

SCI-TECH

“Summer has always been good to me, even the bittersweet end, with the slanted yellow light.”
PAUL MONETTE AUTHOR AND POET

The only summer: Medical students reflect on summers after first year

BY EDDIS MESIC
STAFF REPORTER

While the end of each spring semester usually means a few months off from school for Yale undergraduates, medical students typically only get one summer break during their four-year journey at the School of Medicine.

Rising third and fourth-year students at the School of Medicine have a summer academic term that begins just a few days after their spring term. But rising second-year students have from mid-June until early September to recharge, reflect and make use of the extra time away from their studies.

“In terms of preventing burn-out, we have some time to just take a step back and do things a little slower, which meant a lot,” Aish Bhattacharya MED ’28 said.

The News spoke to three second-year medical students about how they spent the summer.

From the army to a honeymoon

For Justus Gabriel MED ’28, the summer was a busy but enjoyable time.

A graduate of West Point and recipient of the Army’s Health Professions Scholarship Program scholarship, Gabriel started off the summer in San Antonio with some military training and then married his wife Julia Ross in her home state of Colorado. The two first met at West Point and enjoyed their honeymoon in the Dominican Republic.

Gabriel said the large chunk of time off school during the summer made it a great time for the two to get married.

Following the celebrations, Gabriel spent some time in Savannah, Ga. — where his wife is stationed — while working on two remote projects with doctors at Yale New Haven Hospital before returning to Yale.

In one of his projects, Gabriel is working with an endocrine surgeon to build a database to better characterize a rare type of thyroid cancer. In the other, he is studying pancreatic cancer and aims to better understand the best timing of chemotherapy cycles and other factors that can influence patient survival.

Looking ahead, following his time at Yale and residency, Gabriel will complete four years

of service commitment to the army as an army doctor.

“I’m definitely excited for my time in the army,” Gabriel said. “I might have to see if it’s something I want to stick with, or just transition over to the civilian side after I finish my service commitment.”



COURTESY OF JUSTUS GABRIEL

Justus Gabriel and his wife, Julia Ross celebrating their wedding at Fort Collins, Colorado.

Research and recharge

Like many others in the summer between the first two years of medical school, Aish Bhattacharya focused mainly on research, while also leaving some time to visit family and explore the New Haven food scene with friends.

According to Bhattacharya, summer research is a great way for medical students to get a competitive edge in residency applications while contributing to a project that interests them.

Coming into Yale with a passion for public health, Bhattacharya spent the summer at the lab of Anne Mongiu, an assistant professor of surgery. Bhattacharya worked on developing food swamp indexes for Connecticut and studied the relationship between unhealthy food options and the rising incidence of early onset colorectal cancer in patients under 50.

While Bhattacharya was able to begin research during her first year, she said that juggling academic commitments alongside research can prove difficult. With more time over the summer to build a foundation for her project, she hopes to expand her

research focus to inflammatory bowel and other cancers in the academic year.

Bhattacharya said incoming medical students should find a research topic they are truly interested in and take advantage of the summer to develop their projects.

“Having a dedicated time to really sit down and not really be thinking about learning material, but use your brain in a very different way to just focus on the projects that you’re interested in and passionate about, I think is really powerful,” Bhattacharya told the News.

Going global

While many of her peers might have stayed back home, Ella Zhang MED ’28 traveled abroad to pursue global health research in Tanzania.

Working in one of the national hospitals in Dar es Salaam — the biggest city in Tanzania — Zhang focused on patients there with liver cancer and how barriers to accessing care impact their treatment.

“It was really an unforgettable experience to be able to live and work in such a drastically different culture and setting than I’m used to,” Zhang said.

Zhang also helped run a summer program called Yale Global Health Students United for Regional and



COURTESY OF AISH BHATTACHARYA

Global Education, a program that brings together medical and professional students from around the world to discuss issues related to global health. Zhang recalled spending Saturdays on Zoom with dozens of students from numerous different countries talking about and presenting on different global health topics.

Zhang said she had always wanted to study abroad, but COVID-19 cut her plans short during the middle of her time in college.

“I’ve had an interest in global health for a while, just as a product of,

you know, growing up in a family that tended to move around a lot, I got to experience a lot of different cultures,” Zhang noted.

Upon starting medical school, Zhang said she often thought about how material she learned in class applied to different areas of the world. Zhang found some global health funding opportunities to apply to and received a fellowship to conduct research in Tanzania.

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COURTESY OF ELLA ZHANG

Ella Zhang on an animal safari in Mekumi National Park in Tanzania.

Efforts to find missing Ukrainian children sustained by individual donors

BY KALINA BROOKFIELD
STAFF REPORTER

Yale’s Humanitarian Research Lab, whose work includes locating abducted Ukrainian children, survived federal funding cuts through private donor contributions.

The lab at the School of Public Health was launched in 2022 with \$6 million in federal funding, but in February the State Department withheld its funding. The lab was nearly forced to close shortly after its funding was paused, but, thanks to donations to the lab through a special fundraiser, its staff now expects to be able to continue their work until January, according to Nathaniel Raymond, the lab’s executive director.

The lab uses satellite imagery and open source data to protect populations in crisis zones throughout the world. It is currently investigating the alleged trafficking of over 19,000 Ukrainian children to Russia.

“It has been the best of times and the worst of times,” Raymond said.

Since losing its funding, the lab has been operating in a state of uncertainty, according to Raymond. He described the difficulty of staff wondering month to month whether they will still hold a job and whether the mission of their lab will be able to continue. The team has had to reconstitute many of the systems and procedures it had relied on over the past three and a half years working with the U.S. government, Raymond said.

However, Raymond said, the loss of funding from the government has also provided the lab’s staff with a chance to see the public’s support for their work and interact with the people who directly support them.

“We’ve been able to experience something that academic

research organizations very rarely ever experience, which is the people you’re doing the research on behalf of coming to save you in your hour of greatest need,” Raymond said.

Raymond described how gratifying the past months have been, receiving support and donations from ordinary people who care deeply for the cause in place of typical academic grants. Fundraising to sustain the lab’s work has revealed the relationships between the researchers and the public, especially Ukrainian American communities and activists.

For Marta Fedoriw, a member of the Ukrainian National Women’s League of America, the Humanitarian Research Lab’s research was her introduction to the kidnappings occurring in Ukraine. She first learned of the abductions in 2023, from a “60 Minutes” television segment that featured findings from the lab.

“That’s when I began the Return Ukraine’s Children initiative within the national organization,” Fedoriw said. “It was based on these findings being factual and something that we could depend on.”

Now, in her position as chair of the Return Ukraine’s Children initiative within the Ukrainian American women’s league, Fedoriw has helped to publicize the lab’s work and encourage donations to it.

The lab has received significant support from Yale alumni, as well as elected officials on both sides of the aisle. A bipartisan letter signed in June by 30 members of Congress — two of them Republicans — urged the State Department to maintain funding for the lab’s Ukraine Conflict Observatory. The lab is working to find support from non-U.S. governments and larger-scale philanthropic organizations.



YULIN ZHEN / PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR

Yale’s Humanitarian Research Lab is still working, seven months after the State Department withheld the federal funding it had relied on.

“The lab has been the pre-eminent source of information and diligent work for years, a respected, unbiased, un-politically-affiliated group doing this incredibly important work,” Lydia Zaininger, the executive director of the Ukrainian Institute of America, said.

The lab’s current investigation efforts consist of determining the total number of Ukrainian children in Russian custody, identifying those children by name and determining where the children are located.

Prior to this project, the lab’s work had been geared towards documenting violations of international law and holding perpetrators accountable. Now, Raymond said, its research aims to contribute to the rescue of the captured children.

According to Raymond, the lab is on track to release its first report since the State Department defunding before the United Nations General Assembly in September. The report is expected to contain research supporting negotiation and other means of return for the children.

The Humanitarian Research Lab’s office is located in the School of Public Health building at 60 College St.

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