

Harvard School of Public Health

Department of Biostatistics

Student Profiles

Mariel Finucane

Doctoral student, Department of Biostatistics

"I've always loved numbers, but it wasn't until recently that I began to think of them as instruments of social change," Mariel Finucane says. A social activist with a keen desire to experience other cultures, Mariel spent time as a teenager in Mexico and Germany. She later traveled to the Greek island of Zakynthos to help protect sea turtles and worked for a year in the Marshall Islands as a volunteer for World Teach. Mariel's decision to pursue biostatistics and public health dates to the summer after her junior year at Smith College, when she directed a study at the Desmond Tutu HIV Centre in Cape Town to determine the HIV prevalence among students in the South African township of Masiphumelele: "The idea of using rigorous statistical methods to investigate the causes and effects of infectious diseases was very appealing to me." A National Science Foundation fellow, Mariel elected to come to HSPH because of its strong biostatistics faculty and involvement in AIDS research. She has just finished her qualifying exams ("the most difficult test experience of my life") and will be working on her dissertation with Professor Marcello Pagano; Mariel likes Pagano's pragmatic, applied approach to disease surveillance in Africa. Eventually she wants to work abroad for a nonprofit organization and use statistical methods she has learned to fight communicable diseases in sub-Saharan Africa.



Roland Matsouaka

Doctoral student, Department of Biostatistics

Roland Matsouaka's long journey to Harvard began in his native country, the Republic of Congo. When civil war broke out in the Republic of Congo and damaged Marien Ngouabi University in Brazzaville, the country's capital, Roland had to leave his family behind to continue his mathematical studies in Burkina-Faso. After his funding was cut off, he got a scholarship in Benin and studied there for four years before spending a year as a research fellow at the Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve in Belgium. With two master's degrees in hand, and his determination to pursue doctoral training undiminished, Roland moved to the United States in 2003. He learned English, was accepted to HSPH as a master's student, and has now begun his PhD work at the school. Roland decided upon biostatistics because he wanted to apply his mathematical skills to public health problems: "Malaria is of great concern in my country. People sometimes get the disease two or three times a year. Because they are poor or the clinic is far away, often they seek treatment too late." In describing his HSPH experience, Roland says, "I find my



professors more accessible than they were where I studied in Africa. I can ask them any question.”
Eventually Roland hopes to return to Africa to do data analysis for teams studying malaria and HIV.

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