

# UNIVERSITY OF GHANA CENTRE FOR EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS AND POLICY (UGCESP) AND THE AFRICAN COMMUNITIES OF EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS AND TRANSLATION (ACEST)



## COURSE: SYSTEMATIC REVIEW COURSE

13<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> July 2020, via zoom

### RATIONALE

Instinctively, every doctor wants to choose the treatment that will lead to the best possible outcome for the patient. The scientific community also wants to avoid redundant research that misleads and wastes the available resource and funding for relevant research. Wastage is of particular concern in Low and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) where funds for research is limited. In developed countries, systematically synthesized evidence is used to inform all major policy decisions, even when planning new research. Increasingly, healthcare providers, patients and policymakers in LMICs are looking for quality evidence to inform their decisions and choices. Still, the capacity to undertake rigorous or evidence-based research is less developed. At best, providers and decision-makers in LMICs are forced to rely on evidence generated in developed countries that does not necessarily fit their setting, situation or context. The past 2-3 decades have seen a paradigm shift in scientific research, and systematic review, when well-conducted, has emerged as the model scientific approach for producing the best ('gold standard') evidence upon which sound decisions and policies should be based. The growing application of systematic review methods underscores the need for all scientists involved in designing and carrying out research studies, implementing or evaluating strategies to improve health outcomes, particularly postgraduate students, to have adequate knowledge in systematic reviews in response to the shifting paradigm in research methods and approaches. However, despite its value and demand, the capacity to undertake a systematic review or evidence-based research is virtually absent or less developed in LMICs, particularly sub-Saharan Africa.

The current COVID-19 pandemic has not only changed the global academic calendar but also stirred the scientific community, as never before, in the way we do research. Now, attention has moved swiftly towards rapid systematic reviews. In most research-intensive universities where students used to engage in face-to-face data collection, this is no longer feasible because of measures to avoid the spread of COVID-19. The implications are far-fetched for postgraduate students who need to write a thesis as a requirement for finishing their programmes and rely on primary studies. A systematic review is secondary research that does not require face-to-face data collection or ethical approval.

Given the gravity of the problem the university, supervisors and students are facing at the moment, the University of Ghana Centre for Evidence Synthesis and Policy (UGCESP) and the African Communities of Evidence Synthesis and Translation (ACEST) are jointly organizing Systematic Review course for final year students who are interested in doing secondary research for their thesis work or want to sharpen their research skills. Also, lecturers who would like to gain this knowledge to help their students to do a systematic review, are encouraged to register. Undoubtedly, the course will equip you with the essential skills and knowledge on the theoretical foundations and 'gold standard' approaches you need as a scientist. The knowledge and skills you acquire will also enable you to differentiate yourself as a research scientist and stay competitive in the ever-increasing complex and competitive global scientific ecosystem. With changes in the University's academic calendar, now moving thesis submission date up until December 2020, this provides ample time and an excellent opportunity to learn and do a systematic review. This workshop is a rare opportunity, and for some of you, this will be a defining moment in your career path!

## COURSE OUTLINE

The course comprises both theory and hands-on activities and will be delivered using theory-grounded and problem-based learning approaches. It will teach participants the theoretical foundations and strategies and methods to produce gold-standard evidence, and the practical skills needed to conduct secondary research. Additionally, participants will be introduced to the value of systematic reviews and how to formulate an appropriate review question, followed by hands-on exercises including how to develop search terms and build search concepts to search relevant electronic databases such as PubMed (MEDLINE) and EMBASE to retrieve studies, emphasizing on the practicalities often encountered. Participants will also be introduced to standard software that are used for preparing and reporting a systematic review.

## TARGET PARTICIPANTS

Masters students (MPH, MSc, MPhil, etc.) conducting theses. Also, anyone involved in designing or carrying out research, implementing or evaluating strategies for societal good, can register to attend. The course is particularly important for lecturers who want to gain further knowledge and skills to help their students to do secondary research for their thesis.

## ANTICIPATED IMPACT OF THE WORKSHOP

Participants of the course will acquire new and essential skills that, undoubtedly, will change their passion and attitude towards scientific research. For some, this may be a career-defining moment. Given that almost every systematic review ends up being published, it offers participants additional opportunity to get a published paper from their thesis. As part of the systematic review guidelines, various tools are available to guide participants who want to publish their work without too much work to be done after the thesis submission. The certificate awarded to participants will also be beneficial in future career search.

## FACILITATORS

Experts with long-standing experience in Systematic Review and Meta-analysis (Evidence Synthesis and Translation from the University of Ghana Centre for Evidence Synthesis and Policy (UGCESP) and the African Communities of Evidence Synthesis and Translation (ACEST) will deliver this course.

## LOCATION

The course will be delivered via zoom, so participants do not have to come to the UGCESP or ACEST.

## FEES

Considerable reduction from over **USD1,000 to USD100** (or Ghana cedis equivalent at the prevailing rate at the time of registration) to make it affordable to every student who wants to attend. This course is highly sought-after with limited slots that fill up fast; therefore, participants will be selected on a first-come, first-serve basis. Mode and options of payment are stated on the online application form (see link below).

## CERTIFICATE

Certificates will be issued to participants who successfully register and complete the course.

## IMPORTANT DATES

**Workshop dates:** 13<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> July 2020, 09.00-15.00 GMT each day

**Deadline for submission of application forms:** Friday 10<sup>th</sup> July 2020, 23.00 GMT

**Notification to successful applicants:** Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2020

**Acknowledgement of acceptance by applicants:** 12<sup>th</sup> July 2020, 23.00 GMT

**Online Registration link** <https://forms.gle/qYQPvkeYdeVbZPfv8>