



## Commencement 2004

### Keynote Speaker Marion Nestle Links Public Health Issues to Social and Economic Inequities

On May 15, 2004, Marion Nestle, Ph.D., M.P.H. '86, the School of Public Health's Alumna of the Year, spoke to the graduating class about politics, food, and public health. The author of *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*, Nestle is a professor and director of public health initiatives in the Department of Nutrition, Food Studies, and Public Health at New York University. Below are excerpts from her address. The full speech can be viewed online at <http://sph.berkeley.edu>.



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1 Professors Nicholas Jewell, Tom Boyce, and Denise Herd prepare to lead the procession into Zellerbach Auditorium; 2 Valerie Flaherman gets help donning her hood from her 10-year-old daughter; 3 (Left to right) Graduates Vivian Johnson, Emmanuella Joseph, and Jacqueline Liro Goeldner.



“

The health problems in today's world are difficult, complicated, and not easily fixed. Infectious diseases like AIDS and SARS; chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes, and cancer; and the health consequences of present day conflict and violence do not have simple causes and cannot in any way have simple solutions. As public health so directly teaches, these problems are rooted in social and economic inequities that can only be addressed by making fundamental changes in society. Public health is about giving everyone a chance at leading a full and rewarding life.”

“It is the ‘everyone’ that constitutes the critical issue. To give everyone a chance means to advocate for equality—equality of opportunity, of equity, of social justice, and, dare I say it, of democracy, and to advocate for the education, environment, and resources needed to make equality happen.”

“Food companies will do anything to get people to eat more. They will throw some vitamins into sugary cereals and candies and advertise them as healthful. They will take out the trans fats and advertise salty snacks as health foods. They will remove one gram of carbohydrate from wine and advertise it as low carb. I’m not kidding. They will put vending machines in grammar schools and advertise junk food to two-year-olds. They will insist that no government agency ever suggest

eating less of their products, no matter what those products might be.”

“At a time when hundreds of millions of people, many of them children, do not have enough to eat, hundreds of millions more are so overweight that they risk getting heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and other chronic diseases. In the United States today, most adults are overweight, and even young children are so overweight that they are showing unprecedented signs of the adult form of diabetes.

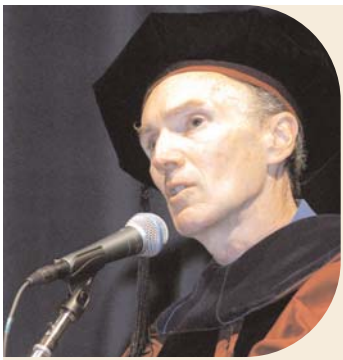
“Obesity, like chronic starvation, is a worldwide phenomenon, and equally political. It affects the poor more than the rich. In public health terms, not having enough food and having too much food are class issues. They affect the poor and disenfranchised far more than they do those who are educated and better off.”

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### Inside:

#### How Much Junk Food Do We Eat?



## Dean's Message

The past year has been one of significant accomplishment for the School. We recruited two outstanding new faculty: Darlene Francis, a developmental neuroscientist (jointly appointed with the Department of Psychology), whose work focuses on the interaction between biological and social/environmental factors influencing early childhood development; and Will

Dow, a health economist who, among other interests, examines the impact of early investment in human capital on health status.

In the past year, faculty were awarded approximately \$50 million in new research grants and contracts, representing approximately \$1 million per FTE faculty member. The School is third on the Berkeley campus in receipt of research funds, second only to the much larger College of Engineering and Biological Sciences Division.

Another achievement was the successful launch of our upper-division undergraduate major in public health, with more than 120 students now enrolled. Daphne Ling became the first graduate of the program in May.

In addition, an external program review committee gave us a very positive report fully supporting the School's strategic plan. The report called for modest growth in faculty size, endorsed our various programmatic initiatives, and underscored the critical need for space to accommodate the majority of the School in a single building. In the words of the committee's report: "The School's size is an issue of great importance, and the fac-

ulty are at or perhaps even slightly below the minimum essential size for meeting the needs of the research and training program. Their approach to growth appears to be carefully analyzed, suitable to strengthen the School and compatible with the academic environment of UC Berkeley."

I am pleased to announce the appointment of our new dean of students, Barbara Abrams, a professor of epidemiology and graduate of the School who is deeply committed to improving the quality of the student experience. She succeeds Zak Sabry, professor of public health nutrition, who will return to the faculty as professor emeritus and professor of the Graduate School. We owe much gratitude to Zak for his outstanding service as associate dean over the past several years. His calm demeanor, sage advice, and commitment to the School were appreciated by all of us.

Finally, no message would be complete without commenting on the financial situation facing the School and the campus. State support of the School's overall budget has fallen to an all time low of 13 percent. It is clear that if we hope to achieve our goals and meet the modern day public health challenges, we will be increasingly dependent on private sector support. We look forward to working with everyone to make the best use of our current and future resources to help improve the public's health.

Sincerely,

Stephen M. Shortell, Ph.D., M.P.H.

*Dean, School of Public Health  
Blue Cross of California Distinguished Professor of Health Policy & Management  
Professor of Organization Behavior*

## News and Notes



### Conference Examines Obesity and Society

**1** The UC Berkeley Center for Health Research, together with the UC Berkeley Center for Weight and Health and the Kaiser Permanente Institute for Health Policy, sponsored the Second Annual Science and Society Research Conference, "Confronting Obesity: Science, Health, and Society," held April 15, 2004, at the Berkeley City Club. Following the theme of the conference series, the day's speakers examined the connections between the research documenting a growing epidemic of obesity in this country and its ramifications for society, in terms of both personal behavior and public policy. Pictured (left to right): **José Fernández, Ph.D.**, assistant professor, Department of Nutrition Sciences and the Section of Statistical Genetics in the Department of Biostatistics, University of Alabama at Birmingham; **William Caplan, M.D.**, director of clinical development, Kaiser Permanente Care Management Institute, Oakland, Calif.; and **Pat Crawford, Dr.P.H. '94, R.D.**, codirector of the Center for Weight and Health at UC Berkeley.

### Former FDA Commissioner Kessler Discusses "The Tobacco Wars"

**2** **David A. Kessler, M.D.**, dean of the School of Medicine and vice chancellor for Medical Affairs at UC San Francisco, spoke at a dean's colloquium, "The Tobacco Wars," held this past April in Baldwin Auditorium. Kessler served as FDA commissioner during a time when substantial progress was made in the war against tobacco.

### Symposium Showcases Outstanding School Research

**3** Presenters at the Spring Research Symposium, held March 4, 2004, included **Art Reingold, M.D.**, **Nicholas P. Jewell, Ph.D.**, **Paul Gertler, Ph.D.**, **Thomas E. McKone, Ph.D.**, and **Ronald Krauss, M.D.** Pictured: **Ira Tager, M.D.**, (left), professor of epidemiology, and **Sangwei Lu, Ph.D.**, assistant adjunct professor, taking questions from the audience at the symposium.

# Junk Food Constitutes One-Third of American Diet

A new analysis of the foods Americans eat finds that sugary snacks and sodas reign supreme over healthier options such as vegetables and fruit.

**Gladys Block, Ph.D.**, professor of epidemiology and public health nutrition, has quantified the types of foods the United States population eats and ranked them by the amount of calories they contribute.

Her findings, published in the June issue of the *Journal of Food Composition and Analysis*, reveal that three food groups—sweets and desserts, soft drinks, and alcoholic beverages—constitute almost 25 percent of all calories consumed by Americans. Salty snacks and fruit-flavored drinks make up another five percent, bringing the total energy contributed by nutrient-poor foods to at least 30 percent of the total calorie intake.

“What is really alarming is the major contribution of ‘empty calories’ in the American diet,” says Block. “We know people are eating a lot of junk food, but to have almost one-third of Americans’ calories coming from those categories is a shocker. It’s no wonder there’s an obesity epidemic in this country.”

For her analysis, Block used data from 4,760 adults who took part from 1999 to 2000 in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). Participants in the survey were asked to report all the foods they ate in the prior 24 hours. For comparison, Block also analyzed NHANES III data collected between 1988 and 1994.

Block categorized food codes from both of the NHANES surveys into 144 total food items. She then categorized those items into 23 food groups.

Among the food items, soft drinks and pastries led the list of top 10 foods contributing the most calories to the American diet. As the leader of the pack, sodas alone contributed 7.1 percent of the total calories in the U.S. population. Foods such as hamburgers, pizza, and potato chips rounded out the top five food items.

When comparing the rankings from the NHANES III survey with the 1999–2000 data, Block did not find major changes. Under the food group category, bread, rolls, and crackers contributed 10.7 percent of calories in the earlier survey but only 8.7 percent in the later one. Soft drink consumption was up slightly, from 6 percent of calories in 1988–1994 to 7.1 percent in 1999–2000.



*“What is really alarming is the major contribution of ‘empty calories’ in the American diet.”*

Block’s calculations took into account the number of respondents who reported eating a particular food item, the portion sizes of the food, and the nutrient and energy content of the food. For example, the calories provided

*continued on back page*

## Event Calendar

### Fall 2004

#### September 28 (Tuesday), 4 p.m.

##### Dean’s Symposium, Penhoet Lecture

Guest lecturer: Richard J. Jackson, M.D., M.P.H. ’79, state public health officer, California Department of Health Services  
*Anita Baldwin Auditorium, 22 Warren Hall, Berkeley campus*

#### October 26 (Tuesday), 2–5 p.m.

##### Fall Research Symposium

Faculty members present current research to provide a snapshot of projects under way at the School.  
*Alumni House, Berkeley campus*

#### November 8 (Monday), 6:30–8 p.m.

##### APHA Social Hour

Socialize with fellow School of Public Health alumni attending the American Public Health Association’s annual meeting.  
*Location TBA, Washington, D.C.*

#### November 18 (Thursday), 4–6 p.m.

##### John Eisenberg Legacy Lecture

Guest lecturer: Barbara McNeil, M.D., Ph.D., Ridley Watts Professor of Health Care Policy, Harvard Medical School  
*Anita Baldwin Auditorium, 22 Warren Hall, Berkeley campus*

#### November 30 (Tuesday), 4–6 p.m.

##### Zak Sabry Lecture

To pay tribute to Professor Zak Sabry who retired this summer, a panel of School of Public Health alumni and faculty will discuss the far-reaching, long-term meaning of mentoring.  
*Anita Baldwin Auditorium, 22 Warren Hall, Berkeley campus*

Updated information about School of Public Health events will be posted at <http://sph.berkeley.edu>.



School of  
Public Health

#### Dean

Stephen M. Shortell, Ph.D., M.P.H.

Assistant Dean, External Relations and Development  
Patricia W. Hosel, M.P.A.

#### Editor & Layout

Michael S. Broder

#### Photography:

Peg Skorpinski, pp. 1, 2, (Shortell), & 4 (commencement); Denise C., p. 1 (cake); Michael S. Broder, p. 2 (News & Notes); Domagoj T., p. 3 (chips); Bulent Ince, p. 4 (smoking).

*Highlights* is published semiannually in the summer and winter by the University of California, Berkeley, School of Public Health for alumni and friends of the School. The School’s magazine, *UC Berkeley Public Health*, is published semiannually in the spring and fall.

University of California, Berkeley  
School of Public Health  
Office of External Relations and Development  
140 Earl Warren Hall #7360  
Berkeley, CA 94720-7360  
(510) 642-9572

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## Introducing Our New Web Site

Visit the School of Public Health online at <http://sph.berkeley.edu>



If you haven’t visited the School’s web site in a while, you’re in for a surprise. Explore our newly redesigned site to find the latest School of Public Health news, events, research highlights, and more.

### Send Us Your E-Mail Address

To help us keep in touch with you electronically, please make sure we have your current e-mail address. You will receive SPH eNews, the monthly online communication for School of Public Health alumni and friends. E-mail [trini@berkeley.edu](mailto:trini@berkeley.edu) with your information.

## School Adopts Policy Against Using Tobacco Funds for Research

Because of the deadly consequences of cigarette smoking, the School of Public Health at UC Berkeley officially adopted a policy banning the use of tobacco industry funds for research. "Accepting money from the tobacco industry is inconsistent with the mission of the University of California, Berkeley, School of Public Health: the promotion and protection of the health of the human population," states the policy's preamble.



The policy was overwhelmingly approved in a faculty vote in May after a year of faculty discussion. A small handful of other schools of public health have adopted similar policies, including Harvard, Johns Hopkins, and the University of Arizona.


The policy reads as follows:

*With due respect for the academic freedom of members of the faculty and their right to pursue any and all legal avenues of inquiry, the School will no longer accept new research grants or contracts from organizations known to be directly or indirectly funded by the tobacco industry. We also discourage faculty from applying for or receiving grants from tobacco industry sources through other units of the University.* 

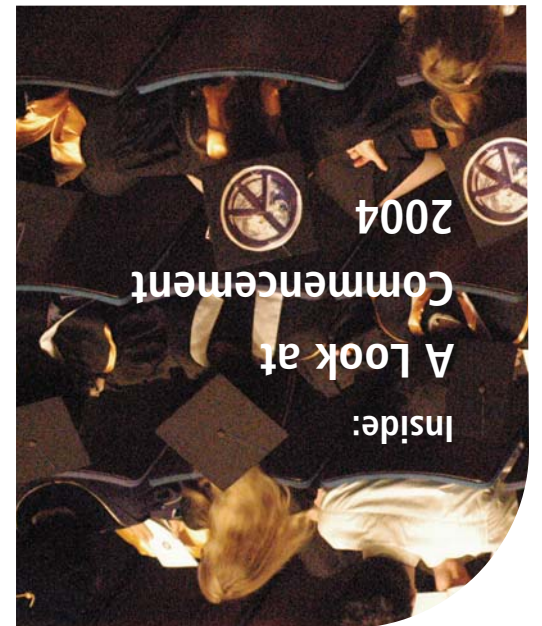
*Junk Food..., continued*

ed by sodas were summed up from individual reports and then divided by the total number of calories consumed by the entire population to get the proportion of energy provided. The foods then were ranked by their contribution to the total energy intake.

"It's important to emphasize that sweets, desserts, snacks, and alcohol are contributing calories without providing vitamins and minerals," says Block. "In contrast, such healthy foods as vegetables and fruit make up only 10 percent of the caloric intake in the U.S. diet. A large proportion of Americans are undernourished in terms of vitamins and minerals. You can actually be obese and still be undernourished with regard to important nutrients. We shouldn't be telling people to eat less, we should be telling people to eat differently."

Block also published a recent analysis of physical activity among the U.S. population that found that Americans are primarily sedentary. "The combination of our sedentary lifestyle with our poor eating habits goes a long way to explain the current rise of overweight and obese Americans," says Block. 

—Sarah Yang



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University of California, Berkeley  
School of Public Health  
140 Warren Hall #7360  
Berkeley, CA 94720-7360  
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