

Savannah Hammerton

GRADUATE STUDENT, EPIDEMIOLOGY & BIOSTATISTICS

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Personal Statement

When I first applied to the MPH program at UGA, I reflected on my path to finding a career that I could be passionate about and excel in. This path took me in a number of different directions, but when I began my course of study at UGA in Fall 2020, I quickly became certain that I had found the career I had been searching for. I became increasingly interested in learning about epidemiological and biostatistical methods; so much so that I applied for and transferred to the MS program in Epidemiology and Biostatistics. As I have worked in my classes for this degree, I have found that the more I learn, the more I realize I don't know. I have also found that I have a strong desire to learn more and build expertise in this field. To that end, I am applying to the PhD program in Epidemiology and Biostatistics, with a concentration in Epidemiology.

I have particular interest in the epidemiology of infectious diseases, and I have worked to develop expertise in this area during my master's program. I hope to continue this development throughout my doctoral program. I have worked hard to gain experience in infectious disease epidemiology. I am completing the requirements for the Graduate Certificate in Infectious Disease Epidemiology this semester, and am using my master's thesis to focus on infectious disease as well. My thesis is focused on assessing what antibody levels confer protection against norovirus infection, using logistic regression and regularization methods such as LASSO, ridge regression, and elastic net models. I am a member of the Center for the Ecology of Infectious Diseases (CEID) at UGA, and joined with the hope of learning and gaining more experience through my work there, while also putting my existing knowledge and experience to use to advance infectious disease research. I plan to continue this focus in my PhD program. I am fascinated by the One Health approach to studying infectious diseases, and would like to build subject matter expertise in the effects of interactions between humans, non-human animals, and the environment. I would also like to continue building expertise in infectious disease epidemiology and infectious disease dynamics. I aim to study these things through the development of conceptual understanding of the various factors contributing to disease spread, and applying that knowledge to strong epidemiological, biostatistical, and modeling methods.

One of the factors that encouraged me to apply to this program is the crossover of required coursework between the MS and PhD programs. I have been very successful in my courses this Fall, taking many classes that are required for the PhD, including EPID 8010, BIOS 8010, and EPID 8500. My ability to still perform in the upper portion of my classes, even when I am one of only a few master's level students, gives me confidence that I could be successful in the PhD. My interest and enjoyment of these classes and what they teach give me confidence that I will continue to enjoy the coursework in the PhD, which will give me additional motivation to work to perform better than requirements and expectations. I have enjoyed the biostatistics and data analysis/modeling coursework a great deal, but have always felt particularly drawn to epidemiology. This is my reason for choosing epidemiology as my intended concentration. I enjoy approaching new and complex problems within an epidemiological framework, and using that framework to investigate potential causes of and solutions to these problems.