

# UCLA College | Life Sciences Center for Reproductive Science, Health & Education

## Newsletter | Spring Quarter 2024

UCLA Center for Reproductive Science, Health & Education envisions a future in which reproductive policies and care are based on rigorous science, and access to this care is more equitable.

### Director's Welcome



For our Spring Newsletter, I am writing to you during National Infertility Awareness week which kicked off April 21, 2024. National Infertility Awareness Week was created as a way to reduce stigma and educate the public about reproductive health, and the challenges many people face as they begin to build or expand their families. Infertility affects a significant proportion of humanity, with 1 in 6 people of reproductive age globally experiencing infertility in their lifetime. At the Center, we support scientists working to solve the grand challenge of human infertility by creating new tools and technologies that can be used to develop advanced therapies for this common problem, for which one-third of cases remain unexplained.

Another major activity of the Center in the last quarter was the launch of the UCLA CRSHE Distinguished Speaker Series. This event focused on Black maternal health and care. We were delighted to host Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell and UC Regent Elaine Batchlor, CEO of MLK Community Health Care to discuss policy and practice aimed at improving the lives of Black birthing persons in the United States. At this event we learned about the California Department of Health Care Services doula benefit which Supervisor Mitchell championed, and the research behind health care disparities from Dr. Batchlor. This distinguished speaker event complemented the work of our student researchers who are creating public-facing fact sheets around critical issues in reproductive health and care, including the role of doulas.

Finally, I am delighted to introduce you to the 2023 CRSHE Research Fellows who were awarded competitive research funds from the Center to support their research in reproductive health and science. The diversity of their research activities highlights the importance of research and innovation in reproductive health to improve people's lives.

Please continue reading below for more research and educational activities aimed at supporting reproductive health and science research and education on the UCLA campus and beyond.

Warm regards,

Amander Clark, Ph.D.  
Director, Center for Reproductive Science, Health and Education  
Professor, Molecular, Cell & Developmental Biology

### **Inaugural Distinguished Speaker Series Event**

We were delighted to host L.A. County Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell along with UC Regent Dr. Elaine Batchlor in a conversation about Black maternal health and care in Los Angeles. Watch the event [here](#).

Our event was featured in UCLA Newsroom [here](#). We would also like to thank our [sponsors and partners](#), including our Gold Sponsor, L.A. Care Health Plan.



### **Did you know?**

Although the term “doula” wasn’t coined until the 1970s, historical doulas tended to be female relatives (grandmothers, aunts, cousins, etc.) with childrearing and/or birth experiences. Despite the prevalence of these support roles in practice, becoming a doula as a career only started to become popularized in the 1980s.

The CRSHE has begun an internship program where our students are creating evidence-based Fact Sheets. Click [here](#) to see our first two Fact Sheets on Doulas!

## **Recent News**

### **Career Development and Mentorship Sessions**

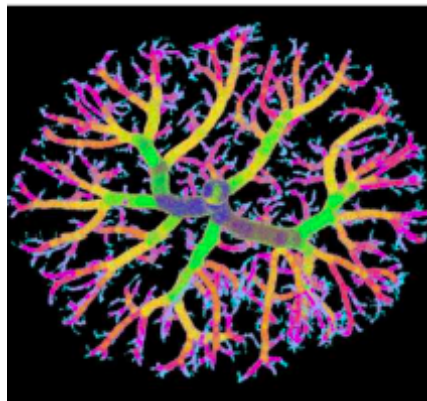
The CRSHE Career Development and Mentorship Sessions kicked off on January 9th, 2024 with Willie Larson, UCLA student nurse-midwife and co-founder of Pregnancy Pathways. She discussed her path to becoming a midwife, as well as doula work within the Los Angeles community.



## Research Spotlight

### **The maternal microbiome promotes placental health**

The human microbiome is a defined set of organisms that inhabit and interact with the human body. Your gut microbiome plays a very important role in health, and the imbalance of healthy microbiomes contributes to disorders. Researchers at UCLA studied the role of the maternal microbiome during pregnancy and showed that the loss of the microbiome impacts placental health. Read the UCLA Newsroom article [here](#).



## Student and Fellow Spotlight

### **Dr. Sissy Wamaitha**

Dr. Wamaitha traveled to Dakar, Senegal this past fall to speak at the Grand Challenges Annual Meeting sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The Grand Challenges meeting is designed to focus attention and effort on solving key global health programs. The theme for the Dakar Annual Meeting was “Science Saves Lives.” Currently a postdoc in Dr. Clark’s lab, she is investigating how ovaries and female reproductive cells (germ cells) are formed, and she aims to translate these findings into research and development (R&D) tools for infertility-related therapies, as well as for contraception discovery. This was the first time Dr. Wamaitha attended the Grand Challenges Annual meeting where she enjoyed interacting with people working on complementary projects, as well as learning about fascinating research designed to build a more effective, inclusive and equitable ecosystem for global health R&D. The project she presented is part of the Ovarian Contraceptive Discovery Initiative, a multi-investigator and institutional

endeavor aimed at developing nonhormonal contraceptives.



### Monthly Seminar Series

Our February seminar focused on early life exposure, prenatal development and environmental health from two scholars in Dr. Patrick Allard's lab. Dylan Hatai discussed the molecular memory of e-cigarette-induced transgenerational asthma while Max Levenson shared about how the environmental toxicant, Bisphenol A, transgenerationally impairs reproductive health. It is fascinating to learn how these toxicants impact reproductive health.

You may follow along on upcoming events [here](#).

A promotional poster for a UCLA seminar. The top left features the UCLA logo and 'CRSHE'. The main title is 'MONTHLY SEMINAR SERIES'. Below this, it says 'Join us for a two-part seminar!' and provides details about the speakers: Dylan Hatai and Max Levenson. The date, time, and location are listed as Friday, February 23rd, 2024, 11-12pm, and BSRB Rm #483. At the bottom, there are two small portrait photos of the speakers, with their names 'Dylan Hatai' and 'Max Levenson' written below them. The poster has a decorative background of yellow and blue lines.

### 2024 Reproductive Health and Science Research Fellowships

A number of fascinating projects in 2023 were included, ranging from the menstrual stigma on social media to the early diagnosis of placenta accreta spectrum disorders to the study of pregnant women with psychiatric diagnoses. Due to the success of the program we reopened the competitive application process for 2024 and are looking forward to sharing updates about the successful applicants in future newsletters.

If you would like to support Reproductive Health and Science Research Fellowships, please [click here](#).

## Coming Soon: Art x Reproductive Science



### **Saskia Baden selected as Commissioned Artist**

Upon receiving many fantastic applications, the CRSHE Committee has chosen UCLA graduate Saskia Baden to create artwork for the Center. A photographer and installation-based artist, her work explores the fluidity of water and the womb. We are looking forward to sharing more with you soon.

We are now on [Instagram](#) and [X!](#)

Follow along [@ucla\\_crshe](#) to see current updates and reproductive science news.



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