

**Profile of
Malia Jones**
Associate Scientist, Applied Population Laboratory
University of Wisconsin–Madison
2021 Regents Academic Staff Excellence Award Individual Recipient

Highlights from nomination materials:

- Associate scientist with UW-Madison’s Applied Population Laboratory (APL) for the past six years. APL is a unit in the Department of Community and Environmental Sociology.
- Interested in the complex relationship between geography and human health. Over the last decade, has studied infectious disease epidemiology, herd immunity, and spatial variation in vaccine coverage.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, worked to support an informed public response using her scientific expertise and outreach talents to address pressing questions resulting from the global health crisis.
- Project co-founder, editor-in-chief, and a contributing writer for *Dear Pandemic*, a 20+ member interdisciplinary team of women that uses its significant social media presence to help members of the public face the COVID-19 pandemic with curated, scientific, practical information. The group has over 60,000 followers.
- News interviews, articles, and public appearances related to COVID-19 garnered national attention. For example, appeared as a guest on the Dr. Phil Show, had her viral Facebook post re-printed in *USA Today*, and published articles in *Slate* and *American Scientist*. Numerous major news outlets – including NBC News, the *New York Times*, and *USA Today* – featured her interviews and statements on COVID-19. Additionally, Dr. Jones appeared dozens of times in state and local media outlets, including multiple appearances on Wisconsin Public Television, Wisconsin Public Radio, the *Wisconsin State Journal*, the *Capital Times*, UW-Madison news, and Wisconsin Alumni Association news.
- Developed an online simulation game called COVID Crush, which teaches players about how viruses are spread and how mitigation strategies can help. In 2020, it had over 17,000 views and accounted for nearly half the web hits to the apl.wisc.edu domain.
- Provided direct guidance to the Wisconsin National Guard, who enlisted her support in understanding the potential magnitude of Wisconsin caseloads.
- Awarded a Mentored Research Scientist Development (K01) Career Development Award from the National Institute for Allergies and Infectious Diseases, a five-year \$500,000 grant (2018) with the research topic of spatial clustering vaccine hesitancy. The award has two components. The training component affords time to learn how to use computer simulations in research to understand how spatial clusters of people who decline vaccines can affect herd immunity. The research component affords time to study how misinformation about vaccines and infectious disease risks spread in social networks.
- Baldwin Wisconsin Idea Award from UW-Madison Provost’s office (2015).

In Malia Jones’s own words:

- “I didn’t become a scientist to make headlines, but if I’m being honest, a tiny part of me did plan on saving the world. That’s what leads most people to a career in public health research—the desire to contribute to a greater good or a community project. This year, my background and the COVID19 pandemic have catapulted me into the limelight and given me the chance to make a real difference in people’s lives during one of the hardest moments in world history.”

In the words of a colleague:

- “Dr. Jones’s style of professional interaction, imbued with deep intellectual curiosity and creativity, unwavering determination and wit, make her an immensely valuable asset to any team....Dr. Jones’s colleagues within our unit eagerly look forward to opportunities to work with her, and external collaborators spanning the campus seek her out for her valuable insight and thoughtful mentoring.”

—Katherine J. Curtis, APL Director, Professor of Community & Environmental Sociology, UW-Madison