

Dear Future GH811 colleague,

Congratulations on making the choice to take this class! I am finishing up my second-to-last semester here at BUSPH, and I can tell you with confidence that this was one of the most challenging and fulfilling classes I have taken in my entire time at this school. I don't want to sugar coat it: this class is really hard. I spent a lot of the time being frustrated, confused, and annoyed at what was being asked of us or how concepts were being explained. That being said, I also spent a lot of time reflecting in awe on how much respect I had for my really talented classmates, how proud I was of myself and my team for producing really fantastic work, and how much of a growing and learning experience this class really was for me as a future researcher. I was also incredibly taken aback at how much faith Professor Stokes had in us as students, even when it seemed clear that none of us felt like we knew what we were doing.

Be prepared to do a lot of work at a very fast pace. This is a teamwork-heavy class, where you will be working intimately with your group to produce journal-quality work. I got lucky and had a stellar group, and we started and ended each meeting with a moment to share qualities or behaviors that we respected and appreciated about one another; this ritual was so helpful in our teambuilding and in creating group cohesion. We really came to admire and trust one another, and I feel like I could truly count on my group members for just about anything now; I believe that they are *that* capable. I highly suggest that you spend time with your team taking the Team Charter seriously and working through it so that it represents all of you and your goals for the course. Keep in mind that you and your teammates all have different life, work, and academic experiences; as such, you will all bring a nuanced and diverse set of strengths and weaknesses to the group. Recognize and acknowledge these strengths and weaknesses ahead of time, and find a way to cobble together a plan that builds off people's strengths and complements their

weaknesses. Furthermore, figure out a consistent weekly meeting time with your team, and pencil it into your calendar for the entire semester. You're going to need it, and it is so much easier to have a set meeting time that is already blocked into your schedule than to scramble around looking for times to meet. My group chose to meet immediately after class, which was really helpful in solidifying the information we had just gone over in class and was a nice way to decompress from the sometimes-overwhelming lectures.

Keep in mind that Professor Stokes is seriously brilliant, and he expects top-notch quality work from his students. His standards are high and can feel unreasonable, but trust that he knows what he is doing and what he is asking of you. The problem sets are really hard, and the weekly deliverables sometimes feel impossible (especially towards the end of the project when everything starts moving even faster), but trust the process. You will come out of the class having produced a publication-worthy project, and that is really cool to think about.

Take the class seriously, but also have fun with the project. Choose a topic that interests you and that will interest other people. My group picked a research question about HPV vaccination, which is an incredibly trendy and sexy topic in research right now. As a result, my group members and I were totally riveted and excited by our research process and by our findings; other groups seemed to pick topics that were less grounded in current research, and they seemed to struggle a bit more as a result. Think about questions relating to health that truly and genuinely leave you curious and excited, and build your project from there.

Good luck with the course, and enjoy the ride!