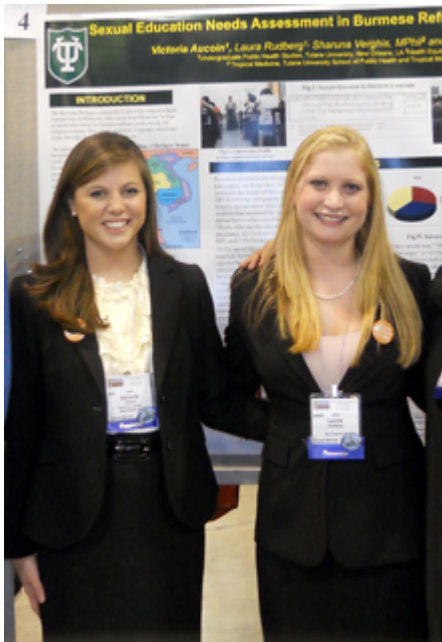


Undergrads' Research Gets Global Attention

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When Victoria Aucoin and Laura Rudberg signed up for Dr. Latha Rajan's summer course in Malaysia, they didn't realize that it would lead to an unprecedented distinction. They are the first undergraduates from the Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine to be selected to present their work at the annual meeting of the American Public Health Association.



At the annual American Public Health Association meeting, students Victoria Aucoin, left, and Laura Rudberg are proud to present their research results during a poster session. (Photo from Dr. Latha Rajan)

During the poster session at the November meeting in Denver, the students discussed the results of a needs assessment survey among adolescents they conducted in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

While in the [Malaysia summer course](#), Aucoin and Rudberg spent more than four weeks in Kuala Lumpur, conducting fieldwork, interviews and training for community health workers to assess the need for sexual health education among school-aged adolescents who are Burmese refugees.

Under the mentorship of Rajan, a clinical associate professor of [tropical medicine](#), they administered a survey in three refugee community schools, assessing adolescents' knowledge of sexual anatomy, behaviors and risks. They found vast gaps in knowledge and an acute need for sexual education in the face of social and religious constraints.

Their findings will be addressed in a sexual education manual being developed by Health Equity Initiative, a non-governmental organization in Kuala Lumpur. As a result of the study, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Bar Council of Malaysia have become aware of these needs, and plans are under way to implement changes, Rajan says.

“This was a difficult project, but the two young students were quick to learn and did an amazing piece of work,” says Rajan. “We are very proud of them since they are the very first Tulane undergrads to present at APHA. I am also delighted that their poster invoked so much interest from other conference attendees.”

Laura Post is communications coordinator in the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.