

Course Evaluation, Critical and Creative Thinking, UMass Boston
CRCRTH 653 Epidemiological Thinking and Population Health
Hybrid, 2015 Spring

Note: lettered responses represent the same individual across the questions, so that all “a)” responses come from the same person, and so on.

1. Start with an evaluation of yourself What were your personal goals in taking this course? Did you achieve them? How would you have proceeded differently if you were doing this course again? What have been your major personal obstacles to learning more from this course?

- a) My personal goals were to gain more exposure to social epidemiological papers. I did this, yes If I were to take this again I would finish the content preemptively. The extent of coursework is extensive
- b) My personal goal was to develop a better understanding of the impact social factors have on health and to broaden my views beyond the patient in the bed at a hospital, and I absolutely achieved this. If I were doing this course again, I would not have taken it at the same time as another time consuming course so I would have been able to read more supplementary articles and to look for different articles relevant to my field to help solidify the content. I am also taking a course with an 8 hour clinical component and working 40+ hours a week, so I wish I could have dedicated more time to the course. (I was advised against taking this class before I signed up for it because it was a heavy load, but I really wanted to take it.) Also, I attended a conference two weeks before the end of the class, which made it difficult for me to catch up. Although I took time off from work to attend the conference, my work still needed to get done so I had to put in even more hours, and I only have one day off a week as it is; this caused me to get behind in my sketch revisions. It was beneficial to me to be able to opt of a few of the assignments, although I was disappointed I could not complete them all.
- c) Understand epidemiological method and how they are applied in population research Consider epidemiology's influence on public policy How social determinants of health is research. I think my personal learning objectives were fulfilled. Early in the instructor told us the course was not focused on policy making but it seems every theme touched upon policy implications. I would have thought a bit more about the sketches I would choose to write about to make sure I am invested in them. My major obstacle was probably my other coursework which demanded more time but coincidentally was related to statistical methods (econometrics)
- d) Learn more about social epidemiology. Somewhat, yes.

1. Self-evaluation (continued) What have you learned about what you have to do to make a course stimulating and productive (with respect to the format of this course: face-to-face, online, hybrid)?

- a) I may not take an online class again
- b) 1) Preparation: It was really important for me to be prepared so I could participate in the discussions in class, so I spent a lot of time on each so I could fully understand them. Although we were required to write two annotations each week, I wrote more each week for the first 1/2 to 3/4 of this course. I had to take notes when I was reading them anyways so I could fully understand them (due to my personal learning style), therefore typing up the extra assignments was not much of an extra time burden. 2) Participation: Although I found the online classroom format with the webcam a barrier at first, it was important for me to participate in the conversations for this to be a productive class for me. I eventually

became more comfortable with this format and was able to increase participation and learning as the semester progressed (although it is still slightly anxiety provoking).

- c) I think I could have read only slightly a bit more but tried to take away different points from an article rather than try to digest larger reading in their entirety. The class was small so I think we all knew that we had to come to class prepared to contribute. That was good.
- d) I've read quite a few papers on the material

2. General Evaluation of course What was special about this course (+positive and/or -negative)? How did the course meet or not meet your expectations? In what ways do you think this course could be improved?

- a) The exposure to articles and issues in epidemiology is very good. The scope of written work (sketches, bibliography, check-ins, annotations) is somewhat extensive for what I was expecting
- b) I really enjoyed the class structure, including the readings, the round robin participation, and the different perspectives from both Peter and the other students. I also enjoyed the multidisciplinary backgrounds of each of us, which lead to richer conversations. The course exceeded my expectations since it was much more engaging than I had anticipated. The sketch really helped to tie all of the concepts into one entity, which helped to see them all as influencing factors on a single topic and not as separate, segregated ideas. The course was fabulous....if it ain't broke, don't fix it :)
- c) I think the course tried to use different techniques that are not usually used in a classroom setting. Free writing, time to gather thoughts, a topic to use to reflect on the course themes throughout. I think tweaking the expectation of the sketches, they did take more time to think, sometimes do additional research, and craft.
- d) The class, ultimately, was not what I expected.

2. General evaluation (continued) In what ways did your attitude to doing the course change through the semester? How does it compare with other graduate courses? What would be your overall recommendation to prospective students?

- a) I would not recommend this class for a graduate student, as the scope is too broad.
- b) -My perception of epidemiology has changed, as well as my perspectives on patients, study design, and public policies. I look at each of these in a different way since I started this course and have had a lot of intellectual growth. -For me, the purpose of taking a graduate course is to change my way of thinking. I obtained my masters degree over ten years ago and have returned to school about a year ago. Unfortunately, the courses I am required to take for my post master's certificate so far have been in topics I am well versed in, so it was exciting to take this course and have the intellectual stimulation I have been looking for! -This is a great class to understand the concepts of epidemiology and to be able to apply each of them into a semester long project, which is a compilation of them all into a common theme, helps the learning process. The professor is extremely well versed in epidemiological methods and has many examples of concepts at the ready. His creative teaching methods are conducive to learning. There is a big time commitment to complete the readings, but the knowledge gained is worth it.
- c) I thought I would fall off track at some point throughout the semester. I didn't read completely some weeks but generally I was able to stay on top of the readings. Okay, maybe that's not true with all of the Gordis text. Things have gotten away with me with other classes. I would recommend this class for students interested in the topics and interested in a different pedagogical experience.
- d) The course is not exactly good for a busy graduate student, time wise

3. Evaluation in relation to the course description Read the course description/goals below. Comment on how well the goals expressed in the syllabus were met. Make general and specific suggestions about how these could be better met.

Course Objectives:

Introduction to the concepts, methods, and problems involved in analyzing the biological and social influences on behaviors and diseases and in translating such analyses into population health policy and practice. Special attention given to social inequalities, changes over the life course, and heterogeneous pathways. Case studies and course projects are shaped to accommodate students with interests in diverse fields related to health and public policy. Students are assumed to have a statistical background, but the course emphasizes epidemiological literacy with a view to collaborating thoughtfully with specialists, not technical expertise.

- a) Sure
- b) The course description is dead on.
- c) These goals were met. One thing to consider is some of the course themes
- d) Somewhat

4. Synthetic statement (1 or 2 paragraphs) Building on your comments from Qs 1-3, compose a synthetic statement (1 or 2 paragraphs) evaluating this course. (Imagine readers who might not be willing to wade through all the answers to Qs 1-3, but are willing to read more than simply the numerical averages of standard course evaluations.) Please make comments that help the instructor develop the course in the future and that enable some third party appreciate the course's strengths and weaknesses. Among other things you might comment on the overall content and progression of classes, the session activities, and the use of mentors to support the learning in the course.

- a) n/a
- b) This course provides an introduction to epidemiological methods. Near the end of each class, a new concept is introduced which is later reinforced through the homework assignments. It is helpful to have the introduction so you can understand the direction of the assignments. The homework consists of reading relevant articles, some are required and others can be chosen from a list, and also writing up a few of them each week. It is great to have the quick introduction in class and then reinforce the material with these weekly readings. The following week, the students participate in discussions about the concept, which starts with the readings and progresses to application of the idea to current events or to individual disciplines, which always leads to interesting conversations. The big semester long project ties all of the epidemiological concepts into one topic. This is really helpful as it reminds us the topics can be interlinked and are not each separate entities. Although intimidating at first, and time consuming, the project is extremely beneficial in solidifying the concepts. The course has a nice flow to it, with the topic introduction in one week, the readings in the following week, and application to the project the following week. Although a time consuming course, at its completion you have a new way of looking at contributions to health status in populations, can better evaluate effectiveness of study designs, and health policy challenges.
- c) As someone who has worked with public health students and professionals I appreciated how epidemiology is more of a unique discipline with its set of principles and concepts. One of the more interesting overarching themes is how biology interacts with and is shaped by environments. There is a volume of reading to take in on a weekly basis and the concepts build upon each other. The teaching

style takes different approaches to integrate material through preparation, reflection, and discussion. The group project was useful in helping us apply the week's theme to a common topic. If there was a way to integrate the glossary part of the course with the readings I would have found it more applicable. Our class was responsible to each other to keep up with the readings and continue contributing throughout the weeks. Our instructor had interesting approaches to looking at a theme through a precog mini-lecture.

d) n/a

I give permission for my response to Question 4 to be included anonymously in the compilation posted to the CCT wiki (and thus viewable to the public)

- a) Yes
- b) Yes
- c) Yes
- d) Yes

Using the scale below, overall, how would you evaluate this course? [1. Very Poor, 2. Poor, 3. Average, 4. Good, 5. Excellent]

(AVERAGE = 4.0)

- a) 3
- b) 5
- c) 5
- d) 3

Using the scale below, overall, how would you evaluate this instructor? [1. Very Poor, 2. Poor, 3. Average, 4. Good, 5. Excellent]

(AVERAGE = 4.5)

- a) 4
- b) 5
- c) 5
- d) 4