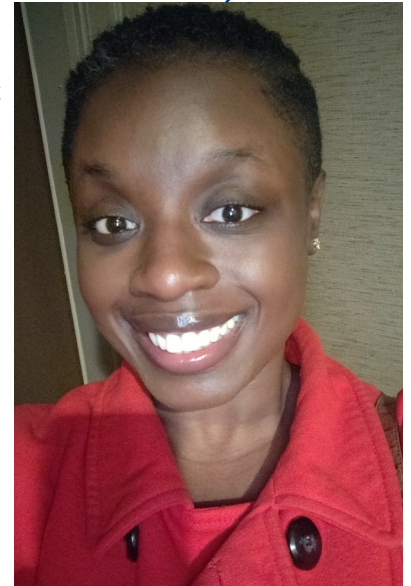


Alumni Spotlight:

Vanessa Assibey-Mensah, PhD

Describe your current position:

I am the Senior Epidemiologist in the Office of the Health Commissioner at the City of Philadelphia's Department of Public Health. I am responsible for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data that provides actionable information on the health and well-being of Philadelphia's residents. I provide technical guidance on design and implementation of high priority epidemiologic studies and surveillance systems across divisions within the department and with external partners. I also serve as the Project Director/Principal Investigator for the Philadelphia Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System, a survey of maternal health behaviors and experiences before, during, and shortly after pregnancy.



How did your UR experience prepare you for your current career?

My UR experience prepared me for my current career in public health practice through training in advanced epidemiologic methods and community-based participatory research. The UR experience has enabled me to (1) summarize disease patterns and trends as input for local priority areas; (2) evaluate existing public health programs and initiatives; (3) measure patterns and outcomes of delivery of public health services; and (4) communicate findings to non-technical audiences including general public, press, and local decision-makers. Most importantly, this skillset has been incredibly valuable in creating, recommending, and implementing appropriate data-driven approaches to inform local decision-making.

What were some of your favorite things about your time at UR?

Some of my favorite things about my time at UR would be the people, including supportive faculty and staff, and students. As a graduate student, I worked as a Graduate Community Assistant in University Park for three years. It was an amazing opportunity to meet new graduate students and help nurture an inclusive residential community! I enjoyed connecting with new students and serving as a resource to them during their time at U of R. I hosted community events like our annual welcome BBQ and thanksgiving dinner, along with apple picking, karaoke, and ice cream socials. There were times where I needed to be a listening ear and provide support during a time of crisis or perform a wellness check.

What tips do you have for public health graduate students to obtain their first job after graduation?

I would encourage students to first take some time and celebrate their success – finishing your degree was no easy feat! Take time to recharge, refocus, and recover from the stress of graduate school before starting your job or postdoc. I would encourage to job/postdoc search 3-6 months prior to graduation or defense. While searching for your first job, it's important to prioritize work-life balance. Finally, it is okay if you decide academia is not for you.