

Merriah A. Croston

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EDUCATION

Ph.D., Public Health Sciences

Washington University in St. Louis, Saint Louis, MO

Dissertation: “Black people cannot get coronavirus” and other myths: The prevalence and diffusion of COVID-19 misinformation narratives on Black Twitter

Committee: Jenine Harris (chair), Douglas Luke, Ruopeng An, Matthew Keuter, Raven Maragh-Lloyd

**May 2024
(expected)**

M.P.H, Epidemiology

Emory University, Atlanta, GA

2014

B.S., Biology

Georgetown University, Washington, DC

2006

HONORS AND AWARDS

Fellow, Chancellor’s Fellowship for Graduate Studies

Washington University in Saint Louis, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

August 2017 – Present

Fellow, Spencer T. & Ann W. Olin Fellowship for Women

Washington University in Saint Louis, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

August 2017 – Present

3MT Competition 1st Place Awardee

Washington University in Saint Louis, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

October 2022

Dissertation Fellow, Tech Impact Network

University of California Los Angeles, Center for Critical Internet Inquiry

May 2022 – August 2022

Graduate Student Awardee

Washington University in St. Louis, The Association of Women Faculty

April 2021

Scholarship Recipient, Gates Millennium Scholars Program

August 2002 – May 2008

Scholarship Recipient, Howard Hughes Research Program

May 2004 – May 2006

Scholarship Recipient, Georgetown University Research Opportunities

August 2003 – May 2006

Scholarship Recipient, International Trucking Company

August 2002 – May 2006

Scholarship Recipient, National Urban League Scholarship

August 2002 – May 2006

RESEARCH INTERESTS

I have theoretical and applied interests in how and why health (mis)information spreads on the internet and how to combat it. I use social network analysis and other statistical approaches to study these areas.

RECENT RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Lead Investigator **January 2019 - present**
Public Health Social

Spearheading projects that use social media data to study health information diffusion.

Collaborator **July 2023 - present**
Pathway to the Professoriate

Collaborating on a series of projects that enrich our understanding of how anti-Black racism affects Black faculty success, identity construction, and well-being by examining discourse among Black faculty on social media.

PI: Renee Cunningham-Williams, PhD, School of Social Work, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ

Collaborator **October 2022 – present**
P4PrEP

Collaborating on a series of papers that examine the influence of health discussant networks on interest in preexposure prophylaxis for HIV prevention in a national sample of Black cisgender women.

PI: Whitney Irie, PhD, School of Social Work, Boston College, Boston, MA

Collaborator **December 2020 – May 2021**
Investigators Connecting Health and Social Media (iCHASM)

Collaborated on a series of projects that leveraged Twitter and Reddit data to study information diffusion and to better understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on vaping and other health behaviors.

PI: Patricia Cavazos-Rehg, PhD, Psychiatry, Washington University, St. Louis, MO

Research Assistant **November 2019 - March 2020**
Analyzing Outcomes for African American Breast Cancer Patients and Caregivers

Facilitated focus group discussions and revised focus group materials for a mixed-methods study that explored the experiences of caregivers of Black women with breast cancer. Co-wrote manuscripts.

PI: Tess Thompson, PhD, MPH, The Brown School, Washington University, St. Louis, MO

Research Assistant **August 2019 - May 2020**
#DiversifyTheSyllabi: Examining the Representation of Female Authors in College Course Readings

Collaboratively designed the study #DiversifyTheSyllabi; collected, sampled, managed, and analyzed data; co-wrote a manuscript.

PIs: Jenine Harris, PhD, MPH & Amy Eyler, PhD, MS, The Brown School, Washington University, St. Louis, MO

Research Assistant **August 2018 - May 2019**
Examining the Relative Penalties for Risk-taking Among Nonprofits Compared to For-profit Firms

Collaborated on study design, analysis, and literature review. Presented findings at conferences and participated in manuscript writing.

PI: Cynthia Cryder, PhD, Olin Business School, Washington University, St. Louis, MO

Research Assistant **August 2017 - May 2018**
Health Communication Research Laboratory

Led and collaborated on multiple analytic projects to better understand the relationship between basic needs and health behaviors like smoking. Participated in manuscript and grant writing.

PI: Matthew Kreuter, PhD, MPH, The Brown School, Washington University, St. Louis, MO

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Health Scientist

May 2014 – October 2017

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Atlanta, GA

*National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
Division of Population Health
Applied Research and Translation Branch
Prevention Research Centers Program*

- Designed, developed, documented, and launched a new system to collect evaluation data.
- Prepared the first analyzable 5-year evaluation dataset in the history of the program.
- Developed and executed comprehensive program evaluation plans.
- Presented research and evaluation findings and applications of innovative research methods to internal and external audiences.
- Reviewed CDC awardees' evaluation plans and provided feedback and technical assistance.
- Served as an objective reviewer for extramural CDC funding opportunity announcements.
- Mentored and supervised fellows and contractors.

Health Research Analyst

August 2010 – May 2014

Northrop Grumman Corporation
Atlanta, GA

*National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
Division of Population Health
Applied Research and Translation Branch
Prevention Research Centers Program*

- Managed evaluation data collection.
- Planned, documented, implemented, and managed an automated data quality assurance process.
- Completed analysis for and dissemination of 38 annual evaluation reports.
- Responded to *ad hoc* data requests from colleagues, CDC leadership, and CDC awardees.
- Provided CDC awardees technical assistance in evaluation methods and evaluation data collection protocols.

*National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention
Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention
Program Evaluation Branch*

- Developed a suite of SAS programs to assess and report the quality of state-level HIV testing data.
- Provided data-driven feedback and technical assistance to 12-15 CDC awardees.
- Managed the production of 59 HIV testing reports.
- Assisted CDC colleagues prepare reports, presentations, and peer-reviewed publications.

Epidemiologist

January 2007 – August 2010

Georgia Department of Community Health
Atlanta, GA

*Division of Public Health
Epidemiology Branch
Georgia Violent Death Reporting System*

- Planned, implemented, and managed surveillance data collection and quality assurance efforts.
- Led analysis for and dissemination of annual surveillance reports.
- Collaborated with demographers to conduct a series of epidemiological studies.
- Presented surveillance and research findings at advisory committee meetings, CDC site-visits, and community stakeholder meetings.
- Responded to *ad hoc* data requests from colleagues, leadership, and other key stakeholders.
- Resolved data gaps by establishing cooperative agreements with 150 medical examiners/coroners.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Statistics Tutor, StatLab

Washington University in St. Louis, The Brown School

August 2019 – May 2023

Lab Instructor, Applied Linear Regression

Washington University in St. Louis, The Brown School

Lead instructor: Shenyang Guo, PhD

January 2021 – May 2021

Lead Instructor, Public Health Seminar I

Washington University in St. Louis, The Brown School

August 2020 – December 2020

Lab Instructor, Applied Linear Regression

Washington University in St. Louis, The Brown School

Lead instructor: Shenyang Guo, PhD

January 2020 – May 2020

Teaching Assistant, Epidemiology

Washington University in St. Louis, The Brown School

Instructor: Angela Hobson, PhD, MPH

August 2019 – December 2019

Lead Instructor, Public Health Seminar II

Washington University in St. Louis, The Brown School

January 2019 – May 2019

Lab Instructor, Applied Linear Regression

Washington University in St. Louis, The Brown School

Lead instructor: Shenyang Guo, PhD

January 2019 – May 2019

Teaching Assistant, Environmental Health

Washington University in St. Louis, The Brown School

Instructor: Christine Ekenga, PhD, MPH

August 2018 - December 2018

Teaching Assistant, Health Behavior and Health Education

Washington University in St. Louis, The Brown School

Instructor: Darrell Hudson, PhD, MPH

June 2018

Teaching Assistant, Introductory Biology

Georgetown University

Instructor: Anne Rosenwald, PhD

August 2004 - May 2006

REFEREED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Croston M. (upcoming 2023, December). *“Black people cannot get coronavirus” and other myths: A social network analysis of COVID-19 misinformation diffusion on Black Twitter*. Will present at the 2023 Promoting Research in Social Media and Health Symposium. San Francisco, California.

Croston M. (2023, June) *The effects of health departments’ ego networks on information diffusion during a public health crisis: Twitter as a case study*. Presented at the International Association of Social Network Analysis’ 2023 Sunbelt Conference. Portland, Oregon.

Croston M. (2022, November) *Twitter’s Birdwatch: A case study of crowd-sourced and community-based fact-checking*. Presented at the Community Informatics Research Network’s annual conference. Prato, Italy.

Croston M., Harris J. (2022, July) *Debunked?: A Comparative Analysis of COVID-19 Vaccine Information Sharing Networks on Twitter*. Presented at the International Association of Social Network Analysis’ 2022 Sunbelt Conference. Cairns, Australia.

Croston M., Harris J. (2022, June) *What’s in a jab?: The spread of COVID-19 vaccine misinformation versus fact-checks on Twitter*. Presented at useR!.

Thompson T., Coats J., **Croston M.**, Motley R., Colditz G., King K., James A. (2020, April) *“I didn’t think about me”: Perspectives on supportive resources for informal caregivers of Black breast cancer patients*. Presented at Society of Behavioral Medicine 42nd Annual Meeting & Scientific Meeting (virtual).

Thompson T., Coats J., **Croston M.**, Motley R., Colditz G., King K., James A. (2020, November) *“I didn’t think about me”: Perspectives on supportive resources for informal caregivers of Black breast cancer patients*. Presented at the Siteman Cancer Center Research Symposium (virtual).

Gershon R., Cryder, C., **Croston M.** (2019, October). *Risky Business: The Risk-Reward Trade-off is Different for Nonprofit and For-profit Firms*. Presented at the annual Association for Consumer Research Conference, Atlanta, Georgia.

Croston M., Gershon R., Cryder, C. (2019, February). *Risky Business: The Risk-Reward Trade-off is Different for Nonprofit and For-profit Firms*. Presented at the annual Society for Consumer Psychology Conference, Savannah, Georgia.

Croston M., Kline J., Bish, C., Lilleston, P., Leeks, K., Massoudi, M. (2016, October). *Evaluating the Associations between Structural and Contextual Characteristics and Productivity among a Network of CDC-funded Prevention Research Centers*. Presented at the annual American Evaluation Association Conference, Atlanta, Georgia.

Kline J., **Croston M., Bish, C., Lilleston, P., Leeks, K., Massoudi, M.** (2016, September). *Evaluating the Associations between Structural and Contextual Characteristics and Productivity among a Network of CDC-funded Prevention Research Centers*. Presented at 2016 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Evaluation Day, Atlanta, Georgia.

Rabarison K., **Croston M.** (2016, June). *How to measure public health Twitter chat participant engagement*. Presented at the annual National Association of City and County Health Officials Annual Conference, Phoenix, Arizona.

Croston M., Rabarison K., Bish C. (2016, June). *Evaluating Participant Engagement during a Public Health Twitter Chat: Insights from #LiveFitNOLA*. Presented at the annual National Association of City and County Health Officials Annual Conference, Phoenix, Arizona.

Croston M., Shaw C., Rabarison K., Bish C., Lebow-Skelley E., Henry D., Massoudi M. (2015, November) *Sandbox Play: Potential impact of PRCs' core research projects & intended core research-related partnerships with health departments within the framework of the CDC's Chronic Disease Domains*. Presented at 143rd Annual American Public Health Association Meeting, Chicago, Illinois.

Croston M., Chandra G., Bish C. (2015, September). *Innovations in Data Collection: Evaluation of the Prevention Research Center Program*. Presented at the 2015 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Evaluation Day, Atlanta, Georgia.

Croston M., Rabarison K., Bish C. (2015, September). *Public Health, Twitter Chats, and Evaluating Participant Engagement: A Case Study*. Presented at the 2015 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Evaluation Day, Atlanta, Georgia.

Croston M., Rabarison K., Bish C. (2015, August). *Public Health, Twitter, and the Big Easy*. Presented at the 2015 National Conference on Health Communication, Marketing, and Media Conference, Atlanta, Georgia.

Croston M. (2014, November). *Weight perception and suicide-related outcomes among high school students who were administered the national Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance survey in 2011*. Presented at 142nd Annual American Public Health Association Meeting, New Orleans, Louisiana.

GUEST LECTURES & INVITED TALKS

Croston M. (2023, March) *Health Misinformation & Social Media: Spotting It + Intervention Approaches*. Guest lectured the course *Social Justice and Social Policy* at University of Arkansas. (virtual)

Croston M., Gershon R., Cryder, C. (2019, March). *Risky Business: The Risk-Reward Trade-off is Different for Nonprofit and For-profit Firms*. Presented at the Spencer T. and Ann W. Olin Fellowship for Women Spring Research Symposium, St. Louis, Missouri.

Croston M. (2017, April). *Program Evaluation, Twitter & Public Health*. Guest lectured the course *Public Health and Society* at Washington University's Brown School, St. Louis, Missouri.

Croston M., Shaw C., Rabarison K., Bish C., Lebow-Skelley E., Henry D., Massoudi M. (2016, January) *An Exploratory Study of CDC's Prevention Research Centers, NCCDPHP's Four Domains, and Partnerships with Local, State, and Tribal Health Departments*. Presented at a CDC/NCCDPHP/DPH Applied Research & Translation Branch Meeting, Atlanta, Georgia.

Croston M., Rabarison K. (2016, June). *Public Health, Twitter Chats, and Evaluating Participant Engagement: A Case Study*. Presented at a CDC/NCCDPHP Division of Population Health Scientific Workgroup meeting, Atlanta, Georgia.

Rabarison K., **Croston M.** (2016, May). *How to measure public health Twitter chat participant engagement*. Presented at a CDC/NCCDPHP Training Workgroup meeting, Atlanta, Georgia.

Croston M. (2015, November). *Program Evaluation, Twitter & Public Health*. Guest lectured the course *Public Health and Society* at Washington University's Brown School, St. Louis, Missouri.

Croston M. (2014, March). *Social Marketing and The Community: An Abbreviated Inventory of Current Research & Practical Methods*. Guest lectured the course *Public Health and Society* at Washington University's Brown School, St. Louis, Missouri.

Croston M. (2011) *Social Media and Public Health: Development of a Unique Tool to Aggregate and Uniquely Showcase Twitter Data*. Presented at the unNiche Digital Health Conference, New York City, New York.

PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL ARTICLES

(under review) Thompson T., Coats J., **Croston M.**, Motley R., Sanders Thompson V., James A., Johnson L. *"We need a little strength as well": Examining the social context of informal caregivers for Black women with breast cancer*. *SSM - Qualitative Research in Health*.

(accepted with revision) Irie W., **Croston M.**, Mahone, A. *The Impact of Providers as Health Discussants on Black Women's Interest in PrEP for HIV Prevention*. *Journal of the International Association of Providers of AIDS Care*.

(accepted with revision) Gershon R., Cryder, C., **Croston M.** *Risky Business: The Risk-Reward Trade-off is Different for Nonprofit and For-profit Firms*. *Journal of Marketing Research*.

Thompson T., Coats, J., **Croston M.**, Motley R., Colditz, G., King, A., James, A. *An exploration of the needs and experiences of informal caregivers for Black breast cancer patients*. *SSM - Qualitative Research in Health*. 2022 December; 2.

Garg R., **Croston M.**, Thompson T., McQueen A., Kreuter M. *Correlates of smoking discarded cigarettes in a sample of low-income adults*. *Addictive Behaviors*. 2022 May; 128: 107237.

Harris J., **Croston M.**, Hutti E., Eyler, A. *Diversify the syllabi: Underrepresentation of female authors in college course reading*. *PLoS ONE*. 2020; 15(10): e0239012.

Thompson T., McQueen A., **Croston M.**, Luke A., Caito N., Quinn K., Funaro J., Kreuter M. *Social Needs and Health-Related Outcomes Among Medicaid Beneficiaries*. *Health Education and Behavior*. 2019: 1-9.

Rabarison K., **Croston M.**, Englar N., Bish C., Flynn, S., Johnson C. *Measuring audience engagement for public health Twitter chats: Insights from #LiveFitNOLA*. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*. 2017; 3: e34.

Hudson D. Kaphingst K., **Croston M.**, Blanchard M., Goodman M. *Estimates of Mental Health Problems in a Vulnerable Population within a Primary Care Setting*. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*. 2016; 27: 308–326.

Fell G., Munson A., **Croston M.**, Rosenwald A. *Identification of Yeast Genes Involved in K^+ Homeostasis: Loss of Membrane Traffic Genes Affects K^+ Uptake*. G3. 2011; 1(1): 43-56.

CURRENT PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

Association of Internet Researchers	July 2022 – present
International Network for Social Network Analysis	April 2022 – present
North American Social Marketing Association	2016 – present
International Social Marketing Association	2016 – present
American Public Health Association	2007 – present

METHODS AND SOFTWARE

QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE METHODS

Linear and Generalized Linear Modeling; Social Network Analysis; Content Analysis; Multilevel and Longitudinal Modeling; Structural Equation Modeling

SELECT SOFTWARE AND PROGRAMS

R, Stata, SAS, NVivo