

Dear GH 811 Student,

Welcome to what should be one of the most beneficial classes of your MPH program. I did not know how desperately I needed this class until I was in the weeds with the content – for me, it was truly a culminating experience that married many topics from other courses and allowed me to actually operationalize skills. This class will require a lot of your time, including learning the content, facilitating a healthy group dynamic, and actually chugging and plugging away at the workload. Be prepared for an intense semester and commit to dedicating the time required from the start. You'll thank yourself at the end.

Here is my advice for surviving GH 811 (and maybe even enjoying the ride in the process...):

### **Completing Project Components**

- **Get ahead!** Project components come fast and furious in this class. You need to get in the habit of starting project components BEFORE the week they are due. Many of the components are iterative processes that cannot be cranked out last minute. Keep an eye on what is due in upcoming weeks and start anything and everything as soon as you can.
- **Be strategic in your thought processes.** Really think everything through at the beginning to save a lot of headaches at the end (especially with how you will analyze data!). If you're stuck or not sure what direction to take, ask Professor Stokes or the TA. They can help you avoid potentially time-intensive and painful workarounds to compensate for something that wasn't well thought-out.
- **Build in time to copy edit.** Someone on your team should read through each project component to make sure it is a cohesive, unified body of work. A strong draft that requires minimal changes will save you time and energy when you are compiling your final report.
- **Know what is going on.** Professor Stokes WILL call on you to discuss your entire project with the class during the semester. Be able to speak specifically to each part of your project no matter what you did or did not work on.
- **Be warned: While Google docs is great for collaborating, it doesn't always cut it in this class.** Many of the project components will require embedded references, graphs and charts, formulas etc. etc. Google docs isn't conducive for these kinds of highly-formatted documents. Put some thought into how you will handle formatting and finalizing documents outside of Google docs before you submit deliverables.

## Working With Your Team

- **All hands on deck, all the time.** If you're the person that usually carries the team, you're going to need to learn how to let go. There is too much work for one person to handle. If you're the person that usually coasts along in a group, you're going to have to step up and jump in if this project is going to get done. It's a lot of work but there is a lot of learning in the process, both academic and personal.
- **Meet once a week with your group face-to-face.** I cannot overstate how necessary it is to have face-to-face group discussions weekly, even if only for 15 minutes. My group chose to meet every week directly after class. This was ideal for processing information fresh in our minds and determining a game plan for completing upcoming deliverables.
- **Learn to have direct, constructive conversations from the outset.** Figure out a way to get every team member equally motivated to collectively pitch-in on the workload. There is minimal opportunity to divide and conquer on this project; you will never survive if you think you can work in silos.

## Developing R Skills

- **Enjoy the process of learning R!** This class was my only true opportunity at BU to develop R skills. This is such an important marketable skill beyond this class – capitalize on the opportunity to learn even basic uses of R and have fun trying different ways to address problems.
- **Learn to take notes within R code.** Taking notes within the module code helps when you are trying to figure out how to repeat the code for your quantitative analysis (# will be your best friend).
- **Schedule TA sessions into your week like you would any other class.** Feeling comfortable in R will come in handy when you are conducting your quantitative analysis.
- **Start the problem sets early.** They require more time than you think!

Best of luck this semester! I am confident you will have a great experience.