

MPH Memos



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HAPPY OCTOBER!

Happy Fall Department of Public Health! To all of you who recently made it through midterms (and those of you grading them), congrats! To those of you about to take the comps exam, good luck! We only have a month left of classes until an extended winter break so find your study groups, gather up your motivation, reach out and ask for help when needed, and take time to recharge and engage in self-care. This may not be a typical semester, but fall is still upon us in Knoxville and with it brings Volunteer football, cooler days that are perfect for getting outdoors, and pumpkin-flavored everything! As a reminder, there are three memos released per semester. If you have any feedback, submissions, or comments, please feel free to contact me at pprother@vols.utk.edu

IMPORTANT DATES

- MPH Comprehensive Exam on **November 6th**
- Last day of fall classes is **November 24th**
- Registration for spring classes begins on **November 2nd.**

CAMPUS EVENTS

- **Safe Zone Tier 1 Training.** Hosted by the Pride Center. Wednesday, November 4th 9-11 AM & Thursday, November 12th 10 AM—12 PM. [Register here.](#)
- **Why Representation Matters: Disability in the News and Media Entertainment.** Hosted by Student Disability Services. Monday, November 9th 5:30-7:00 PM. [Register here.](#)
- **Students of Color Empowerment Group:** How to Have Civil Dialogue with Family. Hosted by the Office of Multicultural Student Life. Tuesday, November 17th 6-7 PM. [Register here.](#)
- **Child and Family Studies Lead Seminar Series:** LGBTQ People of Color: Reconceptualizing Resilience. Friday, November 20th 1-2 PM. [ZOOM link.](#)
- **VOLS ACT Bystander Training for Graduate Students.** Hosted by the Office of Title IX. Wednesday, November 25th 1-3 PM. Register by contacting Laura Bryant at lbryant7@utk.edu



PUBLIC HEALTH GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION

Want to get some Department of Public Health Spirit Wear?

There's lots of options available!

- 1/4 zips
- Crewnecks
- Hoodies
- Long & short-sleeve t-shirts

View options [here](#). To order, contact Ahmad at amitoubs@vols.utk.edu

COME AND LET'S TALK COMPS!

FREE STUDY SESSIONS SHARE YOUR KNOWLEDGE BRING A PUBH PAL

Weekly | 12pm to 3pm (EST) | Saturday's
From Sat Oct. 3 to Sat Oct. 31

TOGETHER, WE WILL PASS! HOSTED BY PHGSA VIA ZOOM

<https://tennessee.zoom.us/j/91837682011>

OCTOBER EVENT



MEET DR. THANKAM SUNIL

We would like to give a warm welcome to Dr. Thankam Sunil who is the new Head of the Department of Public Health!

Please introduce yourself!

Hello, I'm Thankam Sunil, Professor of Public Health. Well, my wife refers to my collection of degrees as wall paper, because they can cover a whole wall. My most relevant degrees are a Master's in Public Health, a PhD in Sociology, Masters and PhD in Population Studies (sometimes called demography), and a Master's in Statistics. These areas are reflected in my teaching, research, and often in my interactions with others. I have taught courses, both at undergraduate and graduate level in these areas for the last 18 years or so.



What is your role in the department and what are your research interests?

I am the Head of the Department, which means that I am responsible primarily for providing leadership for the departmental academic programs, the infrastructure necessary for support of the academic programs, and planning annual performance and review for faculty and staff. In terms of my research, my interests are in the areas of health and health disparities in minority populations at local and national levels. I am involved in public health research in several developing countries, including China, India, Indonesia, Thailand, The Philippines, Mexico, and Nicaragua.

Why did you choose public health and what advice would you give new MPH students?

Looking back, I am not sure if I knew that I would become a public health researcher. I always wanted to do something related to health while growing up. Just happened that my background training in Statistics, Population Health, and Sociology prepared me for becoming a better public health researcher. My major advice to students: please be on the lookout for courses, opportunities and engagements where you can be a part of and think about creative ways to become a better public health researcher. There is no one single approach to reach that level.

What is your favorite thing so far about Knoxville and UTK?

It has been only less than 3 months since I have been in Knoxville. Given the little I know, I am amazed by the extent of outdoor activities Knoxville offers!

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect us all from our personal lives to our graduate studies as we adapt to virtual learning. As public health students, we have a responsibility to be role models in how to stay safe, healthy, and protect others! For fall semester, we will be highlighting faculty, staff, and current students to learn about their experience.

Reminders:

- Anytime you are going to campus, complete the [Daily Health Self-Screening](#) in the Tennessee App.
- The Student Health Center is offering [COVID-19 testing!](#) You can call to make an appointment at **865-974-5050**.
- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds, wear a mask, and stay six feet away from others!
- For more information about COVID-19, please visit the [UTK COVID Homepage](#).



MEET DR. CRISTINA BARROSO!

Hi! I am Dr. B, as in Dr. Barroso (not to be confused with the great Dr. Brown). I earned both my MPH and DrPH from the University of Texas School of Public Health in Houston, Texas. I am a health disparities researcher who partners with community organizations, local and regional health departments, and policymakers to provide a more equitable physical and social environment so that all populations can achieve high health status to enable them to thrive in their communities. I believe that the health and well-being of one individual is interconnected to the health and well-being of everyone in their community. To eliminate health disparities we must all do our part.

What is your role in the department?

At UTK, I teach PUBH 536 for both the CHE and EPI concentrations. I also teach a doctoral theory course (PUBH 656). In the past, I taught PUBH 201 and PUBH 350. I am excited to teach PUBH 202—Intro to Epi for our undergraduate public health minor students. Send undergraduate students interested in our minor my way as I am the Director of the Public Health Minor.

How are you finding ways to have fun or practice self-care during the pandemic?

The COVID-19 pandemic is no joke. It is impacting everyone to some degree. All stress is magnified because of it. Please practice self-care. Be physically active. I try to go for a walk at lunch time to help me re-energize. Get at least 7 hours of sleep. I set an alarm at night to remind me to end my day. Otherwise I will continue working until exhaustion. Like many, since March I have been working longer hours, because there is no where to go



and there's a sense of guilt associated with not working. Follow the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. I use an app to help keep count of my daily fruit and vegetable servings and other dietary intake. Finally, I have established a social support network (a shout-out to my crew) that helps me navigate the numerous microaggressions I have experienced as a person of color. Find what works for you to practice self-care.

What are your tips for being successful in the MPH program during the pandemic?

To be successful in the MPH program: read, read, read, read. Be prepared to ask questions during class, use evidence to support your arguments, and be open to different lines of thinking. If you need help, attend office hours or make an appointment. Come to office hours/your appointment with the instructor with specific questions. Form a ZOOM study group. Do not be afraid to ask for help, but be sure you read all pertinent materials before doing so. I love talking with students. Feel free to send me an email (cbarroso@utk.edu) if you want to chat!

MEET CARMAN NORTH AND LEARN ABOUT CONTACT TRACING!

Hi folks, I'm Carman North (she, her, hers), and I'm a first-year student in the HPM concentration. I've traveled a pretty windy path to get here. Past stops have included bench science in biochemistry and epidemiology labs, massage and Traditional Chinese Medicine, health insurance, and a whole lot of restaurant and bar work. More recently I served as the Office Manager at the Center for Health Education & Wellness here on campus, and now I'm the Associate Contact Tracing Coordinator for UT's COVID-19 Contact Tracing Team.



How are you finding ways to have fun or practice self-care during the pandemic?

I'm so grateful to have a supportive husband and a comfortable home to ride out the pandemic. We've both been pretty busy this year. The extra time at home, though, has given us more time to spend in the yard and garden, and we've gotten around to a few home renovations that we've put off for years. If I'm being honest, though, most of what we've done for self-care has been watching *The Office*...over and over again.

What is it like to be a contact tracer?

Working with the contact tracing program on campus has been rewarding (and challenging!) As contact tracers, we try to track down chains of transmission so that we can help exposed individuals get tested early and contain risk to the campus community. As an associate coordinator, I don't get to talk to many students. I oversee the tracing team's daily operations, look for ways to streamline and strengthen our processes, and look for patterns in data that can help inform our tracing and surveillance efforts.

Are there any current or future opportunities for MPH students to get involved in contact tracing?

Lots! All of our contact tracers are master's students, so we expect our needs to change each semester. You can find an application through Handshake. We have to work out some details, but we are also exploring other opportunities for students to get involved. The university's COVID-19 response has been comprehensive, so there may be opportunities for students in all of the concentrations. Finally, we are happy to answer questions at any time! If you have papers or projects that we can help with, please reach out!

Curious about current campus data for COVID-19? Check out the page on [data monitoring for UTK.](#)

GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS!

Many of our Public Health students have graduate assistantships which are 10-20 hour/week positions that support the university in a research, teaching, or administrative capacity. Check out some of the highlights below! For information on assistantships within the department, please visit the [Department of Public Health](#) and for outside of the department, [The Graduate School](#).

Sierra Turner

Hello, everyone! My name is Sierra Turner! I am a second year MPH student with a concentration in Community Health Education. I enjoy long walks on the beach and delicious homemade meals. My most favorite fun fact is that I speak Spanish! I have been practicing for over 15 years. My passions in health include working with racial minority youth. I am only a Zoom link away!

Tell us about your GA position!

In the Public Health department, I serve as a GTA for 201, Introduction to Public Health. I love this position mainly because I love to teach! Teaching is my passion. As a GTA, I get to work with Julie Grubaugh. Since working with her, I have been able to grow a lot of my skills and pedagogical approaches. How could this position get any better?



Bethany Rand

I am Bethany and I am a first-year doctoral candidate in the Public Health PhD program, with a cognate in exercise science. I received my Master of Science degree in Exercise Science and Chronic Disease while serving as a graduate research assistant and lab instructor in the Clinic and Applied Movement Sciences Department at the University of North Florida. I also completed my undergraduate coursework at the University of North Florida, where I earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Public Health. My research interests are centered around exercise for prevention and treatment of hyperglycemia during and after pregnancy. My other interests include hiking, yoga, craft breweries, plant-based baking and cooking, art, and spoiling my lab/boxer mix.

Tell us about your GA position!

I work as a graduate assistant under Dr. Samantha Ehrlich in the Department of Public Health. My assistantship is split between GTA and GRA roles, where I serve as a teaching assistant for Biostatistics and also work on various studies which partner with UT Medical Center and Kaiser Permanente Northern California. My favorite thing about my position is my amazing rock star mentor, Dr. Ehrlich, who is such a supportive mentor. She is a breadth of knowledge on maternal and child health and I have learned so much from her already.



GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS!

Isis West

My name is Isis West and I am a first-year MPH student in the epidemiology concentration from Nashville, Tennessee. I attended the University of Tennessee, Knoxville for undergrad and received a Bachelor's of Arts in Anthropology with a minor in Public Health. I am also the first in my family to graduate from college and enter a masters program.

Tell us about your GA position!

Currently, I serve as a Graduate Assistant for the Office of Academic Inclusive Initiatives. Within this position I am responsible for creating and implementing programs for First-Generation students at the University and guiding their success throughout their first year. I work directly with the UT LEAD program, which has a mission to promote undergraduate success, academic excellence, and persistence to graduation for first-generation college students at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. My favorite thing about this position is the reward of helping other first-gen students navigate their first year of college and creating a solid foundation for success.



Jeremy Kourvelas

I'm Jeremy and I'm originally from Memphis, Tennessee. I came here to Knoxville for my undergraduate degree in psychology with the intention of going to medical school. After four years in multiple Emergency Departments in the area, however, I began to fully appreciate how broken the healthcare system is, particularly for marginalized groups, rural folk, and individuals of low SES, and how much cost and suffering could be alleviated by addressing upstream issues. Now I find myself striving for the MPH, concentrating in community health education and seeking the health policy certificate.

Tell us about your GA position!

My experience and goals have so far benefitted me in my position as a GTA for Dr. Chen's global health class and as a GRA for the SMART Policy Network, wherein my research may influence future legislation pertaining to telehealth and treatment of substance use disorder. The long term goal is still to become a psychiatric practitioner (perhaps a DNP), but I feel compelled to address some systemic problems before I seek further schooling. I have long since fallen in love with East Tennessee and the striking beauty of its geography across which I love to hike and camp. In my spare time I play in a band, experiment with photography, and read as many books as I can (at a rate that never seems to catch up with that of new purchases).





DON'T FORGET!

Get your **flu shot!** There are plenty of local places offering the vaccine:

- UT Student Health
- Walgreens & CVS
- Publix
- Knox County Health Dept

Election day is **Tuesday, November 3rd**. Check out [this guide to Voting in Knoxville](#).



PUBLIC HEALTH RESOURCES

- American Public Health Association (APHA) Webinars: [COVID-19 Conversations](#).
- **American Journal of Public Health Podcasts**. [Listen online here](#).
- Check out the [YWCA 21-Day Challenge: Racial Equity and Social Justice](#) to learn about voting, education, criminal justice reform, and public health!
- In honor of Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM), check out these resources from the **National Resource Center on Domestic Violence**: [Policy & Advocacy in Action Podcast](#) and [Prevent IPV Videos](#).
- Tennessee Integrated Food Safety Centers of Excellence courses on **foodborne outbreak investigations**. [Visit their website](#) for more information.

LOOKING TO GET INVOLVED?

Join the Public Health Equity & Diversity Committee!

Interested? Contact Laurie Meschke at llmeschke@utk.edu

- Opportunity to provide educational workshops and seminars on equity and diversity topics.
- Engage in shared learning and thinking about inclusion and diversity with students, faculty, and staff.
- Review course syllabi and curriculum to improve course content about equity and diversity. **And More!**