

Public Health Memos



WINTER BREAK!

We made it! The end of another challenging, busy, but rewarding fall semester is here. For some students, you made it through your first semester in graduate school. For others, you studied hard and completed the comps exam. Also, a big congratulations to those of you who are graduating! For the department, several new faculty were hired and this was the first semester of the online MPH program. No matter what your accomplishment, you should all be proud at the work that has been done. It is now winter break and we find ourselves with over a month to relax, enjoy the holidays, and prepare for spring semester. This is the final memo of 2021—take a look inside to learn about one of our new faculty members and some students who are doing important and interesting research! I welcome any comments that you have to improve the newsletter for the new year. Please don't hesitate to contact me at pprother@vols.utk.edu

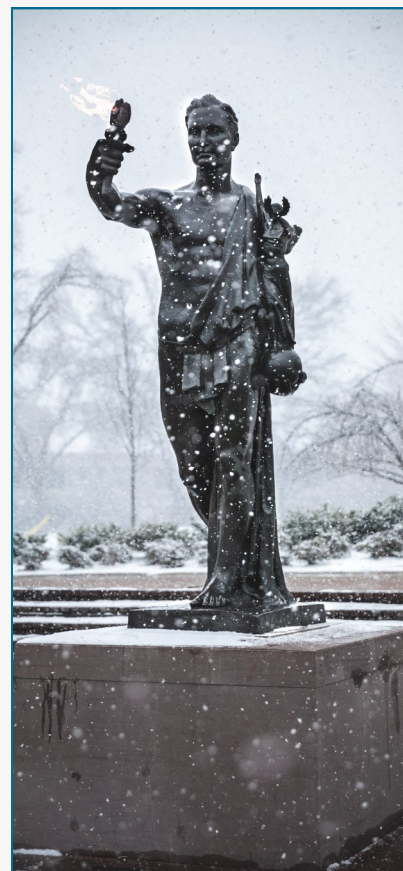


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IMPORTANT DATES

- The university is closed **from December 24th—31st.**
- Spring semester begins on **Monday, January 24th.**



WINTER BREAK ACTIVITIES

Looking for some activities to do over the long break? Check out some ideas below!



Join the End of Semester Party hosted by the **Multicultural Graduate Student Organization and the Graduate School for all graduate students.** Monday, December 13th from 6-9 PM. HSS Building—Room 205.

Check out all the holiday events in Knoxville—there is ice skating in Market Square, a family friendly bike ride, showings of the classic A Christmas Carol at the Clarence Brown Theatre, and more!

This article from UTK Student Life has 12 unique ideas for COVID-19 safe activities to do over break.

Get outdoors! There's plenty of local places to walk or hike such as Ijams Nature Center, Seven Islands Wildlife Refuge, UTK Gardens, Sequoyah Hills, Sharp's Ridge, High Ground Park, or the many greenways!

See some holiday lights! There's Light the Park in Farragut at Campbell Station, Zoo Lights at Zoo Knoxville, Christmas in Chilhowee Park, Light up Lakeshore Park, or take a drive around some of the neighborhoods with lights.

Read! Check out these articles from [The New York Times](#) and [Barnes and Noble](#) on the best books of 2021.

Watch some new movies or TV shows! Check out the NY times recommendations on the [Best TV Shows of 2021](#) and [Best Movies](#).

If you're interested in traveling a bit further, there are plenty of Holiday events in Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg. [Check out some of the events here.](#)

NEW FACULTY HIGHLIGHT: DR. JENNIFER PERION

Please introduce yourself!

My name is Jennifer Perion, and I am an Assistant Professor of Practice. My credentials are rather varied: I have a BA in history, a Master of Liberal Studies, graduate certificates in Contemporary Gerontological Practice and Biostatistics & Epidemiology, and a PhD in Health Education. I also a Certified Health Education Professional (CHES) and have a Master Online Instructor Certificate. Before entering academia, I worked for many years in the IT field as a network administrator and IT manager. I like to think my exposure to different disciplines helps me think outside of the box when presenting topics in my classes. I currently live in southeastern Michigan with my husband Jack and my daughter Emily, who is a student at the University of Toledo. I have two dogs, Ringo Starr (pug) and Bunky (English bulldog), who usually can be seen in the background of the many Zoom meetings that I attend each week.



What is your role in the department?

My primary teaching responsibilities are focused on the online MPH program. I will be teaching Biostatistics, Epidemiology, Research Methods, and Program Evaluation as well as some upcoming electives. In the upcoming semester I will also be teaching undergraduate Public Health Aspects of Aging. My research interests focus on the aging population, with a special focus on the social aspects of dementia and dementia caregiving. I have investigated reciprocity in friendships among older adults with dementia, the experience of adolescent dementia caregivers, and Chinese stroke caregiver experiences. I am currently evaluating a unique device from the Netherlands that is designed to provide opportunities for engagement for older adults with dementia. I am also a frequent contributor to aging organizations in Michigan, Ohio, and Tennessee, providing health-related information, and delivering educational talks for members of the community.

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

I guess you could say my entry in public health was rather accidental. I took an aging & public health course as a master's student and was so fascinated that I continued into my doctoral studies. I can't imagine a better field to work in, especially now as our aging population continues to grow. My advice to new public health students is to embrace opportunities to explore different aspects of the discipline and have fun while you learn!

What is your favorite thing about Knoxville and UTK?

Oh, I love the mountains and hills in the Knoxville area! Michigan is very flat, the only hills we have are expressway overpasses. I think the UTK campus is beautiful and very walkable. I also love how evident students, faculty, and staff excitement is when I visit campus.

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHTS

Will Andershock

Please introduce yourself!

I'm Will Andershock and I am a second-year MPH student in the Epidemiology concentration. I am an alumnus of the University of Tennessee with a degree in Psychology and a minor in Neuroscience. After hearing an epidemiologist talk about their job at a career panel, I was drawn to the field and knew it would be a great fit for me! I'm originally from the Memphis area, but after living in Knoxville for seven years, I call Rocky Top home. My career interests are genomic epidemiology, data science applications for public health, and clinical research.



Tell us about your research!

The Tennessee Department of Health (TDH) is one of the five Integrated Food Safety Centers of Excellence and the University of Tennessee served as the academic partner. My Graduate Research Assistant position is part of the ongoing collaboration with TDH, the Public Health Department, and the Food Science Department. I work with Dr. Lauren Hudson and Dr. Thomas Denes in the Food Science Department where we conduct retrospective genomic analyses of foodborne pathogens. By using whole-genome sequencing (WGS), we can infer genomic diversity, determine source attribution, identify outbreak clusters, and predict emerging threats. Currently, I am determining the phylogeny of *Salmonella enterica* serovar Newport clinical isolates in Tennessee to assess source attribution patterns and identify potential out-

break clusters. If you want to learn more about WGS and our research, [check out our most recent publication in *Microorganisms*!](#)

Will Martinez

Please introduce yourself!

My name is Will Martinez (he/him/his) and I am a first-year student getting my MPH concentrating in Community Health Education and PhD in Public Health Sciences. I was born and raised in Knoxville but call Atlanta, GA home. I received my BA in Anthropology and Sociology from Emory University and my MS in College Student Personnel at UTK. Since being at UTK, I've worked as an Assistant Hall Director in Housing; Interpersonal Wellness GA in the CHEW; the Pride Center GA; and am now in the Post-secondary Education Research Center (PERC).

Tell us about your research!

I have the pleasure of being advised by Dr. Jabson-Tree. In her lab, we focus on LGBTQ+ public health broadly. Specifically, I focus on identity-based violence prevention in collegiate environments. My master's thesis centered on interpersonal violence prevention staff member's perception of identity in their support of institutionally underserved survivors of sexual violence (e.g. LGBTQ+ and/or Students of Color). Throughout my time in college, I have been involved with diversity, equity, and inclusion work and serve as a Safe Zone facilitator and member of the Public Health DEI Committee. To me, identity-based violence prevention requires an understanding of the interlocking systemic oppressions, power, and privilege that allow discrimination to exist in the first place. Dr. Jabson Tree's lab recently received a grant to focus on IPV prevention among LGBTQ+ students at UTK which will begin in the spring.



RESEARCH SPOTLIGHTS, CONT.

Gulsah Onar



Please introduce yourself!

My name is Gulsah Onar, and I am a second-year MPH student with a concentration in epidemiology. I have a BA in psychology with a minor in biological sciences from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. During my last two years, I worked as an undergraduate research assistant at Schultz



Lab at UTK, a behavioral neuroscience lab, and gained outstanding experience in research while working with animal models to investigate underlying neural mechanisms and structures in the brain. I participated in several conferences and symposiums during my undergraduate career, starting in 2018 and even during the COVID-19 pandemic. I also achieved important personal goals during my college years with my daughter, Mila, who is 2.5 years old now, and my superman husband, Omer. I enjoy traveling with my family, exploring new places and cultures, and taking photographs. My enthusiasm for public health stems from my desire for a world in which individuals have access to person-centered and high-quality healthcare, receive preventive medicine and treatments, and take precautions to reduce or even eliminate disease and illness. Through my academic curriculum, experience in a neurobehavioral research lab, and volunteer positions in healthcare settings, I've observed how important it is to protect, promote, and restore people's health by describing and analyzing pressing public health problems and bringing solutions. I always loved the scientific puzzles of biology and neuroscience, but I honestly did not enjoy statistics much. I

started to love it when I saw how the field of epidemiology used statistical tools and biological thinking to address the world's preventable public health problems.

Tell us about your research!

For more than a year, I have been working with the research divisions of the Departments of OB/GYN and Anesthesiology at UTMC and UT Graduate School of Medicine in Knoxville. Working at UTMC with different departments has helped me not only to develop my public health competencies, but also to gain new skills in clinical epidemiology, biostatistics, and software programs. I also had an opportunity to complete my APEx at the Department of Anesthesiology last summer, where I am currently involved in several projects. With these projects, we aim to reduce perioperative opioid use and the risk of opioid dependency after surgeries. Some of the projects I have been involved in are as follows: "Pre and Post-COVID Analgesic Quality Improvement in Nephrectomy and Mastectomy with the use of Regional Anesthetics", "Opioid Dependency Prevention Among Postpartum Women", "Use of Aggressive Treatment with Subarachnoid Hemorrhage Pathway", and "The Effect of Decrease Syringe Size on Intraoperative Opioid Utilization and Postoperative Pain." As a research assistant, I conducted literature reviews, wrote study protocols and submitted IRB applications. I created databases using Cerner Power Chart, conducted quantitative data analysis using biostatics and SPSS, and wrote the methods section for a manuscript. I have recently submitted a grant proposal to the TDOH. I am also helping to conduct a pilot randomized clinical trial study, aimed at examining the impact of physical activity intervention among women with pregnancy hyperglycemia. I work closely with Dr. Samantha Ehrlich from UTK and Dr. Jill Maples from the OB/GYN Department at UTMC, and have developed expertise in REDCap, an electronic data capture software. An abstract on this project has been accepted for the 2022 Annual Meeting of the Southeast Chapter of the American College of Sports medicine, and I will be attending the conference in February 2022 in Greenville, SC. I love research, epidemiology, and working with data in a collaborative environment. I am curious about the who, what, where, when how, and why the problems occur. My goal is to pursue a PhD in epidemiology to practice, teach, and continue in research.