Course Evaluation, Critical and Creative Thinking, UMass Boston
CRCRTH 653 Epidemiological Thinking and Population Health
Peter Taylor
Hybrid, 2019 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) When beginning this course, I was familiar with reading research articles due to my undergrad in psychology, but I knew I still had further to go in my research literacy skills. I hoped that this class would contribute to my skills in reading research, and it definitely has. Sometimes the articles were very technical, and I found them challenging to read but for the most part I was able to understand even the technical readings. If I were to take this class again, I would ensure I gave myself more time to digest the reading material. This was my first semester taking several hard science course in addition to this class, and I felt that I was not providing enough time to do well in this course. That being said, the major obstacle I had in this course was certainly my own time management.

b) There were specific things I wanted to get out of this course that I believe I achieved. Entering this class, I wasn't 100% sure what to expect but know that it would help me in my future studies and broaden my critical thinking processes around epidemiology. I am taking a lot away from thing class including a better understanding of how epidemiology is studied, how to ask better questions, and critically thinking. I think the major personal obstacle was having little to no knowledge in public health and epidemiology. It was hard for me to understand some of the technical aspects of the articles. If I were to retake this course I would put more time aside to read and understand the topics at hand; however, there is only so much time in a week.

c) I was very excited initially to take this course and though it was outside my comfort zone I felt the challenge would prove worthy and support my future goals. Due to some extenuating circumstances, my experience has been severely compromised, and thus my academic engagement suffered greatly. That said, all is not lost and as a result of the way the course is structured through CCT, I am thankfully able to work towards a successful completion with the ability to take a great deal of education away from it. The way I would proceed differently if given the chance for a redo, therefore, is to have a suitable living-condition where I was not distracted or taken away from the learning experience.

d) I wanted to learn how to study population health. I needed more background in health research. I feel that I have enough knowledge now to at least design a project under supervision. Honestly I would not do anything differently, I'm happy with how everything played out. I wish I had more time to read more of the supplemental readings, but other than that I have not had any major obstacles.

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 think the fact that this was a very small class helped make the class more stimulating because it kept you more engaged with the other students and even more interested in their journey and background. Sometimes in the hybrid classes, when they are large, it can be difficult to stay engaged.

b) I like the ability to be in class face-to-face, or online. The way the class is set up I did not feel like I had a hard time speaking up.

c) I very much believe that the face-to-face model as my standard practice for courses provides a richer learning environment and that I thrive better in-class than when I attend remotely. That said I really

appreciate the ability to telecomute or appear online when the situation demands it, when it would otherwise mean having to miss a class.

d) This course was completely different from any other course I've taken before. When you have a small class, there's less people to provide content and input. By having us free write and then requiring everyone to take turns speak, it allowed us to collect our thoughts and contribute meaningfully so that there are not too many periods of awkward silence. Taking cards/signing up in chat was a nice way to avoid having one student control the conversation.

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) I think the small class size was very unique. There were only a few of us, but I think that made the class more interesting and more engaging. If there are too many people, it can be difficult to find time to speak or difficult to say all the things you want to say. I can't think of how the class could be improved. I was very satisfied with the course.

b) I enjoyed this class and will be taking a lot away. This class has a lot of reading, and some are very long. Along with the multiple assignments and revisions each week I struggled to be able to keep up with this course while making time for my other classes. I also sometimes struggled with finding the course information on the website or the syllabus. I think some things could be better explained during the first class.

c) Probably the most special thing about this course is Peter Taylor and what he brings with his expertise and extensive knowledge. This particular semester being small made the classroom environment intimate and allowed for a deep and rich interavtive experience that could not be had with a larger group - our ability to dialogue through sessions in a more expanded way as a result of the smaller group was really substantial and something that could never be duplicated with many more persons in the mix.

d) I liked that it was set up so that all of the important topics were covered, but we were encouraged to apply those topics to our own area of interest. It kept me more engaged than requiring me to research something that I am not interested in. The negatives are that it was hard tracking completion of course requirements on the blog using a spreadsheet instead of submitting assignments through blackboard.

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 was actually very intimidated by this course initially. I expressed my concerns to Peter before the course because I was going to take Biology in Society but it did not fit my schedule. He told me I would do fine it, to which I think I have. However, throughout the class I still remained a little timid because I do not have a background in research, and while I know you don't need a background in research to do well in the course, I still felt a little behind in terms of understanding of the information and experience. However, I would definitely recommend the course to anyone who wanted to increase their skills in reading research in health.

b) I enjoyed the discussion portion of this class. I think the amount of work along with my other courses increases as the semester continued and created some stress, but since all the assignments were planned out in advance, I was able to prepare some. Also, the ability to take what I am interested in and bring it into the course.

c) Early in the course I thought I was likely in over my head and that my lack of specialized science and math training would have prohibited success throughout the rest of the semester. I am pleased that my anxieties were not well founded and that as the course evolved so too did my confidence in being able to digest and work through the material in a meaningful way.

d) At the start of the semester I felt a bit overwhelmed and uncomfortable with the course format- it was different for me and I knew that was why I was uncomfortable. As the course went on I got into the swing of it and really enjoyed the format. I'd tell other students to stick it out if they seemed overwhelmed; it will get easier.

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.

a) I think overall the course met the course description. I did, however, find that some of the reading was pretty technically, and I found it challenging to follow, but not impossible. I found myself wanting to understand the technical side more because it would help me feel more comfortable in my collaboration efforts.
b) I think this fits how the class is set up and ran.
c) This course is exactly what the description says. I do not see a need to change it.
d) I think this is an accurate description of the course.

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) This course did an excellent job in helping me gain skills in epidemiological and literacy and research literacy. I did find that, at times, my lacking in a technical background influenced how well I was able to absorb the material, but overall I think it was a great introduction to "thinking skills" in the world of epidemiology.
b) There were specific things I wanted to get out of this course that I believe I achieved. Entering this class, I wasn't 100% sure what to expect but know that it would help me in my future studies and broaden my critical thinking processes around epidemiology. I enjoyed the discussion portion of this class. In addition, I enjoyed the ability to take what I was interested in and bring it into the course. I am taking a lot away from thing class including a better understanding of how epidemiology is studied, how to ask better questions, and critically thinking. I think the major personal obstacle was having little to no knowledge in public health and epidemiology. If I were to retake this course I would put more time aside to read and understand the topics at hand; however, there is only so much time I a was able to give this class each week. This class has a lot of reading and writing involved. Along with the weekly writing assignments, there were the revisions which needed to be done as well. Overall, I took a lot out of this course, some of it I was expecting, but I know going forward it will help me with future studies and work.
c) It is quite a priviledge to be able to take this course with Peter Taylor as his knowledge and experience lends to a rich learning experience which is not limited to one narrow aspect in the field of epidemiology, or biology or policy. Instead of being a course which could easily be very dry, Peter

provides a diverse set of materials to work with and and environment in which students can jump off from and take in directions that match their own interests. The class requires that students are comfortable with the extensive scientific readings that must be done weekly and the expectation that students should be at least somewhat versed in stats, as mentioned in the description holds true, however, a smart and determined student with strong interest could make up for any previous lacking in training if they are willing to do a bit extra on their own, with Peter's support.

d) This is a graduate level course that introduces the student to the field of epidemiology of public health. The course is designed to build off of your knowledge of social science research. You will be expected to know how to read and evaluate research articles. While the required readings are not terribly complicated, you should have basic knowledge of research methods and design to be able to understand the content. The amount of reading required is average for a graduate level course, and you must complete the required readings to be able to participate in the class. It is very clear if you are not prepared for class. This is mostly independent work, which is nice for students that cannot travel campus easily. The professor is knowledgeable, respectful, professional, and supportive. I highly recommend this course

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

a) 4. Good
b) 4. Good
c) 5. Excellent
d) 4. Good

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

a) 4. Good
b) 4. Good
c) 5. Excellent
d) 4. Good