

Ellen Foley

Assistant Professor of International Development and Social Change



ELLEN FOLEY CAME TO IDCE BECAUSE she wanted to be part of an interdisciplinary department where all faculty members are working on relevant development and environmental issues. “The idea that all IDCE faculty members are scholar-practitioners especially appealed to me because in most academic settings there is a very sharp divide between theory and pure research vs. applied work,” Foley states.

Foley completed her undergraduate degree at Kalamazoo College, which is a small liberal arts college similar to Clark that also values close mentoring and interaction with undergraduate and graduate students. While there, she majored in anthropology and women’s studies and took advantage of an opportunity to study abroad in Senegal during her junior year. This trip cemented her interest in West Africa, and she’s traveled back to Senegal almost every other year since 1992. After completing her degree at Kalamazoo, she attended Michigan State University, where she received her Ph.D. in medical anthropology and the anthropology of development in 2002. From 2002–2006, she was a postdoctoral fellow in the Health and Societies program at the University of Pennsylvania.

Foley teaches Development Theory, Health and Disease in the Developing World, Gender and Health, and an International Development and Social Change Senior Capstone Seminar. She hopes her students see the social, political, and economic connections between the developed and the developing world. She pushes students to gain a greater appreciation of how global health challenges are a manifestation of global economic inequality, and how social, political, and cultural systems of power operate at local, national, and global levels. “But I also want them to emerge with a sense that change is possible, and that there are concrete actions they can take to engage with often overwhelming development dilemmas.”

Foley’s research areas include: women’s access to health care; global reproductive health politics; reproductive health care in Senegal; African immigrant and refugee health in the United States, transnational immigrant groups and health development in Africa; the intersection of Islam, religious politics, and health politics in West Africa; and the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Foley is working with Laurie Ross on the Charles E. Shannon Community Safety Initiative, a statewide youth violence/gang reduction program working in collaboration with Worcester city organizations to conduct a comprehensive youth employment program as a strategy to reduce youth violence and gang activity in the city. Clark’s role is to evaluate the program participants, providers, and partners to ensure an effective strategy is pursued and implemented.

Foley is also at the helm of a collaborative research project and resulting health education intervention proposal that aims to address the socio-cultural barriers African and Southeast Asian communities in Worcester face with regard to accessing reproductive health services and sexual health information. Clark hopes to partner with local immigrant and refugee organizations to address these barriers in three ways: synthesizing existing epidemiological and qualitative data on health challenges and needs of the target populations, conducting needs assessment research to com-

plement existing data, and working with the community partners and service providers to develop and test innovative, culturally-sensitive approaches to sexual health outreach and education. Foley hopes to create an IDSC service-learning course related to this grant that would get IDSC undergrads working on various urban health issues in Worcester.

Foley is also pleased to be a part of a team from IDCE that includes Tim Downs and Jude Fernando in creating complementary public health courses as

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part of the IDSC curriculum. The team has already won recognition from the Public Health and Liberal Education Curriculum and Faculty Development Project of the Association for Prevention Teaching and Research and the Association of American Colleges and Universities. In recent years, IDCE has made strides to develop its curricular opportunities in public health through faculty recruitment, increased funding to support research and scholarship in the public health arena, and development of graduate courses related to public health. To complement IDCE’s initiatives and to recognize the importance and relevance of global health challenges to all world citizens, Foley hopes to capitalize on the momentum created over the last few years on campus by developing undergraduate courses in public health and global health to consolidate and institutionalize these efforts.

“Clark students have an intellectual curiosity that is driven by wanting to make a positive difference in the world. This gives them great drive and motivation for wanting to learn new things. It makes for an exciting classroom environment as they grapple with issues they really care about and are politically committed to improving around the world.”