EPI 820/CPH504: Epidemiology in Public Health (Online)

Spring Semester 2013
3 credits

COURSE SYLLABUS

Course Description
This course provides an opportunity for graduate and professional students and fellows to gain knowledge and skills in basic epidemiological concepts and applications. Major topics to be covered include sources of data, study designs and analytical strategies, interpretation of findings and applications to inferring causality and controlling public health problems.

Instructor
Leslie Elliott, MPH, PhD
Email: leslie.elliott@unmc.edu
Office location: Off Campus

Office Hours
By appointment
If you have questions about the course, please post them to the Q&A Discussion Forum on Blackboard. If you have questions that are personal in nature, please contact me through email. I will respond to you within 24 hours. My Skype ID is “leslie.elliott.unmc”

ADA Policy
Students with disabilities who are in need of accommodations should contact the Student Disability Services office (see below). In order to be eligible for accommodations, the student is responsible for registering with this office and providing documentation of disability. The student must register and provide documentation well in advance of the semester for which the accommodation is needed (6 weeks is suggested). Once the request has been approved, an individualized accommodation plan will be formulated, and an official “Letter of Disability Accommodation” will be issued to the student. Instructors will not provide classroom accommodations without prior approval.

Student Disability Services
Bennett Hall 6001 (402) 559-5553 E-mail: rstevens@unmc.edu

Course Format
This course is in an online format. Although readings will be assigned from the course textbook, the course materials will include a variety of methods such as online assignments and discussions, team projects, quizzes, and group presentations. These activities will facilitate student-centered and collaborative learning – which means that each student will need to be self-motivated and engaged in the course throughout the semester. Students are expected to complete all assigned readings and activities in a timely manner.

This is NOT a self-paced course. A new topic is introduced each week with associated readings, discussions, assignments, and quizzes. It is critical that you schedule time on a weekly basis to complete all the materials. You should plan to spend approximately 10-15 hours per week on this course, which is similar to an in-class course.

The timing of the course is the same as the in-class course offered at UNMC College of Public Health campus. For purposes of this course, a week will run Sunday through Saturday. Assignments for each module need to be submitted by Saturday, 11:55 PM Central Time.

Course Website  http://my8.unmc.edu (use your UNMC username and password)

Course Competencies
Upon successful completion of this course, the student will be able to:

1. Explain the importance of epidemiology for informing public health issues.
2. Identify key sources of data for epidemiologic purposes.
3. Calculate basic epidemiology measures and draw appropriate inferences from epidemiologic data.
4. Use epidemiological measures to describe a public health problem in terms of magnitude, person, time, and place.
5. Apply ethical principles to the collection, maintenance, use, and dissemination of public health information.
6. Articulate how ethical principles apply to public health practice.

Evaluation and Grading

1. **Weekly Quizzes (15% of course grade):** A short quiz will be completed each week, covering materials presented in the weekly unit (readings, Modules). Each quiz will have approximately 10 multiple-choice, short answer, or true-false questions. Each quiz will be worth 5 points, for a total of 75 points (the lowest grade will be dropped). The quizzes are timed (30 minutes) and must be completed in one sitting. Note that the pre-course Syllabus Quiz offers an opportunity to gain 2 bonus points toward the quiz grades.

2. **Weekly Group Discussions (25% of course grade):** Students will work in groups to build consensus on answers to weekly assignments, which will usually consist of questions based on journal articles or a current event. Students will be assigned to groups (up to 5 per group) in the beginning of the semester.

After groups have been established, students in each group will sign up to be facilitator for weekly group assignments during the semester. The role of the facilitator will be to (1) create the weekly Forum on the Group Discussion Board, (2) create a weekly Wiki page on the Group Wiki Document, (3) assign questions to group members, (4) moderate the group discussion, and (5) finalize the group answers on the Wiki document.

Groups will work together in their own section of the Course Blackboard area to discuss and build consensus on answers to the assignment. In order to be familiar with the materials and contribute to the group discussion, each student should work through the assignment before working with the group. Each group member will have primary responsibility for one or two questions (depending on the size of the group), which will require more in-depth work.

At the beginning of the week, the facilitator will assign questions to each member of the group, and group members will post answers to their assigned questions on the Group Discussion Board by **Wednesday 11:55 pm Central time** each week. The initial posting on Wednesdays may feel “rushed” because of the need to read through the materials before forming a response. However, the main purpose for submitting to the Discussion Board on Wednesday is to begin a forum for discussion among the group members. After the initial posting on
Wednesday, each group member will also be required to make **at least two additional** substantive contributions ("responses") to the answers posted by other group members on the Group Discussion Board by **Saturday 11:55 pm Central time** of the same week. Students will use these discussions to "finalize" their answers to the assigned questions and post them on the Group Wiki Board by **Saturday, 11:55 pm Central time**. The facilitator will moderate the group discussion throughout the week, then check the final Wiki document for completeness (based on group discussions) by **Saturday 11:55 p.m. Central time**.

Students will be graded on their discussion contributions and responses (see **Discussion Grading Rubric**). Each weekly discussion is worth 20 points, and the lowest grade will be dropped. Please read the **Communication Policy and Guidelines**.

3. **Exams I, II, and III (50% of course grade)**. Each of the 2-hour examinations will contain multiple choice, true-false, computation and short answer questions. Material covered on each exam will come from lectures, textbook readings, class discussions, and exercises. The exams will be timed and administered online during 24-hour periods in selected weeks.

4. **Group Project (10% of course grade)**. Each group will prepare a 15-20 minute presentation describing a public health problem in terms of magnitude, person, place, and time. Each group will prepare a powerpoint presentation (with audio) and upload to Blackboard for Class viewing. (See **Group Project Grading Rubric**.) More details about this project will be given in the course materials.

5. **Additional Credit**. Students who consistently make **meaningful contributions** to the Class Discussion Board (which is different from the weekly Group Discussion Boards) throughout the semester may earn 2 additional points to their final grade at the end of the semester. **Note that many students who have A- or B+ at the end of the semester often wish they could earn just a point or two to raise their grade**. This additional credit is given to encourage active participation in the class that goes above and beyond expectations. The contributions should be relevant to epidemiology, public health, health policies, etc. "Consistent" means weekly contributions from the beginning of the semester; "meaningful contribution" means thoughtful, insightful, relevant postings that spark discussion or engage other students.

The relative weight of each course component is as follows:

| 50% | Exams I, II, III |
| 25% | Group Discussions |
| 15% | Quizzes |
| 10% | Group Project |

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Academic integrity and professional conduct:
The University of Nebraska Medical Center has established a policy on academic integrity and professional conduct. This policy may be found in the UNMC Student Handbook. All graduate students are expected to adhere scrupulously to this policy. Cheating, academic misconduct, fabrication, and plagiarism are viewed as serious matters and will lead to disciplinary action as described in the UNMC Student Handbook under Procedural Rules Relating to Student Discipline. Additional materials related to Responsible Conduct in Research can be found in the UNMC Student Handbook.

Selected sections from the UNMC Student Handbook include:

Cheating: A general definition of cheating is the use or attempted use of unauthorized materials or information for an academic exercise. Examples of cheating include:

- Using unauthorized materials such as books, notes, calculators or other aids during an examination or other academic exercises;
- Receiving unauthorized assistance from another person during an exam or exercise such as copying answers, receiving answer signals, conversation or having another person take an examination for you;
- Providing assistance to another person during an exam or exercise, such as allowing your answers to be copied, signaling answers or taking an exam for someone else;
- Obtaining answers and/or other information without authorization from someone who has previously taken an examination;
- Including all or a portion of previous work for another assignment without authorization.

Academic misconduct: Academic misconduct is defined as the falsification of official documents and/or obtaining records, examinations or documents without authorization. Several examples of academic misconduct are:

- The unauthorized acquisition of all or part of an unadministered test;
- Selling or otherwise distributing all or part of an unadministered test;
- Changing an answer or grade on an examination without authorization;
- Falsification of information on an official university document such as a grade report, transcript, an instructor’s grade book or evaluation file or being an accessory to an act of such falsification;
- Forging the signature of an authorizing official on documents such as letters of permission, petitions, drop/add, transcripts, and/or other official documents;
- Unauthorized entry into a building, office, file or computer database to view, alter or acquire documents.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the appropriation of another person’s ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit, i.e. an appropriate attribution or citation. Some examples are:

- In the methods section of a thesis, a graduate student describes a procedure used in research for the thesis. The procedure was developed by a fellow graduate student in the laboratory of a professor; however, neither the student who developed this procedure nor the professor was given credit in the thesis. This implies that the author had himself developed the procedure.
- In the background section of a thesis, a graduate student quotes verbatim the results of a previous investigator’s work but fails to credit the individual through citation. The work is recent and thus cannot be considered common knowledge.
- Copying and pasting materials from other sources, such as journal abstracts, Wikipedia, or other electronic sources.
Course Policies

Student participation. An online course presents unique challenges (as well as opportunities) to students regarding participation in classroom activities. The pace of an online course is just as “constant” as that of an in-class course, but the multiple activities in an online course require more self-discipline and self-motivation. It is important not to fall behind! The concepts in this course build on each other, so students should work diligently to understand each unit before beginning the next one. Please contact me right away if you feel you are falling behind.

Students in this course may be physically located in different countries around the world as the UNMC College of Public Health builds its global community. This is a wonderful opportunity to learn from each other through our own cultural perspectives. To benefit from collaborative learning, all students must participate in this online course.

The channel of communication is always open among the students and the instructor. Please use all available communication tools (email, discussion board, chat, telephone) to contact other students and me throughout the semester so that we may stay connected and interact with each other.

Students are expected to communicate with others in the classroom by contributing to Discussions on Blackboard. Weekly graded discussions will be held among the small groups in the Group Discussion Boards, but all students are encouraged to post thoughtful contributions to the Classroom Discussion Board. Note that additional credit at the end of the semester will be given to students who have consistently contributed to the classroom discussions.

Expectations for students:

1. Students are encouraged to complete the pre-course activities (Week 0)
2. Students are expected to read their emails and Blackboard Announcements on a daily basis. Note that the email address on Blackboard will be the email address to which email messages and notifications will be sent. If this is not your correct email address, please change this with the University. Do not send me different email addresses!
3. Students are expected to participate in the Discussion Board activities, both in small groups and in the Classroom discussion board.
4. Students are expected to follow the online communication policies and etiquette (“netiquette”).
5. Students are expected to contribute to small group discussion activities and the group project.
6. Students are expected to check their grades and feedback on a weekly basis.
7. Students are expected to complete activities and assignments for each module by the end of the week (Saturday, 11:55 p.m. Central Time) unless otherwise noted.
8. Students are expected to submit all assignments through Blackboard. (Do not email them to me.)

Expectations for instructor:

1. Interest in your education and progress as a student and professional.
2. Timely response to emails (within 24 hours during weekdays).
3. Weekly announcements, including reminders of due dates.
4. Timely information about course updates and changes.
5. Midterm Skype appointment, to discuss your progress, any problems or concerns.
6. Grade feedback within a week after the deadline.
7. Enthusiasm about epidemiology!
Late Assignments
LATE submissions for assignments, quizzes and exams may not be accepted without prior approval of the instructor. **If late assignments are accepted, points will be deducted for lateness.** If a student has an extraordinary event that prevents timely submission of an assignment, he or she must submit a formal written explanation (on a Word document or PDF, attached to an email to the instructor) or note (scanned and attached to an email to the instructor) from an authoritative witness (e.g., a doctor if the event was acute illness or accident) to avoid losing points. The deduction of points for lateness provides equity to those students who are timely in their submissions.

Online Communication “Netiquette”

1. Respect others! Use respectful language in a professional manner.
2. Remember that the written language on the discussion board is coming from human beings – be mindful of others.
3. Remember that students in this course may be from different countries around the world – be mindful of cultural differences.
4. Avoid sarcasm, as it often is interpreted as rude and hurtful.
5. Show respect for the opinions of others, even if you disagree.
6. Do not use profanity or slang – this class is a core course for a professional degree, and professionalism is expected.
7. Avoid the use of all uppercase letters: THIS IS OFTEN CONSIDERED TO BE SHOUTING, even if you do not mean it to be.
8. Read through your posts before you publish them. It is too easy to publish a sloppy message with misspelled words and bad grammar. Again – this is a graduate course and should reflect graduate abilities and workmanship.
9. Write in short paragraphs for easier reading.
10. Use a descriptive title in the subject line of your message – it makes communication more efficient.
11. Do not forward another person’s email without his or her permission.
12. Feel free to use emotional symbols ("emoticons") in your posts to convey your tone of voice.
13. Unprofessional students who abuse online communication will be banned from posting.