

Professional Leave Report Cover Sheet

Name: Dvera Saxton

Department: Anthropology

College: Social Sciences

Leave taken: Sabbatical Difference in Pay Professional Leave without Pay

Time Period: Fall

Spring

Academic Year

Other

Please upload your report to this DocuSign envelope. Your report will be sent to your Dean for your PAF and to the Library Archives. You will also receive a confirmation copy.

PROFESSIONAL LEAVE REPORT:
Atlantic Fellows for Equity in Brain Health, Global Brain Health Institute,
University of California San Francisco 2019-2020

Dvera I. Saxton, PhD
Associate Professor
Department of Anthropology
College of Social Sciences, CSU-Fresno

During the 2019-2020 academic year, I took an unpaid professional leave of absence from my position as a then-assistant professor in the Department of Anthropology at Fresno State. I was accepted into the Atlantic Fellows for Equity in Brain Health program, a global leadership training program that recruits select interdisciplinary applicants from over 40 countries. The program is hosted by the Global Brain Health Institute, which has two locations: one at the University of California San Francisco, and one at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland. GBHI's mission is to reduce the global burdens of aging and dementia by training, mentoring, and supporting successive cohorts of scholars, researchers, community advocates, and artists from all over the world.

I joined a cohort of 16 fellows in San Francisco, and took up residence there from August 2019-March 2020. We attended seminars, case conferences, workshops, and community events together that all revolved around brain health. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted some of our fellowship activities; however, I still gained a lot, professionally and intellectually from the experience, which will directly benefit Fresno State and communities in the San Joaquin Valley in a number of ways.

First, I have developed relationships with an expansive network of brain health professionals from different cultural and professional backgrounds, including neurologists, gerontologists, arts in health practitioners, policy experts, health economists, nurses, social workers, and other social scientists. Our shared goal as Atlantic Fellows for Equity in Brain Health is to address the disparities endured by elders and their families and communities, especially when it comes to the growing rates of neurodegenerative diseases. Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and other dementias are significant in the Central Valley, and remain under addressed in vulnerable populations like rural, immigrant, and farm working communities. I compared notes with peers from Peru, Chile, Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia, Sweden, China, Argentina, Wales, Belgium, Catalonia, Cuba, Brazil, Spain, Mexico, France, Bermuda, Israel, and beyond.

This is what drew me to this fellowship opportunity--the chance to learn more about the brain from different perspectives and to be connected with people who are working on similar issues from all over the world. I also now count on new colleagues who are faculty members at UCSF

in the neurology, gerontology, and other departments as mentors and collaborators. A significant and welcomed connection is with fellow medical anthropologist Dr. Alissa Bernstein, who is currently conducting research in Fresno at UCSF-Fresno's Alzheimer's Research Center about the clinical experiences of Latino neurology patients who have dementia. This has opened doors to me to build connections at UCSF-Fresno as well, for future collaborative research and elder and health care advocacy work.

My interest in brain health as a medical and environmental anthropologist was inspired by my previous research on farmworkers and pesticides, which will be published in my forthcoming book *The Devil's Fruit: Farmworkers, Health, and Environmental Justice* (Rutgers University Press, February 2021). Emerging research in neurology and environmental health suggest troubling relationships between toxic exposures and brain health throughout the lifecourse. My new work at the intersection of neurology, aging, and ethnography, builds on my long track record of community based and engaged research on farmworker health.

One of the main training components of the fellowship year is learning how to write and submit a grant proposal. My pilot project about aging in place for rural Latinos in the San Joaquin Valley, sought to engage community members' through a qualitative arts-based body-map storytelling methodology (BMS). BMS entails participants tracing life-sized renditions of their bodies onto large pieces of paper. Through a series of bilingual (Spanish-English and or Spanish-indigenous language) guided exercises and prompts participants, ages 55 and up, will fill in their body traces over a series of 5 3-to-4-hour sessions.

Questions posed to participants will include: (1) What is it like to grow old in your community? How do toxics in the environment affect your body (how do they feel on and or in the body)? (2) What does your brain look like? What does it do? Have you noticed changes in your ability to think and function in everyday life? What do you think is the cause of those changes? (3) What do you enjoy about getting older? What are the biggest challenges of getting older or being an elder? What's nice about growing old in [your community]? What makes it challenging or difficult? (4) What changes would you like to see in your community that would make growing old easier, happier, or healthier?

Body mapping with rural elder Latinos will encourage participants to artistically express their lived and embodied experiences of aging and brain health and its relationship to place, work, immigration, and pollution. Body mapping has been used in a variety of qualitative research and therapeutic contexts, across different age, occupational, social, activist, health and disease communities, and in dozens of different countries in both urban and rural settings. I would like to assess whether or not a BMS approach is appropriate for these populations and to gauge if the information gleaned can inform brain health community outreach in the San Joaquin Valley. To date, the BMS methodology has not been used to assess aging in zones of toxic exposure. Data produced will include: (1) the body maps themselves; (2) observations of participants creating

their body maps; (3) notes and reflections from participant observation throughout their daily lives (at home, at work, in social and family circles, and in clinical and social work contexts); (4) notes from facilitating the workshops; (5) scale-based survey results gauging participants' experiences with the project and its effectiveness and assessing their experiences, needs, and levels of engagement; and (6) community conversations and collaborative analyses generated throughout the process. The specific aims of this project are:

- (1) To describe the experiences, concerns, and needs of aging rural Latinos using a Body Map Storytelling (BMS) and ethnographic methodology about aging in place.
- (2) To assess the feasibility and acceptability of BMS methodology in the San Joaquin Valley's aging rural Latino population.

Given the rapid growth of the elder Latino population in the U.S., their diversity, and their many and complex social, environmental, and health vulnerabilities, health care infrastructures and interventions must be intentionally grounded around community members' concerns and needs. We must build upon different communities' understandings of their brains and bodies and their lived and place-based experiences of aging. This will lead to the development of more effective health outreach and more proactive and appropriate place- and community-based policy responses.

In my role as an associate professor of anthropology at California State University, Fresno, I am well positioned to continue building relationships germane to this and future projects. Building a solid cohort through snowball sampling and community networking will allow her to find other communities interested in environmental brain health issues. She plans to incorporate what she learns from the pilot into her curriculum at Fresno State, which will guide the future work and practice of new generations of social scientists, social workers, and health care professionals. This pilot will also serve as a springboard for future community-based projects to more accurately quantify and qualify neurodegenerative disease in the San Joaquin Valley. Public dissemination of results through publications, presentations, and exhibits will help guide the work of health care and social institutions to better serve vulnerable aging communities in the region and the development of appropriate and effective outreach and interventions. Another benefit of my fellowship time has been connecting with Dr. Joy Goto, who is serving as my regional mentor. She has given me excellent advice about future sources of funding to apply to and how to balance teaching and research at the CSU.

My time with GBHI reiterated to me the value and urgency of ethnographic and place-based research with different aging Latino communities in the U.S. and beyond. While I had planned to take a sabbatical leave for 2020-2021 to complete my pilot project, it is currently on hold due to the pandemic. When it is safe to resume in-person meetings and research activities, I will submit the proposal for consideration for funding.

Another significant accomplishment during my fellowship time was my participation in the Creative Minds working group. In collaboration with UCSF neurologist Dr. Sergio Lanata and research coordinator Gloria Aguirre, and my fellow fellows Karin Diamond (Wales) and Kunle Adewale (Nigeria), we created an arts-based brain health program. We received a grant from the County of San Francisco to address brain health in elders who live in the region's underserved neighborhoods. My contribution was the development of the NeuroNose curriculum, which used strategies for making one's own eco-friendly household cleaning and body-care products to teach participants more about environmental health, brain health, and the relationships between smell and memory. Participants learn how they can reduce their exposure to neurotoxic substances in their home and daily hygiene routines and how they can stimulate their brain through their sense of smell. To date, we have offered NeuroNose in Cantonese, English, and Spanish. I would like to involve my students in future NeuroNose workshops, and to train them to deliver them in other languages spoken in the Valley, including Hmong, Lao, Arabic, Punjabi, and indigenous languages from Mexico and Central America.

In March 2020, shortly after Governor Gavin Newsome issued the orders to shelter in place, I returned to my home in Fresno. I have been participating in fellowship activities remotely, and helped coordinate a Professor Rounds speaker series. I am also supporting community based organizations, the California Institute of Rural and the Fresno County Department of Public Health in their COVID-19 response work. While my fellowship was interrupted, I have pivoted my energies to address the disparities being endured by rural and immigrant communities amidst the pandemic. This has triggered new ideas for virtual project based learning that I am developing for Fall 2020 and Spring 2021.

It is my hope that my experiences as a formerly assistant professor taking a professional leave of absence can serve as a model for future generations of tenure track faculty who wish to pursue similar opportunities. I hope it is clear from my report that I have spent my time in productive ways that will be of benefit to my students, my department, and the university for years to come and probably for the duration of my career.