Dear Future GH811 students,

Congratulations on deciding to take GH811! Personally, I am very glad that I took this class because it was such a great practice of how research is conducted in the real world. This class forced me out of my comfort zone, and I ended up doing analyses, at a level that I thought I would never reach. Here are my two cents of advice on how to get the best out of this class.

Your team is your team!

The bulk of the work in this class is going to be in teams. This is a great simulation of the fact that research is never done alone, in a vacuum but always in collaboration with other people. A huge chunk of what I learned from this class was to do with team dynamics. I had an amazing time working with my team and I attribute it to a few practices we set for ourselves. From the beginning, we took the rules set out in the team charter very seriously and followed them throughout the semester. This made sure that we could count on each other to get the work done. The second most important rule that we set, was that of having "put ups" or "check outs" at the end of each meeting. These were little nuggets of compliments, we observed about each team member during the past week. This practice really forced us to focus on the "good" things and efforts each team member was putting in, and be openly appreciative of it. It also re-enforced good behavior. For example, if somebody appreciated the way I took notes one day, the next meeting I would do it happily knowing that my effort appreciated. This also helped us end meetings on a positive note, which set the tone for the next week. Last, but not the least, I think the team members strengths and weaknesses really complimented each other. When two of us would be stressed, there was always one person who was reassuring and calm to get us through a crisis. When our code suddenly gave us different results. We were not sure what went wrong and felt like it would be impossible to redo this again. The team's positive attitude really helped us through that difficult time, and we managed to complete all the deliverables on time. So own your team and work together.

Data analysis and R

This is the part where I was pushed out of my comfort zone. Though I understood the data analysis concepts well, I was terrified of using R. The R learning modules, TA sessions and in-class activities really helped me get over that phobia. Attending the TA sessions was immensely helpful, as it provided me with a safe space to ask dumb questions and really understand how R works. By the end of the course, I was much more comfortable with using R as a software and confident in putting it down as a skill on my resume. The problem sets can be challenging, even for individuals who have taken Intro to R. I would advise you to start working on them as early as you can, to score well.

Research in real world

This class very closely simulates how research should be conducted in the real world. You will learn a lot of skills and work ethics that you can carry forward in your professional life. Apart from learning to work well in teams, this class will give you opportunities to demonstrate transparency in all steps of the research process. You will also learn what not to do in the field of academic research, and spot wrong practices. You will learn the best practices of conducting data analysis so that it is reproducible and robust. You will learn to access and use data from large national surveys. This process will also teach you to be proactive researcher instead of a passive one. Dr Stokes does cold call and there is no way of escaping it. Even if it terrifies you, it will challenge you to think and really participate in class, instead of inertly daydreaming. Many of these skills are invaluable if you want to build a career related to public health research. You are in for an amazing time and lot of great lessons that will stick with you! All the very best!