

Spirituality and Public Health National Student Essay Contest

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Of special interest to students and faculty concerned with spirituality and/or religion, the fourth annual **Spirituality and Public Health National Student Essay Contest** is now underway. The contest is accepting submissions through the end of 2019 (see <http://www.spirituality-public-health-essay.com/>). Since its 2016 launch, the contest has awarded \$1900 each year to graduate students enrolled in public health schools, colleges, or programs affiliated with the Association of Schools and Colleges of Public Health (ASPPH). Prizes are \$1000 for First Prize, \$600 for Second Prize, and \$300 for Third Prize. Some years we've also had funding to print congratulatory messages in the American Public Health Association's official newspaper, *The Nation's Health*.^[3]

Initially launched in 2016 with funding from the John Templeton Foundation, the contest aims to support several educational and field-building goals. Perhaps most directly and importantly, it aims to catalyze and intensify student engagement in academic and professional exploration of religion/spirituality (R/S) and public health. A second aim is alerting faculty and reinforcing student recognition of the need for increased attention to spiritual and religious factors in public health curricula. National surveys have documented perceptions among public health students and school leaders (e.g., deans) of the validity and need for such increased attention to R/S factors (Oman, 2018a). Third, the contest aims to highlight and foster the continued growth of evidence on R/S factors and health that already includes well over 3000 empirical studies and a growing number of books (e.g., Holman, 2015; Idler, 2015; Oman, 2018b). Unfortunately, despite this evidence base, R/S factors at present remain poorly covered in the education of many public health students, including nearly half of Oman's

(2018a) national survey respondents whose public health education had *never* addressed R/S topics.^[4]

This national essay contest was initially organized by faculty of schools of public health at Drexel University, Johns Hopkins University, the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Maryland, and the University of North Texas, who with colleagues elsewhere have carried out the judging. Prize-winning essays, listed on the contest website (<http://www.spirituality-public-health-essay.com/winners/>), have been submitted by students at a universities that include Emory, Johns Hopkins, Loma Linda, the Universities of Arizona, California (Berkeley, Irvine), Minnesota, and South Carolina. Winning essays have explored topics ranging from the relevance of R/S factors to the US opioid epidemic or to mental health promotion among North Korean refugees, from God-focused locus of control among American breast cancer patients, to closing India's mental health treatment gap through formal collaboration between allopathic and faith-based practitioners.

Please spread word about this contest, alerting public health students and faculty to the existence and importance of the emerging field of spirituality, religion, and public health.

Each year we've publicized the contest by sending notices to as well as contacts identified through the internet at each school's administration, such as a leaders of student services divisions, as well as to interested colleagues. Such dissemination has generated an increasing number of submissions nearly every year, but we suspect that dissemination could be much broader. We encourage all readers of this article to consider sharing through appropriate channels with public

health colleagues and public health students (see <http://www.spirituality-public-health-essay.com/share/>). If you have questions, or would like to be involved in other ways, or perhaps help organize a separate “track” for undergraduate public health majors,^[5] please feel free to contact the author (dougoman@berkeley.edu).

any coverage at all in their public health education” (Oman, 2018a, p. 346).

[5][^]An undergraduate award track was piloted in Fall 2017, but effective publicity proved challenging.

References

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[3][^]For congratulatory messages to 2016 and 2017 winners in *The Nation's Health*, please see <http://www.spirituality-public-health-essay.com/winners/winners-in-the-media/>.

[4][^]“[O]ut of 980 total student respondents, only 516 (53%) affirmed that R/S topics had received