?**

There will always be more school work, so make time for what's important to you.

**What would you say to someone who is unsure of the impact his/her service would have on a community?**

Anything you can do to give back to the community is meaningful. You have to accept that you mostly won't be able to gauge the impact of your work, at least not on a daily basis. Seeing the results of your service work takes years of steady effort. It's only been recently, after two plus years of consistent effort, that I've been seeing the impact of PHU's efforts. For over a year, I couldn't tell if our message was getting out or if anyone was listening. Whenever I wonder about the impact of my work, I always say to myself, "Build it, and they will come." I have a chuckle and keep going.

**What is the community service accomplishment that has affected you and/or your community the most?**

Since September, PHU has been organizing a charity event to benefit Moveable Feast as I mentioned above. I've never planned an event before or managed a team of volunteers. It has been a great experience (and a steep learning curve)—and I've learned the importance of having a dedicated team of volunteers who do what they say they will do. I couldn't have done it without them. We were also able to get support from the Johns Hopkins Alumni Association—they are sponsoring safe rides to and from our event in the form of a shuttle bus. In this process, we've gotten so much positive feedback from the Baltimore Community—and offers of venues to hold similar events in the future! We hope our next event will be an even bigger intersection of education, music, and harm reduction and to incorporate more local organizations to provide public health education and fundraising support.



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