



Academic Health Department Advisory Committee (AHDAC)

Purpose: The AHDAC helps guide the strategic direction of the Tennessee Department of Health's Academic Health Department in service to academic institutions, students, and the public health workforce including advisement on programming, goals, objectives, and sustainability. The AHDAC is composed of 11 faculty members representing public health programs at 11 Tennessee institutions of higher learning.

2025 – 2026 Committee Members

Amir Alakaam, PhD, MS, RDN, LDN, MBChB.....University of Tennessee, Chattanooga
MPH Program Director, Associate Professor

Taylor Dula, DrPH, MPH.....East Tennessee State University
Assistant Dean for Student Services, Academic Coordinator for Public Health

Julie Grubaugh, MPH, MCHES.....University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Undergraduate Program Director

Garret Harper, PhD, MPH.....Trevecca Nazarene University
Master of Public Health Program, Skinner School of Business

William (Brad) Hawkins, PhD, MPH.....Vanderbilt University
Master of Public Health Practicum Director

Ilias Kavouras, PhD.....University of Memphis
Assistant Dean, Academic Affairs, School of Public Health

Miranda Sanford Terry, PhD, ACUE.....Tennessee State University
Director, Public Health Programs

Heather Tillewein, PhD, CHES.....Austin Peay State University
Professor

Lesia D. Walker, MPH, BS.....Meharry Medical College
Instructor, School of Global Health

Christian Williams, DrPH, MPH.....Belmont University
Chair, Department of Public Health, Director – CARES

Bethany Wrye, PhD.....Middle Tennessee State University
Chair, Department of Health and Human Performance

Amir Alakaam, PhD, MS, RDN, LDN, MBChB.....University of Tennessee, Chattanooga
MPH Program Director, Associate Professor



Dr. Amir Alakaam is the MPH Program Director and Associate Professor UTC Department of Health and Human Performance. Dr. Alakaam has over six years of clinical experience as a Medical Doctor in family medicine and general surgery, and about eight years of teaching and research experience in nutrition and public health. He holds a PhD in Nutrition and Food Systems from the University of Southern Mississippi, an MS in Nutrition and Dietetics from Marywood University in Pennsylvania, and an MBChB in Medicine and General Surgery from the University of Baghdad. He is also a Fulbright Scholar (2010) and Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (2019-present).

Prior to coming to UTC, he was as Assistant Professor at the University of North Dakota (2016-2019), and a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Southern Mississippi (2015-2016). His research interests focus on using the concepts of the Socio-Ecological Model to address health and nutrition needs of marginal populations. He is also interested in the research related to breastfeeding's policies and practices in the U.S. and eating habits of international students and immigrants in the U.S. Currently, he is working on research related to breastfeeding that aims to identify breastfeeding needs and determinants in Tennessee.

Dr. Alakaam is also heavily involved in local community organizations. He is currently serving as a member of board of directors of Chattanooga Food Center, and he is the current Awards and Scholarship Chair and the upcoming President for Chattanooga Academy of Nutrition. As the MPH Program Director, Dr. Alakaam is aiming to develop a multicultural scholars' program, aims to address the workforce deficit in underrepresented populations by increasing the number of students and graduates from these communities.

Taylor Dula, DrPH, MPH.....East Tennessee State University
Assistant Dean for Student Services, Academic Coordinator for Public Health



Dr. Taylor Dula has been with ETSU College of Public Health for 14 years in several roles. For the past 5 years, she has served as the Assistant Dean of Student Services in the College of Public Health at ETSU and oversees the Office of Student Services. That office provides academic advising, career counseling support, and student support services, promotes professional development opportunities, and coordinates field internships and MOUs. She was formerly an academic advisor both prior to and during her role as Assistant Dean but no longer provide direct advisement. She is also the Director of the TN Public Health Training Center, formerly LIFEPAH, which provides training to the public health workforce across Tennessee and the region.

Dr. Dula is a faculty member in the Department of Community and Behavioral Health and her educational background is in Public Health – Community Health.

Julie Grubaugh, MPH, MCHES.....University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Undergraduate Program Director



Julie Grubaugh, MPH, MCHES®, helped establish UT's Bachelor of Science in Public Health (BSPH) program in fall 2022. She directs the BSPH program and the public health minor and has contributed to two successful CEPH re-accreditation self-study reports and site visits.

Julie teaches the Introduction to Public Health (PUBH 201) course at the University of Tennessee, serving over 1,600 undergraduates annually. Her students create Public Service Announcement (PSA) videos on pressing public health issues. She incorporates Generative AI literacy and use into teaching to help students learn to leverage AI tools effectively and ethically.

From 2011-2020, Julie managed UT's Master of Public Health student internships, with nearly half of the students receiving paid internships and over 30% being directly hired upon graduation. She established workshops, networking opportunities, and a private LinkedIn group for MPH students and alumni to connect with potential mentors and employers.

Julie also facilitates networking, skill-building, and resume-building experiences at Knox County Health Department (KCHD) as part of UT-Knox County's Academic Health Department (AHD). From 2011 to 2018, she worked in a joint position with KCHD and UT Department of Public Health, resulting in student learning experiences, workforce development, and activities supporting health department accreditation (PHAB)

Garret Harper, PhD, MPH.....Trevecca Nazarene University
Master of Public Health Program, Skinner School of Business



As evidenced by his seven graduate degrees, Dr. Harper is the epitome of a life-long learner. He has taught at the university level for over 25 years in a variety of disciplines. In addition to being a full-time professor at Trevecca, Dr. Harper has taught as an adjunct professor at a number of other institutions including Middle Tennessee State University, Tennessee State University, Meharry Medical College, and the University of Nevada.

Dr. Harper is the Lead Strategy and Data Analyst for the Nashville Metropolitan Department of Social Services and previously served as the Vice President for Research for the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce.

William Bradley (Brad) Hawkins, PhD, MPH.....Vanderbilt University
Master of Public Health Program Director



W. Bradley Hawkins is the Practicum Director for the Vanderbilt University MPH program. Dr. Hawkins received his PhD and MPH from Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. His research interests have been focused on assessing and to characterizing environmental parameters that contribute to chronic exposures in communities while addressing population health to decrease exposures to environmental hazards. Serving as a Fulbright Scholar (2012-13) to Suriname, he coordinated and instructed the Anton de Kom University of Suriname's Master of Public Health (MPH) program along with managing joint NIH research projects between Tulane and Suriname.

Ilias Kavouras, PhD.....University of Memphis
Assistant Dean, Academic Affairs, School of Public Health



Ilias Kavouras, PhD, is Professor and Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs at the University of Memphis School of Public Health. His research aims to address the interplay between environment and human health with emphasis on atmospheric quality, climate, and built environment through environmental monitoring, cohort studies, geospatial modeling. The development of new novel sampling and laboratory analytical methods is integral to the efforts to better understand exposures, disease and susceptibility markers. He published more than 100 peer-review publications including one in Nature. His research has been sponsored by international, federal, state and local agencies.

Dr. Kavouras teaching portfolio include fundamental and advanced courses in Climate Change and Human Health, Public Health Emergency Preparedness, Exposure and Toxicology. He mentored post-doctoral fellow, doctoral students, graduate, graduate and high school students with exceptional career trajectories. Dr. Kavouras is the Editor-in-Chief of Atmosphere.

Miranda Sanford Terry, PhD, ACUE.....Tennessee State University
Director, Public Health Programs



Dr. Miranda Sue Terry earned her PhD in Community Health, specializing in Disability Studies at University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. She is the director of Public Health Programs and an associate professor at Tennessee State University. She previously served as the chair of the Department of Applied Health Sciences, Public and Community Health Program Director, and associate professor at Murray State University in Kentucky.

Her research interests are diverse, spanning Disability Studies, Gender and Women's Studies, and Public Health. Her overall research objective is to improve the rights and lives of people with disabilities as well as addressing health disparities. Dr. Terry serves on the board of Trust Yourself, Inc. (TN). Dr. Terry previously served on the board of the Kentucky Public Health Association and has served on boards of several community organizations, such as CASA by the Lakes (KY) and Purchase Area Sexual Assault and Child Advocacy Center (KY). Dr. Terry was elected to serve as a school board member of Murray Independent School District (KY) in 2018. She has been a consultant with the Marshall County Health Department in rural Western Kentucky since 2021, assisting with the community health assessment process and providing data analytic services.

She has been recognized for her work with vulnerable populations, through both her service and research, by being honored with awards, such as the Paul Mason Award by the Kentucky Public Health Association in April 2019, Rotarian of the Year by the Rotary Club of Murray in 2018, and Murray State University School of Nursing and Health Professions Outstanding Researcher Award in 2017.

Heather Tillewein, PhD, CHES.....Austin Peay State University
Professor



Dr. Tillewein is on the Executive Committee, Policy Committee, and serves as Communication's Chair for the LGBTQ Health Caucus for the American Public Health Association. She also serves as Director for Special Editions and Associate Editor for the HPHR Journal (formerly known as the Harvard Public Health Review). Dr. Tillewein is active as Director of Membership for the Boston Congress of Public Health. Also, she has held a Harvard Fellowship with the H.T. Chan School of Public Health where she wrote blogs for the Harvard Public Health Review. She is involved with several projects with the SIU School of Medicine under the RuralHarmony Project. Dr. Tillewein also actively researches with the Kinsey Institute on several projects. Recently, Dr. Tillewein is also project leader for the NIH/NIDA grant, Ending Transmission of HIV, HCV, and STDs and Overdose in Rural Communities of People who Inject Drugs (ETHIC).

Lesia D. Walker, MPH, BS.....Meharry Medical College
Instructor, School of Global Health



Lesia D. Walker is a seasoned public health and healthcare professional with over 25 years of diverse experience, including 15 years in managerial and supervisory roles. Her expertise spans program and project management, grant administration, financial oversight, compliance, and quality improvement. With a passion for health equity and eliminating disparities, Lesia has successfully led initiatives in both public and private sectors.

As a Regional Coordinator with the CDC Foundation, Lesia provided leadership to field staff during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring public health systems' resilience across multiple states. Her tenure at Meharry Medical College showcased her ability to design and manage federal programs, foster strategic partnerships, and develop interdisciplinary education initiatives.

Lesia's career highlights include serving as Chief Operating Officer at Street Works, Inc., where she managed a \$1.2 million budget and spearheaded strategic planning, and as Director for the Tennessee Department of Health's Division of Minority Health, where she led statewide efforts to address health disparities.

In addition to her professional roles, Lesia has worked as an independent consultant and grant writer, leveraging her analytical and strategic planning skills to secure funding and enhance organizational performance. She holds a Master of Public Health from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and a Bachelor of Science in Medical Technology from the University of Tennessee Health Science Center.

Lesia's leadership philosophy centers on collaboration, innovation, and impact. She is dedicated to advancing public health, improving health outcomes, and fostering equitable healthcare access for all communities.

Christian Williams, DrPH, MPH.....Belmont University
Chair, Department of Public Health, Director – CARES



Christian L. Williams, DrPH, MPH, has served as the founding Chair and Assistant Professor of the Department of Public Health at Belmont University since August 2017. In this role, she teaches across the curriculum, coordinates fieldwork experiences for students, and oversees all administrative functions in the department. In addition to her work at Belmont, she is recognized as an Honorary Lecturer at Queen's University in Belfast, where she frequently lectures in the College of Nursing and Midwifery, specializing in topics such as public health, population health, community health, and healthcare systems. Dr. Williams' consults as an Epidemiologist I at the Tennessee Department of Health, evaluating a CDC-funded grant aimed at reducing Alzheimer's and Dementia in the state.

Dr. Williams previously served as the Public Health Competency Coordinator for the Tennessee Department of Health (TDH) where she developed learning opportunities for over 3,000 employees, coordinated internships and volunteer processes, and established a Commissioner's Fellowship in Public Health. Dr. Williams also initiated the development of a state-level academic health department model, fostering collaboration between the Department and accredited public health programs in Tennessee.

Prior to coming to TDH, Dr. Williams contributed as a Visiting Assistant Professor at Western Kentucky University, teaching health care administration courses and facilitating community health forums for the Lost River District Health Department. As the Academic Health Department Coordinator at Sullivan County Regional Health Department, she launched the development of the Sullivan County Community Health Status Assessment and coordinated projects between ETSU College of Public Health and Sullivan County Regional Health Department.

Dr. Williams earned her DrPH in Community Health and MPH in Health Services Administration from the College of Public Health at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, Tennessee.

Bethany Wrye, PhD.....Middle Tennessee State University
Chair, Department of Health and Human Performance



Dr. Bethany Wrye, Ph.D, MCHES, is an Associate Professor at Middle Tennessee State University, where she serves as the Interim Chair for the Department of Health and Human Performance. She holds a B.A. in both Biology and Spanish from Lipscomb University, a M.S. in Experimental Psychology (2006), and a Ph.D. in Health and Human Performance (2011), both from Middle Tennessee State University. Prior to MTSU, she held faculty positions at both Belmont University and Tennessee State University.

Currently, she serves as the President for the Middle Tennessee Fund for Women and Girls. Previously, she served as the Chair of Tennessee Public Health Association's Academics Section, on the Health Education School Health Advisory Committee for the state of Tennessee, on the United Way Healthy Behaviors Vision Council, and the Program Vice President for the Murfreesboro chapter of the American Association of University Women.

In addition to being committed to supporting students in their own research interests, Dr. Wrye's scholarly focus is two pronged. Firstly, she is interested in the use of technology and student engagement to improve pedagogy. Additionally, she is interested in exploring the relationship between moral disengagement and adverse childhood experiences. She has published in peer reviewed journals on both topics and presented research at several national conferences, including American Public Health Association and the Lilly Conference on College Teaching.

Dr. Wrye is experienced in leading professional development initiatives, including a Professional Learning Community centered on the implementation of MT Engage, MTSU's Quality Enhancement Plan; and a Faculty Learning Community aimed at increasing sense of community among graduate students enrolled in online courses. Current grant funded projects include developing online workforce development modules for the Tennessee Department of Health and measuring stigma of substance misuse among health care providers.