

# **INTERVIEW** WITH **CODY MULLEN**

*Dr. Cody Mullen is a clinical associate professor of public health and director of the Master of Health Administration (MHA) degree program at Purdue University. In this role, he works closely with industry partners, faculty, and students to deliver the MHA program.*



**You graduated from Purdue in 2012 with a bachelors of science degree in interdisciplinary science. What brings you back to the university?**

I was born and raised in the West Lafayette community, attending preschool on campus, several of my family members have worked at Purdue, and I knew I wanted to one day work at Purdue. Purdue and the College of Health and Human Sciences recently launched the Department of Public Health after the success of the Master of Public Health program. When an opportunity in the department opened focusing on health administration and health policy, I applied. It is great to be back on campus.

**You also published in JPUR, with your 2012 article "Hospital System Readmissions: A Care Cycle Approach." How did you get involved with your research then? What were some of the most important things you learned from that project specifically?**

I got involved with the Regenstrief Center for Healthcare Engineering (RCHE) as a Discovery Undergraduate Research Intern (DURI) when a call for applicants was released by Discovery Park. It was initially to

look at assistive technology use within the Vocational Rehabilitation Services for the State of Indiana. My twin is disabled and utilizes assistive technology, and I thought this would be an opportunity to learn more about his world. As I got engaged with RCHE, other projects opened up for me to partner on. My article's specific research focused on patients who were admitted to the hospital and came back to the hospital within thirty days of discharge. In this research, I learned how different aspects of the health care settings are connected and directly affect how the patient receives care. I learned how a small difference in a patient or their care pathway can have large differences in their outcomes.

**Where has your journey with research taken you since then? What sort of topics have you researched and published on?**

Since leaving Purdue, I went to Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis to pursue graduate studies in health policy and management. There a mentor recommended I apply for the National Rural Health Association Fellowship program. This opportunity introduced me to the Indiana Rural Health Association, where I later worked. My research has focused on two main areas: (1) the delivery of health care in rural settings and (2) health care for patients who are diagnosed with an intellectual developmental disability. In this research, I study pathways of care for patients, how different methods of paying for care can affect the patients' outcome, and public health delivery in rural America.

I have done work looking at infant/maternal mortality and behavioral health, including the substance use disorder epidemic.

### **How did your time as an undergraduate researcher at Purdue help you as you continued into your PhD education and into your career?**

My time as an undergraduate researcher changed my career trajectory. When I started at RCHE, I was a chemical engineering/chemistry dual major wanting to focus on drug discovery. It was through RCHE that I saw the different side of research and the human side of health care delivery and research. I learned from wonderful mentors at RCHE how to develop an independent research agenda, how to frame research questions, and how to approach health care research. I also learned that the health care industry is always changing and the importance to stay current on health care topics. It is important, when talking with health care executives and clinicians, to understand the system in which they are required to function.

### **What advice do you have for undergraduate students looking to start research?**

Take any opportunity that offers itself to you that you are remotely interested in. You never know where a passion may be waiting. Do not be afraid to recognize an area of research that your passion is not and to pivot to an area that does speak to your passion. Ensure you have several mentors around who can help you and advise you on your next step. Get involved with the professional association for your field early. You will be amazed at the connections you will make around the country and internationally.

### **What advice do you have for undergraduates looking ahead to a career in academia?**

It is a long journey from being an undergraduate to being in front of a college classroom. Keep your friends and family close to remind you who you are and why you are striving for that career in academia. Each stage in the journey will challenge you in ways that you did not expect, and you will grow in ways you did not expect. You also need to recognize that there are several different opportunities in academia—research-focused, teaching-focused, engagement-focused, or a blend of any of these. Follow your passions, interests, and heart to find the career that will bring fulfillment to your life while benefiting your community.

#### **Interviewer**



**CATIE GILHOOLY** is a junior in Purdue's Honor College studying Professional Writing and English with a concentration in Literature with minors in Management and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

Gilhooly served as the coordinator for this volume of the *Journal of Purdue Undergraduate Research* and on the Student Editorial Board for volume 11. She works with Purdue College of Liberal Arts as a recruitment intern and Dean's Ambassador, and serves the Purdue Bands and Orchestras department as a brother of Kappa Kappa Psi, a national honorary band fraternity.