

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 20, 2020

CONTACT: Suzanna Cisneros, suzanna.cisneros@ttuhsc.edu
(806) 743-7605

Fulbright Board Selects TTUHSC Faculty Member for Scholar Program

Prestigious Award Will Allow Queen to Make Second Trip to Latvia

Courtney Queen, Ph.D., an assistant professor in the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences Department of Public Health at the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC), was selected to be a Fulbright U.S. Scholar.

Brandt Schneider, Ph.D., dean of the TTUHSC Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, said being selected to participate in the Fulbright Scholar program is a tremendous honor and he congratulated Queen for her achievement.

“With less than 500 Fulbright U.S. Scholars working world-wide, this award clearly identifies Dr. Queen’s research as being highly meritorious, innovative, impactful and wide-reaching,” Schneider said. “The Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and the Julia Jones Matthews Department of Public Health are incredibly proud of Dr. Queen and her accomplishments.”

Funded by the U.S. Department of State, the presidentially appointed J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board annually offers approximately 470 grant opportunities for U.S. faculty, administrators and professionals in variety of fields. Fulbright U.S. Scholars are selected based on their leadership and academic merits and their abilities to teach, conduct research and contribute to solutions for shared international concerns.

Under her award, Queen will travel to Latvia in the Baltic region of Northern Europe to teach at Riga Stradiņš University (RSU) during the spring semester, which runs from February through June. She previously worked in Latvia from 2000 to 2002 as a Peace Corps volunteer for non-governmental organization and small- and medium-sized enterprise development. During that time, she learned to speak Latvian and some Russian.

In addition to teaching, Queen also will collaborate with the RSU Institute of Public Health to identify and evaluate health disparities and inequalities within Latvia’s relatively young health care system. Their research will focus on evaluating data and examining some of the remaining public health challenges and concerns. Those issues include reducing inequities in health access and health status, increasing coverage and reducing harmful behaviors that contribute to chronic disease and cardiovascular death.

Latvia gained its independence in 1991 and has undergone a major societal transformation that has changed their institutions, especially the government and economic health systems. Because of this

transformation, Queen said Latvia is known to have a health system in transition, which has required the country to develop a slew of new policies, create a contemporary funding approach and review changes in organization, governance, health care financing and health care provision and performance.

With the system nearing the end of its third decade, she said it's a good time to start looking at data through the lens of independence to evaluate the overall health care structure to identify those areas that may benefit from intervention.

"We can come in now with evidence, experience, ideas and thoughts about the public's health, health disparities and equities and use our theories and models to look at them starting now," Queen said.

During independence, Latvia's Ministry of Health approved measures to ensure the social safety net and adopted a public health strategy. Queen said this would allow her and the RSU researchers to collaboratively focus attention on evaluating the major structural reforms on matters of public health concerns.

"This time is especially important because that specific population has had particularly traumatic experiences," Queen said. "Now they're at the age where we can start looking at different health conditions; for instance, the development of chronic health conditions, wellness and health and even resilience. There's a lot of unique opportunities with this population that we can garner a lot of perspective from which have a profound ability to shape the public health perspective about how we approach social, political and the economic determinants of health."

During her career, Queen has received training as a National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities Scholar at the Health Disparities Research Institute, part of the National Institutes of Health. In addition, she gained experience as a Health Equity Leadership Institute Scholar and worked in global health education and with vulnerable populations in Costa Rica. Her research related to increasing access to health care for those who suffer from melanoma and Buruli ulcer, a neglected tropical disease, has also taken her to Ghana and Ivory Coast.

Queen considers the opportunity to work as a Fulbright Scholar to be an honor and a pinnacle moment where her dedication and commitment over a long period of time has paid off. She believes studying the development of the Latvian health care system will enrich her ability to teach and complement the missions of TTUHSC, the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and the Julia Jones Matthews Department of Public Health.

"I'd like to thank Dr. Schneider, our department chair, Dr. Theresa Byrd, and all of my wonderful department colleagues for their support," Queen said. "In public health, we look at the development of public health systems and we look at the development of medical care systems, so all of my experiences in Latvia will be brought back here to the classroom. It'll be great for students too; it's really nice for our students to have faculty with these kinds of experiences and perspective."