EPIC Fund in the Department of Epidemiology

WHAT
The EPIC Fund was created to provide our graduate students with an opportunity to access resources to help advance their educational agenda, using the revenue generated by the Epidemiology and Population Health Summer Institute at Columbia University (EPIC).

WHY
The EPIC Fund is a funding source for Department trainees pursuing research and training opportunities beyond those covered by their standard tuition. Examples of potential uses for the EPIC fund include but are not limited to:

- **Travel** for conferences; priority will be given to trainees who are presenting findings at professional meetings.
- **Purchase** of e-books, datasets, or samples for a study.
- **Tuition** for specific training needs, such as short courses, workshops, and training in software packages or lab techniques.
- **Research** related items that will contribute to the trainees’ research (for example, data collection).

The EPIC fund will not fund trainee tuition for their ongoing degree programs or living expenses.

WHO
All master’s, doctoral, or post-doctoral trainees enrolled in a degree program in the Department of Epidemiology are eligible.

All things being equal, priority for funds will be given to students who have demonstrated active engagement in the Department, particularly in attendance at Department Seminars and CUEGRs.

HOW
Students seeking funding will complete a brief one-page application, providing the following information:

- **Description**, including, as applicable, date(s), location.
- **Cost**, including, as applicable, a detailed listing of each element. It is anticipated that applications will be for amounts less than $2,500 for any one project. Lump sum costs without explanation will not be considered. Projects for higher amounts may be considered in exceptional circumstances.
- **Rationale**, as in, why this conference/dataset/class is vital to the student’s education and research goals.
- **Brief description** of other funding avenues the student has pursued prior to, or concomitantly with, seeking EPIC Funds.
- **A clear explanation** of how all costs requested will be spent.

All things being equal, priority for funding will be given to students who demonstrate that they have exhausted all other available avenues of funding.

All applications should be submitted to Ms. Liliane Zaretsky (lz3@columbia.edu).

A committee made up of the Department Chair and other senior faculty will adjudicate applications.

WHEN
There are three EPIC funding cycles: applications will be accepted on January 30, May 30, and September 30 each year. Applicants will be notified of the committee’s decision within a month of the request. Applicants who are funded will be reimbursed, an amount up to the award amount, upon conclusion of the event and after applicant has submitted (a) all receipts and (b) a brief summary of how the EPIC Fund award was used.
Excerpts from letters of recent EPIC Fund recipients

I attended the European Professional Association for Transgender Health in Ghent, Belgium from March 12–14, 2015. My abstract “Reforming transgender health care delivery at the international level through the informed consent model” had been accepted as a workshop for Friday 13th, 2015. Approximately 60 people attended, which was well over the usual number for a workshop. Participants ranged from activists and legal analysts, to physicians, surgeons and community members. The reason that it was so well attended was because the informed consent model is not yet used in Europe. Transgender individuals in most European countries must follow rigid criteria in order to change their sex assigned at birth (transition), including hormones and genital surgeries. They are subject to enforced sterilization and mandated divorce from their legal spouses in order to have their new identity recognized. This is currently being debated at the UN as a human rights violation.

As a result of attending this meeting, I was invited by the WHO to assist with developing a tool to improve treatment and care of HIV-infected transgender women in international settings.

Anita Radix, PhD candidate

Thank you very much for your financial assistance for my attendance to the 2014 IEA World Congress of Epidemiology in Anchorage, Alaska. The Congress was an amazing experience for me professionally. This experience allowed me to meet and connect with a variety of epidemiology professionals from around the world. Not only is this ideal for my career pursuits, as I am thoroughly enthused and committed to the field of global public health, it gave me even greater enthusiasm for the work and mission I am striving to pursue in my future career in public health.

Lauren Arnesen, MPH 2015

My experience at the American Heart Association’s International Stroke Conference was an eye-opening experience. To witness researchers interacting and learning from each other, in some cases even giving each other ideas was fascinating. I arrived the day prior to my presentation and enjoyed the electric atmosphere as researchers discussed the Mr. Clean follow up study which was published 2 months prior. I then attended a few sessions regarding stroke in women and throughout hearing the speakers discuss areas of interest in this field I jotted down a few analyses that I thought would be great opportunities for me to look into in my own dataset.

The morning of my presentation went great, I listened to other presentations evaluating quality measures for stroke care and after my presentation, I was given wonderful insight by both the moderators and fellow researchers. One researcher, whose work is cited in my manuscript, approached me to give me advice on future directives to address in my analysis. I have never seen this side of research before, a supportive community where scientists and physicians came from all over the globe to discuss the future of stroke research has been an invaluable milestone in my professional development.

Hajere Gatollari, MPH 2015
The award that I obtained allowed me to attend the annual conference of the CDC’s Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS) conference in Atlanta from April 20–23, 2015. Attending the conference was valuable to me for many reasons. First, attending this conference allowed me to meet numerous current EIS officers, including 2 recent Columbia PhD alums. I was able to hear firsthand about the important work that they are currently involved with around the globe as part of their fellowship training. I was able to learn about their perspectives on public health topics, given their unique experiences, as well as direct accounts about the epidemiologic activities that the CDC is involved in. I was also able to meet individually with current EIS officers and talk with them about their diverse backgrounds and experiences. I was also able to meet with the directors of the EIS program and learn about their visions for the program. I was able to learn from them about how I can maximize my preparation for the program, as well as to ensure that my interests continue to align with the goals that they have for the program. Through these interactions, I think that the people who I met from the CDC were able to learn more about me and the unique set of experiences and skills that I have to offer as a future applicant. After attending the EIS conference, I have confirmed that this is my top choice as a postdoctoral program. I am very grateful to the EPIC fund for making it financially possible to attend the conference and I strongly believe that I was able to advance my educational and professional agenda through this possibility.

Justin Knox, PhD candidate

The moment I arrived at the Annual Meeting for the Society for the Study of Psychiatry and Culture in Providence, RI, I knew that it would be a special experience. The theme was “Culture and Global Mental Health,” my particular topic of interest and one of the reasons that I came to the Mailman School of Public Health. To be able to hear presentations by experts in this niche field, to expand my professional network, and to present my own work to everyone from fellow trainees to the Director of Global Health at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) was an incredible experience.

Sang-Hee Min, MPH 2015
My EPIC fund award supported the purchase of the Kid’s Inpatient Database from the Healthcare Costs and Utilization Project (KID-HCUP) needed for my master’s thesis. The KID-HCUP is the largest all-payer inpatient database in the United States and therefore, will draw insightful epidemiological findings on the health of American adolescents.

The purpose of my thesis is to study racial/ethnic disparities among diabetic adolescents in the US, by region and by payer. I am currently working alongside an epidemiology faculty member who serves as my first reader to analyze the variables of interest within the dataset in the goal of publishing a manuscript. This valuable experience is applying the epidemiological skills that I have gained over my graduate studies, thereby putting into use my statistical analysis abilities as well as challenging my SAS programming skills. This project has also pushed me to learn beyond classroom material by helping me recognize and fill certain gaps in knowledge. For instance, familiarizing myself with the Poisson Regression model as compared to utilizing the conventional methods learned in class such as linear and logistic regression models. I believe learning how to manipulate this dataset is good practice for future projects either in academia or in the healthcare industry.

Jennifer Phan, MPH 2015

My EPIC fund award supported my poster presentation at the 2014 National STD Prevention Conference in Atlanta, GA from June 9–12.

After my abstract titled “Survey of health care providers serving men who has sex with men suggests suboptimal gonorrhea diagnosis and management practice, New York City, 2012” was accepted for a poster presentation, I was contacted by a press agency who was interested in my abstract. I gained valuable experience in preparing a press palette and learning to focus a scientific research message for press consumption.

My most valuable experience at the conference was the poster session at which I presented my research. I met and talked with many conference delegates and explained the main take home messages from my research. I learned most from my interactions with the others who were presenting at the poster session. I talked with a recent Epidemiology PhD graduate who worked as an EIS office at the CDC in Atlanta.

Sheila Vaidya, PhD candidate
EPIC Fund Application

Instructions
Applications deadlines: September 30, January 30, May 30

Submit completed application to Liliane Zaretsky, Associate Director for Academic Programs (lz3@columbia.edu).

Add extra lines as necessary. Make sure the total amount requested is in **bold** or otherwise highlighted. Applicants are encouraged to use additional pages as necessary to justify why this opportunity is congruent with their educational and/or research goals. Please ensure that you attach relevant documentation (for example, if you are presenting an abstract, attach the abstract as well as evidence that it has been accepted to the conference). You are welcome to attach other supplementary material that the Committee may find helpful in their deliberations.

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Please describe briefly the other funding avenues you have pursued prior to applying to the EPIC Fund.