

Department of Population and Quantitative Health Sciences

Weekly Newsletter

JUNE 15-19, 2026



UMass Chan
MEDICAL SCHOOL

WELCOME



Claire Schwartz is joining the Division of Preventive and Behavioral Medicine this summer to complete her MPH practicum. She is enrolled in the Honors Public Health Sciences Major in the Accelerated Masters of Public Health Program in Epidemiology at UMass Amherst. She will be working with Grace Ryan, Elise Stevens, and Melissa Goulding on a project related to messaging for rural vaccine promotion.

GRANTS

Award Number: 5D43TW011394-07
Awarding Agency: Fogarty International Center
Award Type: Non-Competing Continuation
Title: Strengthening Training and Research Initiatives for Vietnam to Effectively Managing Non-Communicable Diseases (STRIVE-NCD)
Project Period: 04/01/2026 – 02/28/2027
MPIs: [Hoa Nguyen, MD, MS, PhD](#) and [Jeroan Allison, MD, MS](#)
Total approved for this period: \$269,930



Hoa Nguyen, MD, MS, PhD



Jeroan Allison, MD, MS

Award Number: 5R33HL172269-03
Awarding Agency: National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute
Award Type: Non-Competing Continuation
Title: Conquering Hypertension in Urban Vietnam
Project Period: 03/01/2026 – 02/28/2027
MPIs: [Hoa Nguyen, MD, MS, PhD](#) and [Bo Wang, PhD](#)
Total approved for this period: \$445,275



Bo Wang, PhD

UPCOMING EVENTS

NEW DATE: Friday, June 26, 11:30 AM - 3:30 PM

55 Illinois Street, Worcester, MA

Yes We Care Food Pantry

The PQHS Diversity Action Committee invites you to volunteer at the Belmont A.M.E. Zion Church

You are welcome to use the staff benefit of being paid while you volunteer. For the direct link to sign up, click [here](#)

To donate to the food pantry, click [here](#).

Contact Amy Borg with any questions, amy.borg@umassmed.edu.



Wednesday, June 17, 10:00 – 11:00 AM, Zoom

Research Methods Meeting



Presenter: Michael Ferguson, Post Doc

Title: Learning Interpretable Clinical Models With Symbolic Regression

Abstract: Many of the machine learning models currently being developed and deployed in medicine are “black-box”, meaning that they cannot realistically be understood or interpreted by humans. These models are highly accurate, but this lack of interpretability limits integration into the clinical decision-making process and raises concerns for patient safety. In opposition to this trend is symbolic regression, a machine learning technique that dynamically learns human readable mathematical models. Symbolic regression has demonstrated impressive results in the physical sciences and has recently begun seeing use in medicine. In this talk, we will provide an overview of how symbolic regression works, its strengths and weaknesses, and the model building process.

Bio: Michael Ferguson is a 2nd year postdoctoral fellow and trainee in the T32 CODER program in the Department of Medicine. He received a BS in Mathematics from Brown University in 2017 and a doctorate in Mathematics from The CUNY Graduate Center in 2022. His research focus is the development of machine learning models for use in healthcare, with a particular emphasis on model interpretability.

Click [here](#) to join.

RECENT VISIT

[Jeroan Allison, MD, MS](#) and [Bo Wang, PhD](#), visited the Bahamas study site from May 17–20, 2026, as the team prepared to launch the Year 2 SMART-based adaptive implementation trial. During the visit, they met with the Minister of Education and the Director of the National HIV/AIDS Programme to discuss the trial launch. They also met with the Dean of the College of Social and Educational Studies at the University of The Bahamas to explore future research collaborations. The photos show the team meeting with the Dean, as well as a discussion with teachers and school coordinators focused on implementation challenges and strategies to support successful program delivery.



The Culture Code

Week 6: Disagreement in Meetings — Personal or Professional?

Have you ever left a meeting thinking:

- “That got uncomfortable fast.”
- “Why did they make that so personal?”
- “Why won’t anyone just say what they really think?”

Disagreement itself isn’t the problem.

How we interpret it often is.

In the High–Low Context framework, cultures differ in how conflict is experienced and expressed.

High (Group) Context — Conflict Feels Personal

- Disagreement may threaten harmony
- Nonverbal tension is significant
- Conflict may need to be resolved before work can move forward
- Public disagreement may feel disrespectful
- Avoidance may be used to preserve relationships

Low (Individual) Context — Conflict is Depersonalized

- Disagreement is about ideas, not people
 - Open debate may be encouraged
 - Conflict can coexist with ongoing collaboration
 - Direct critique is seen as efficient
 - Emotional tone may be minimized
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When these orientations interact:

- Open debate may feel aggressive or humiliating.
- Conflict avoidance may feel passive or unproductive.

Both styles are trying to maintain something important:

One protects relationships.

The other protects progress.

Cultural Agility Challenge

Notice:

In your next meeting, observe how disagreement shows up. Is it addressed directly? Redirected? Deferred? Avoided?

Try:

If you’re comfortable with debate, try softening your entry:


“I’m seeing this differently — can I share another angle?”

If you’re uncomfortable with open disagreement, try naming it neutrally:

“I have a slightly different perspective — may I offer it?”

Reflect:

When I feel tension in meetings, am I reacting to the content — or to the style of conflict?

 **Next Week:** Learning & Decision-Making — Why some cultures value modeling and synthesis while others prioritize speed and specificity.

UMASS BENEFIT REMINDER

Use Your Excess Vacation Leave by June 27, 2026

As we get closer to fiscal year end, we want to remind you of the maximum accruals outlined in the [UMass Chan Holiday, and Personal and Vacation Time Policy](#) so you can plan accordingly.

As of the last full pay period of the fiscal year, the maximum number of vacation hours employees may carry over into the next fiscal year is 240. During the fiscal year, employees are allowed to accrue hours over 240. Hours over this accrual limit are automatically re-set in the payroll system to the accrual maximum. This year, **the relevant pay period ends Saturday, June 27, 2026**. You are encouraged to use any vacation balances that exceed the 240-hour maximum before that date. To avoid the loss of accrued vacation hours, review the following recommendations:



- Any hours over the cap will automatically be reset to 240 and will appear on your paycheck **on Friday, July 3, 2026**.
- If you are approaching 240 hours of accrued vacation time, talk with your manager about planning time off before June 27 and make sure it is approved by them.
- Ensure your vacation time has been entered into the Time Reporting system **by June 27, 2026**.



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| ✚ Juneteenth National Independence Day – Friday, June 19 th | ✚ Veterans Day – Wednesday, November 11 th |
| ✚ Independence Day – Friday, July 3 rd (observed) | ✚ Thanksgiving Day – Thursday, November 26 th |
| ✚ Labor Day – Monday, September 7 th | ✚ Day After Thanksgiving – Friday, November 27 th |
| ✚ Indigenous Peoples' Day – Monday, October 12 th | ✚ Christmas Eve – Thursday, December 24 th |
| | ✚ Christmas Day – Friday, December 25 th |

PQHS Weekly will be sent to all members of PQHS on Monday mornings. The intent is to provide a snapshot of what is going on that week in PQHS and to share our faculty and staff activities with the department. We depend on you to provide the items we need to share. Please send suggestions of events, faculty invited seminars & talks, honors, student thesis presentations, and news – new babies born! – to Judi (judi.saber@umassmed.edu) & Sarah (sarah.yeboah@umassmed.edu) by Friday each week.