Instructor Information
Lusine Yaghjyan, MD, MPH, PhD
Assistant Professor
2004 Mowry Road, Room 4216
College of Public Health and Health Professions
College of Medicine
University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32610
Email address: lyaghjyan@ufl.edu

Class schedule: Tuesday, 9:35am-12:35pm
Office hours: by appointment

Course Overview
This course covers the theoretical concepts in molecular epidemiology and use of biomarkers in epidemiologic studies. Class topics include: basics of molecular epidemiology, potential uses and limitations of biomarkers, sample collection and storage, issues in epidemiologic study design and analysis, and discussion of specific research examples involving molecular markers.

Prerequisites
Knowledge of basic concepts in epidemiology and study designs: PHC 6001.

Course Objectives
Students will be able to:
1. Describe application of biomarkers in epidemiologic studies, including their strengths and limitations.
2. Identify the criteria used to evaluate a potential biomarker and critically evaluate selected examples.
3. Describe the major problems in collecting, storing and processing various biological samples for human population studies, ethical and legal considerations and principles of quality control for laboratory assays.
4. Critically evaluate application of study designs in molecular epidemiology.
5. Critically evaluate the use of biomarkers as measures of the internal dose of exogenous substances (environmental toxins, micronutrients, etc.).
6. Effectively synthesize & evaluate research to address a specific research question.

Text/Readings
No required text.

Each week there will be one or more required readings that could include information from articles, or book chapters provided by the instructor. When possible, the articles for the class will be posted on Canvas.

Canvas
Canvas is accessible at lss.at.ufl.edu or through my.ufl.edu. You must have a valid Gatorlink ID and password. For assistance, call the UF Help Desk at 392-HELP.

Required: Students will need to log in Canvas and print all electronic files before each class. If materials are not posted in Canvas, we will provide hardcopies in class. Students are responsible for all course material, including required readings prior to each class. Readings will be assigned from historical or current scientific research literature.

Homework
There is no formal exam for this course. However, the students will be required to complete two homework assignments and a final project. All files will need to be submitted electronically.

Homework #1 (10 points): Due by the class start time on the 2nd week. Students will have to select one example of biomarker of external dose, internal dose, biologically active dose, and biological effect and explain why they chose each of the markers. During the class discussion, all students will present their selections and justifications to the class (no PowerPoint!). This homework will count 10% towards the final grade.

Homework #2 (20 points). Due by the class start time on the 6th week. Students need to select one biomarker for the final project and write two-page justification why this is a good candidate biomarker for their final project. They will also need to select the preferred format for the final paper. If format #3 is selected, please provide citations for two selected articles. This homework will count 20% towards the final grade.

Class Participation and in-class paper discussion: Starting from Week 5, each student will be asked to choose one article of their choice that uses biomarkers to investigate associations of interest. The paper will be sent to the instructor by Friday of the preceding week and posted online. The student will briefly present the study and prepare 2-3 questions to lead a 20-30 minute discussion. The questions should focus on various methodological issues pertinent to overall study design, specimen collection, biomarker use, and data analysis/interpretation.

Students will also discuss strengths and limitations of papers assigned by the instructor for group exercise. For this exercise, students will be randomly assigned to “strengths” or “limitations” groups in class. Both groups will have 10-15 minutes to prepare their arguments followed by a brief presentation from each group and discussion. The “strengths” group will also introduce the article by summarizing the key design elements. Students are expected to come prepared for this exercise.

Class participation and in-class discussion will count 10% towards the final grade.
**Final project.** Students will have an opportunity to choose from three possible formats for their final project (40 points total):

**Format #1:** Students will develop a 6-page proposal for a molecular epidemiology study. The proposal will adhere to the following format: introduction; hypothesis/specific aims; research strategy; study limitations. Special attention will be paid to the proper use of Mol Epi terminology and sufficient details on different aspects of the selected biomarker. The paper will be graded based on the clarity of the research question, its justification and supporting literature (10 points); proper design choice and description of the research strategy (population; exclusion/inclusion criteria; sample collection; detailed biomarker measurement, including lab methods (if more than one exist; justification of the method selection); statistical analysis (20 points); proper proposal structure (5 points); critical thinking (5 points). Sample size and power calculations are not required, but additional points will be assigned if discussed.

**Format #2:** (Preferred format) Literature Review: Each student will write a publishable review of the literature on the use of a biomarker(s) in a particular disease/organ system. The manuscript will be prepared according to specifications outlined by the journal to which you intend to submit the manuscript. Using the guidelines of the journal, the literature review will: identify and describe the disease-exposure relationship (5 points); organize information and relate it to the research question you are developing (5 points); synthesize results into a summary of what is and is not known (10 points); identify gaps and controversy in the literature (10 points); use tables and/or figures to graphically represent data (5 points); develop questions for further research (5 points). The journal specifications for a literature review should accompany your paper.

**Format #3:** (Format available for those working in areas with little existing research) The students will select two articles investigating the same marker-disease association but reporting controversial findings. They will write a 6 page paper comparing two investigations and critically summarizing study features that contribute to the differences in findings. Special attention should be paid to the differences in molecular epidemiology methods used by the authors. Simple summary of the two studies or comparison of general design features will not be sufficient. The paper will be graded based on the paper structure and flow (5 points); in-depth comparison of the molecular epidemiology methods (15 points); discussion of the design features that contribute to controversial findings (20 points).

The final project will contribute 40% towards your final grade and will be due by the end of the 15th week.

**Presentations.** Regardless of the chosen format for the final project, each student will present their final work as a 30 minute presentation scheduled during the last two weeks (20 minute talk + 5-10 minute Q&A). Assessment of presentations will be based on organization and flow (3 points), subject knowledge (8 points), visual representation (5 points); style (mechanics, eye contact, etc., 2 points), and Q&A session (2 points). The form used to evaluate the critique will be posted on Canvas prior to presentations. The presentation will contribute 20% towards the final grade.
**Evaluation/Grading**

Grading will be based on attendance and class participation (10%), homework assignments (10% for HW #1 and 20% for HW#2); in-class paper discussion (10%), final paper (40%), and final presentation (20%). There will be no exams.

This course will be graded following the policies described here [http://gradcatalog.ufl.edu/content.php?catoid=4&navoid=907&hl=grades&returnto=search#grades](http://gradcatalog.ufl.edu/content.php?catoid=4&navoid=907&hl=grades&returnto=search#grades)

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<th>Percentage or points earned in class</th>
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<th>90% - 92%</th>
<th>87% - 89%</th>
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**Non-Punitive Grades and Symbols:**

Zero Grade Points Not Counted in GPA

- **W** = Withdrew
- **U** = Unsatisfactory
- **H** = Deferred grade assigned only in approved sequential courses or correspondence study
- **N*** = No grade reported
- **I*** = Incomplete

**Failing Grades:**

Zero Grade Points Counted in GPA

- **E** = Failure
- **WF** = Withdrew failing

**Policy Related to Class Attendance and Make-up Work**

This is an interactive class and students are expected to be present and to participate in all class sessions. Students who know they will need to miss a class session should discuss this with the instructor prior to the date of the class, or on the day of the absence for illness or emergency. According to the UF Catalog (link below) “In general, acceptable reasons for absences from class include illness, serious family emergencies, special curricular requirements, military obligation, severe weather conditions, religious holidays, and participation in official University activities. Absences from class for court-imposed legal obligations (e.g., jury duty or subpoena) must be excused. Other reasons also may be approved.” For more information on UF’s attendance policy, visit [https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx](https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx).
Make-up work will be allowed by the course instructor on an individual basis after an excused absence (see above). Students should consult with the professor for new deadlines for assignments. Please consult the university guidelines for more information on makeup policies: https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx.

Statement of University’s Honesty Policy
University of Florida Academic Honesty Statements
Students and faculty will adhere to the following policies for academic honesty and honor.

“I understand that the University of Florida expects its students to be honest in all their academic work. I agree and adhere to this commitment to academic honesty and understand that my failure to comply with this commitment may result in disciplinary action up to and including expulsion from the University.”

“All faculty, staff and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against University policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate.”

“We, the members of the University of Florida, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.”

For more information regarding UF’s policy on Academic Honesty, please visit http://gradcatalog.ufl.edu/content.php?catoid=4&navoid=907&hl=grades&returnto=search#Academic_Honesty
For details on how suspected honor code violations will be handled, please refer to http://regulations.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/4042.pdf

Citations and Plagiarism
The two key purposes of citation are to: 1) give appropriate credit to the authors of information, research findings, and/or ideas (and avoid plagiarism), and 2) facilitate access by your readers to the sources you use in your research.

Quotations: When directly quoting an outside source, the borrowed text, regardless of the amount, must be surrounded by quotation marks or block quoted. Quoted text over two lines in length should be single-spaced and indented beyond the normal margins. Every quote must include a source—the author, title, volume, page numbers, etc.—whether an internal reference, footnote, or endnote is used in conjunction with a bibliography page.

Paraphrasing or Citing an Idea: When summarizing an outside source in your own words or citing another person’s ideas, quotation marks are not necessary, but the source must be included. This includes, but is not confined to, personal communications from other students, faculty members, experts in the field, summarized ideas from published or unpublished resource, and primary methods derived from published or unpublished sources. Use the general concept of “when in doubt – cite.”

Plagiarism is a serious violation of the academic honesty policy of the College. If a student plagiarizes others’ material or ideas, UF Policies on Honesty and honor code violations, noted above, will be followed.
Generally speaking, the three keys of acceptable citation practice are: 1) thoroughness, 2) accuracy, and 3) consistency. In other words, be sure to fully cite all sources used (thoroughness), be accurate in the citation information provided, and be consistent in the citation style you adopt. All references should include the following elements: 1) last names along with first and middle initials; 2) full title of reference; 3) name of journal or book; 4) publication city, publisher, volume, and date; and 5) page numbers referenced. When citing information from the Internet, include the WWW address at the end, with the “access date” (i.e., when you obtained the information), just as you would list the document number and date for all public documents. When citing ideas or words from an individual that are not published, you can write “personal communication” along with the person’s name and date of communication.

**Statement Related to Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

If you require classroom accommodation because of a disability, you must first register with the Dean of Students Office (http://www.dso.ufl.edu/). The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to you, which you then give to the instructor when requesting accommodation. The College is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to assist students in their coursework.

**Counseling and Student Health**

Students may occasionally have personal issues that arise in the course of pursuing higher education or that may interfere with their academic performance. If you find yourself facing problems affecting your coursework, you are encouraged to talk with an instructor and to seek confidential assistance at the UF Counseling & Wellness Center, 352-392-1575. Visit their web site for more information: http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/. They are located on campus at 3190 Radio Road and are open from 8 am to 5 pm Monday through Friday. You can also get emergency walk-in crisis stabilization at the Counseling and Wellness Center's (CERC) on-campus "Crisis and Emergency Response Center" in Peabody Hall.

The Student Health Care Center at Shands is a satellite clinic of the main Student Health Care Center located on Fletcher Drive on campus. Student Health at Shands offers a variety of clinical services, including primary care, women's health care, immunizations, mental health care, and pharmacy services. The clinic is located on the second floor of the Dental Tower in the Health Science Center. For more information, contact the clinic at 352-294-5700 or check out the web site at: www.health.ufl.edu/shcc.

Crisis intervention is always available 24/7 from Alachua County Crisis Center: (352) 264-6789. http://www.alachuacounty.us/DEPTS/CSS/CRISISCENTER/Pages/CrisisCenter.aspx

BUT – Do not wait until you reach a crisis to come in and talk with us. We have helped many students through stressful situations impacting their academic performance. You are not alone, so do not be afraid to ask for assistance.

**Online Course Evaluation**

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at https://evaluations.ufl.edu. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when
they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/.
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<td>Week 5 09/19/17</td>
<td>UF CTSI Biorepository tour</td>
<td>The class will be meeting with biorepository staff at <strong>10:00am in M-621 MSB (6th floor of Medical Science Building)</strong>. Please make sure to be on time.</td>
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* Sisti et al., Caffeine, coffee, and tea intake and urinary estrogens and estrogen metabolites in premenopausal women. CEBP 2015; 24(8):1174-83 |             |             |
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| Week 9 10/17/17 | Intermediate review of student final project topics  
Planning and executing a molecular epi study: practice example  
Meertens et al. The Course of Skin and Serum Biomarkers of Advanced Glycation Endproducts and Its Association with Oxidative Stress, Inflammation, Disease Severity, and Mortality during ICU Admission in Critically Ill Patients: Results from a Prospective Pilot Study. PloS one 2016, 11(8):e0160893. |             |             |
| Week 10 10/24/17 | Special topics:  
Biomarkers of drug abuse  
Biomarkers of kidney and liver damage  
Paper discussion *  
Student-lead paper discussion - Sheldon | Gjerde et al. Using biological samples in epidemiological research on drugs of abuse. Norwegian Journal of Epidemiology 2011; 21(1)  
| Week 11 10/31/17 | Special topics:  
Biomarkers of dietary intake and interventions  
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