

End-of-semester evaluation for PPol/Nrsng 753 Spring '11 Profile Report

Date Published: 05/29/2011

Response 162607366

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1. Start with an evaluation of yourself

Think about 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?

My goal was to understand the introductory ideas of population health, which I now do particularly from a social epidemiology standpoint. My critical thinking skills were exercised. I have garnered a real world perspective of the processes that determine health outcome.

In hindsight, employing better time management would have facilitated my learning effort. Although, many of the articles were great in explaining key concepts and providing examples, there were definitely instances when I was required to wade through more formal references (textbooks and academic course websites). My personal obstacle was underestimating the broad scope of material that was being covered.

1. Self-evaluation (continued)

What have you learned about what you have to do to make a course on "epidemiological literacy with a view to collaborating thoughtfully with specialists, not technical expertise" stimulating and productive?

Making the class more stimulating may warrant assignments that lend themselves more to creative thinking (an espousing of personal ideas to tackling issues, such as the PKU dilemma).

Making the class more productive requires ensuring that the information presented is digestible within the allotted time frame. I will note the class on confounding, which perhaps required more class time or an alternative means of presentation. I found this particular power point helpful for consolidating my understanding of DAG: [http://agecon2.tamu.edu/people/faculty/bessler-david/WebPage/Quito\(2a\).ppt#256,1,Directed Acyclic Graphs](http://agecon2.tamu.edu/people/faculty/bessler-david/WebPage/Quito(2a).ppt#256,1,Directed%20Acyclic%20Graphs)

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?

Positives: The course was thoughtfully constructed: progressively allowing complexity in thinking to manifest. Articles from authors who are highly regarded for their contribution to the field of social epidemiology were selected as reading material.

Negatives: The isolation of the Gordis textbook and limited traditional instruction (lecturing).

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?

There was a short mental adjustment period. However, I think my average attitude has been quite positive. This course is less structured, in reference to the presentation of learning material, than I am used to. To its credit the course was highly interactive and allowed for the integration of one's personal experience.

I would strongly recommend this course to others.

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.

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.

I think that the goals of the syllabus were met. I have increased my epidemiology literacy level, which is no doubt is the basics for thoughtfully collaborating with specialists. I have already and will continue to apply knowledge from this course in executing my job.

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 and the session activities.

My favorite in-class experience of the semester was the group activity exploring the natural history of a disease (beriberi in the Dutch East Indies). This case study was a prime example of the fruitfulness of collective problem solving. Case studies provide great opportunities for active learning, thus they should and can be utilized more in this course. They are also a means to diversifying the classroom experiences. Time and effort invested in this course is generously rewarded with an expanse in one's thinking. I am still musing over the possibility of a public electronic life course data repository, surely the NIH could be enticed to fund such a venture (intervention).

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Date Published: 05/29/2011

Response 162771027

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1. Start with an evaluation of yourself

Think about 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?

My personal goals were to learn about social epidemiology and its applications to research. I met my goals and surpassed them: My project, the epidemiology of mental distress in Massachusetts and its association with cancer risks, was accepted as a poster presentation at the American Psychiatric Nursing Association Conference next October. In addition, this course served as a synthesis of concepts I had learned before but that I had not fully grasped. It organized my thinking and clarify many aspects of causality, confounders and data analysis. It helped me to look at the big picture.

1. Self-evaluation (continued)

What have you learned about what you have to do to make a course on "epidemiological literacy with a view to collaborating thoughtfully with specialists, not technical expertise" stimulating and productive?

The selection of readings was well planned and provided for stimulating conversations.

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?

The way the course was designed maintained my intrinsic motivation throughout the different topics. I had many aha moments.

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?

It was a unique opportunity to have a small group discussion with a Professor in another department. In the beginning I did not understand the technology (wikispaces and recording my contributions) so I had to come in person. My attitude was one of appreciation for the opportunity.

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.

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.

All the objectives were met. It was hard to understand some concepts in the beginning since Prof. Taylor is in the anti-discipline for genomics. Once his position was clarified, the course flowed much better.

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 and the session activities.

This course offers a unique opportunity to apply critical thinking to the design and interpretation of social epidemiology research. In previous courses the way that critiquing a research article was presented was mechanical. This course allows for a more introspective (self-analytical) style in analyzing research, including one's philosophy of science. This course taught me to take a stance on what I believe is the truth.

Topics covered included the difficulties of applying social epidemiological findings to public policy. These difficulties are numerous, and include targeting the mean (which neglects the tails of the distribution,) stereotyping based on the mean, heterogeneity of the human experience, bias, spuriousness, unintended consequences of policy, deficiency in interventions that do not change societal structural problems, etc. The Professor did not spoon feed the material--he allowed for mature interactions and exchange of ideas. I felt respected and appreciated.