

STRENGTHENING CONNECTIONS AND INCREASING CAPACITY IN INFECTIOUS DISEASE DYNAMICS

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Mathematics and simulation are essential tools in infectious disease control, enabling decision-makers to explore control policies before implementing them, interpret trends, and predict emerging threats. The ICI3D Program, a collaboration between the UF Emerging Pathogens Institute and the South African Centre for Epidemiological Modelling and Analysis (SACEMA), provides intensive training in these methods to students and researchers from the US and Africa and aims to cultivate an international network of researchers from diverse backgrounds. The program comprises two distinct but overlapping International Clinics on Infectious Disease Dynamics and Data and a complementary research scholars exchange program.

The Clinic on the Meaningful Modeling of Epidemiological Data (MMED), held at the African Institute of Mathematical Sciences in South Africa, targets quantitative scientists, including mathematicians, statisticians, and infectious disease epidemiologists. Participants engage with meaningful questions about infectious disease dynamics by integrating mathematical models with epidemiological data. Participants learn to use data to inform the construction of the simplest or clearest models appropriate to answer a given question, rather than on the development of complex mathematical models unrelated to data.

The Clinic on Dynamic Approaches to Infectious Disease Data (DAIDD), hosted by the University of Florida, targets public health researchers and population biologists interested in studying infectious diseases. Instruction focuses on how the complex dynamics of pathogen transmission influence study design and data collection for addressing problems in infectious disease research. Participants develop written research proposals for their systems of interest and receive guidance in seeking out the resources necessary for carrying out their proposed research.

The International Disease Dynamics and Data Research Scholars Program (I3D) funds scholars to spend 6 weeks working on an approved research project at the ICI3D faculty member's home institution. The exchange program allows I3D scholars from Africa to work with ICI3D faculty at North American institutions and American I3D scholars to work with ICI3D faculty at African institutions.

Since the ICI3D program's inception in 2012, the MMED and DAIDD clinics have provided training to 126 participants, 111 based at African institutions and 64 from US institutions. During this time, 17 UF participants from 10 departments and degree programs have attended the MMED and/or DAIDD clinics. In addition, a total of six I3D Scholars from the US, Uganda, Swaziland, Tanzania have completed research exchanges.

Three I3D Scholars completed their exchanges since the last report. Welile Sikhondze, an MS student in the Institute of Infectious Diseases and Molecular Medicine at the University of Cape Town, was supervised by Dr. Travis Porco, an ICI3D faculty member based at the University of California – San Francisco

(UCSF). Welile completed a project focused on modeling the impact of novel diagnostic methods on tuberculosis incidence. Roger Ying, a researcher at UNAIDS in Geneva, Switzerland, was supervised by Brian Williams of SACEMA. Roger completed a project developing improved modeling tools for use by public health officials to inform decision-making for HIV-related policies. Joseph Nondi, a researcher at the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in the United Republic of Tanzania, was supervised by Dr. Jonathan Dushoff of McMaster University. Joseph completed a project focused on care and treatment of pediatric HIV in Tanzania.

The fourth annual DAIDD clinic was held in December 2015, and the seventh annual MMED clinic will be held in Cape Town in June 2016. More information on the ICI3D Program, including application information for the MMED and DAIDD clinics, is available at <http://www.ici3d.org>.

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