

SOCIOLOGY 1020.03
CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL ISSUES: HEALTH AND SOCIETY
FALL 2020
MWF: 8:00-8:50 AM (ONLINE)

Professor: Dr. Rachel Donnelly
Office Hours: Wednesday, 12-2 pm
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides students with an introduction to health and illness from a sociological perspective. In this course, we will unpack the social causes of health and illness, as well as inequalities in health in the United States population. Guided by a sociological lens, this course will cover current health outcomes in the U.S., disparate experiences of health and illness by various social groups, and contemporary topics in health (e.g., the opioid epidemic). Throughout the semester, we will consider how the COVID-19 pandemic relates to class material. This course will primarily cover health and illness in the United States, although we will spend some time comparing the United States to other high-income countries.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Recognize and explain how social factors shape health and well-being in the population.
2. Identify, assess, and discuss inequalities in health and illness by race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation.
3. Analyze and critique contemporary social issues related to health and well-being in the United States.

ONLINE FORMAT

This course will be fully online. For most of the semester, Monday meetings will be asynchronous (i.e., on your own) with detailed instructions on Brightspace. Typically, you will be asked to watch a 15-minute lecture or video and to complete an assignment. **This should take you no more than 50 minutes** – the length of a typical class meeting. I will clearly communicate via Email and Brightspace if we will need to meet as a group (i.e., synchronously) on Zoom on a Monday during the semester. Wednesday and Friday meetings will be on Zoom at 8:00 am throughout the semester. Attendance is required in this class (see below), but if you cannot join us for a class you can find the recorded class lecture on Brightspace. PowerPoint slides will also be posted separately to Brightspace after class. It is strongly encouraged that you turn your video on during class meetings, but please let me know if you have extenuating circumstances.

Summary

Mondays: Usually asynchronous (on your own time) but it will be communicated via Email and Brightspace if we need to meet synchronously.

Wednesdays & Fridays: Meeting synchronously on Zoom using the ID and Password above.

REQUIRED READINGS

Required articles for class will be available on Brightspace.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Final Paper (25% of final grade)

Students will write one final course paper. For the final course paper, students will choose a contemporary topic related to health and analyze this topic by applying concepts from class. The purpose of the final paper is to demonstrate your ability to understand a health topic by drawing on theories and perspectives covered in this course. Students will first complete a short proposal (1-2 paragraphs) identifying their topic and explaining which course concepts they intend to use. Detailed instructions will be provided in a separate handout on Brightspace. Students will submit the proposal and the paper online at Brightspace.

Proposal (5% of final grade): November 1

Final Paper (20% of final grade): December 4

Test (20% of final grade)

We will have an exam that will cover the first four weeks of class. The exam will include information from the course readings, class lectures, discussions, and video clips. Exams will consist of multiple-choice questions and short-answer questions. You will have 50 minutes to complete the exam on Brightspace.

Exam: September 21

Student-led Discussion Assignment (15% of final grade)

Students will be assigned to a group of 3-4 students and tasked with leading class discussion on *one* Friday during the semester (starting Week 3 and ending Week 13). This assignment asks students to 1) summarize the assigned reading's main findings, 2) present additional information on the topic from 2-3 outside readings (e.g., news article, academic article), and 3) identify 2-3 discussion questions based on the week's readings and pose them to the class. Group presentations will be about 15 minutes and detailed instructions will be provided on Brightspace.

Reflection Papers (10% each; 30% of final grade)

Students will complete three short papers (each 10% of final grade) during the semester. Each paper will be 1-2 pages, double-spaced, in 12-point font. Papers will be due to Brightspace on a Sunday, and you will write your reflection paper on one of the readings assigned for the following week. In your paper, you will 1) briefly summarize the main point of the reading, 2) provide your own critical reflections, and 3) offer at least one remaining question about the reading. The goal is to think through some of the concepts that you would possibly bring up in class. What would you want to discuss more, flesh out, add your perspective on, or hear the author's perspective on? You could also compare or contrast concepts in the reading to other readings or themes from class. We will discuss this assignment in more detail in class.

Reflection Paper 1: September 27

Reflection Paper 2: October 11

Reflection Paper 3: October 25

Participation & In-Class Assignments (10% of final grade)

Students will be expected to participate in class. You will be expected to have completed the assigned reading *prior* to the start of class, and you should be ready to discuss the readings in class. You are also welcome and encouraged to ask questions about the course readings. Participation can take many forms and does not always involve answering or asking questions. Nonverbal communication such as nodding your head or being attentive can signal active participation. Throughout the semester, you will be asked to complete short individual and group assignments in class that will be assessed for (thorough) completion.

Attendance

Attendance will be taken during each synchronous class meeting, but I understand that this will not be a typical semester. **Five** absences are allowed for any reason. Each absence after the first five will result in a deduction of 2 points from your final grade for *each* class that you miss, except for university-sanctioned reasons (e.g., religious holidays). Please let me know if you have an extenuating circumstance and we will figure out a fair solution together.

GRADING

Final grades will be determined in the following way:

Final Paper	25%
Test	20%
Student-led Discussion	15%
Reflection Papers (3; 10% each)	30%
<u>Participation & In-Class Assignments</u>	<u>10%</u>
Total	100%

Grading Scale

A	94-100	B-	80-83	D+	67-69
A-	90-93	C+	77-79	D	64-66
B+	87-89	C	74-76	D-	60-63
B	84-86	C-	70-73	F	Below 60

COURSE POLICIES

Communication

In accordance with university policy, I will not discuss grades via email. Questions about grades must be discussed with me or the teaching assistant within **one week** of receiving the grade. If you would like to email me about something else, I typically respond quickly, but please note that I may not respond during the weekend.

Late Policy

A make-up exam will only be administered to students with excused absences who have notified me prior to the exam. In most cases, excused absences will require documentation, such as a doctor's note or letter from the Dean. The make-up exam will be different from the exam given in class on the scheduled day.

The reflection papers and final paper must be submitted by 11:59 pm on the due date on Brightspace. This information will also be included in the assignment instructions. Five points will be deducted from the paper grade for each day that the assignment is late. Missed in-class assignments cannot be made up.

Class Etiquette

Students will be encouraged to engage in discussions throughout the semester. I expect discussions to be fair, respectful, and thoughtful. Please give all students equal chance to talk, refrain from interrupting your peers, and suspend judgement of other students' beliefs and opinions.

Recording & Information Sharing Policy

Audio or video recording of lectures and classroom activities is not permitted. Students may not share any materials from this course on websites, with other students, or through other print or electronic distribution systems. Course materials include, but are not limited to, lecture PowerPoints, your notes from class, in-class assignments, and tests. Publishing or distributing these materials can constitute academic dishonesty and subject to disciplinary action with Vanderbilt's Honor System.

Accommodations

This class respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities. If you need course accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible. You will need university documentation, which requires contacting Student Access Services. More information is available here: <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/student-access/disability/>

Academic Honesty

Vanderbilt's Honor Code governs all work in this course, including in-class assignments, exams, and papers. All work you produce in this class must be your own; you cannot submit papers from other classes unless I give you explicit, written permission to do so. If you use words or ideas that are not your own, you must cite your sources. If you do not cite your sources, you will be guilty of plagiarism and subject to academic disciplinary action. You are expected to be familiar with Vanderbilt's Honor System, available here:

https://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/the-honor-system/

If you have any questions on how to cite your sources or what constitutes plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask the instructor or teaching assistant.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Below is the tentative schedule for the semester. Note that the following is subject to change during the semester. Please complete readings *prior* to the start of each class.

Date	Topic	Reading Due
<u>PART 1. INTRODUCTION & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS</u>		
Week 1		
8/24		Read the syllabus
8/26	The Epidemiological Transition	"The Changing Disease-scape in the Third Epidemiological Transition"
8/28	How Has Disease Changed?	"The Burden of Disease and the Changing Task of Medicine"
Week 2		
8/31	Medicalization	"The Shifting Engines of Medicalization"
9/2	Social Determinants of Health	"The Social Determinants of Health"
9/4	Social Determinants of Health	"The Case for More Active Policy Attention to Health Promotion"
Week 3		
9/7	Social Determinants: Neighborhoods	"Neighborhood Socioeconomic Conditions, Built Environments, And Childhood Obesity"
9/9	Social Determinants: Stress	"Stress and Health: Major Findings and Policy Implications"
9/11	The Long Arm of Childhood	Pages 1-7 of "Childhood Disadvantage and Health Problems in Middle and Later Life"
Week 4		
9/14	International Comparison	"Why do Americans have Shorter Life Expectancy and Worse Health Than Do People in Other High-Income Countries"
9/16	Within U.S. Comparison (States)	"U.S. State Policies, Politics, and Life Expectancy"
9/18		No reading due – catch up on readings. Review in class. (SLD present on either reading from this week)
<u>PART 2. INEQUALITIES IN HEALTH</u>		
Week 5		
9/21		BRIGHTSPACE EXAM TODAY. No class meeting
9/23	Socioeconomic Status	"Social Conditions as Fundamental Causes of Health Inequalities"
9/25	Socioeconomic Status	"Why Education Matters to Health" "Social Distancing Responses to COVID-19 Emergency Declarations Strongly Differentiated by Income"
Reflection Paper #1 Due Sunday, 9/27		

Week 6

9/28	Socioeconomic Status	“Population Health in an Era of Rising Income Inequality: USA, 1980–2015”
9/30	Race	"Understanding Racial-Ethnic Disparities in Health" <i>Optional:</i> Structural Racism, Historical Redlining, and Risk of Preterm Birth in New York City, 2013–2017
10/2	Race	“Racial Capitalism: A Fundamental Cause of COVID-19 Pandemic Inequities in the U.S.” <i>Skim:</i> “The Color of COVID-19: Structural Racism and the Pandemic’s Disproportionate Impact on Older Racial and Ethnic Minorities”

Week 7

10/5	Race	“Myths About Physical Racial Differences Were Used to Justify Slavery – and are Still Believed by Doctors Today” <i>Optional:</i> “400 Years of Chains: The Over-policing of Black Bodies and the Devaluing of Black Pain”
10/7	Ethnicity	“Hispanic Older Adult Mortality in the United States: New Estimates and an Assessment of Factors Shaping the Hispanic Paradox”
10/9	Ethnicity	“Many Latinos Couldn’t Stay Home. Now Virus Cases Are Soaring in Their Communities” “Policy Recommendations to Address High Risk of COVID-19 Among Immigrants”

Reflection Paper #2 Due Sunday, 10/11

Week 8

10/12	Gender	“Gender and Health Inequality” (focus on pages 371-375)
10/14	Gender	“What’s Really Behind the Gender Gap in Covid-19 Deaths?”
10/16	Gender	"Constructions of Masculinity and Their Influence on Men's Well-being: A Theory of Gender and Health"

Week 9

10/19	Sexual Orientation	"Prejudice, Social Stress, and Mental Health in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Populations: Conceptual Issues and Research Evidence."
10/21	Sexual Orientation	"The Impact of Institutional Discrimination on Psychiatric Disorders in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Populations: A Prospective Study"
10/23	Gender Identity	"Chosen Name Use Is Linked to Reduced Depressive Symptoms, Suicidal Ideation, and Suicidal Behavior Among Transgender Youth"

Reflection Paper #3 Due Sunday, 10/25

PART 3. ADDITIONAL TOPICS IN HEALTH & ILLNESS

Week 10

10/26	Overview of Opioid Epidemic	"The Triple Wave Epidemic: Supply and demand Drivers of the US Opioid Overdose Crisis"
10/28	Opioid Epidemic	"Drug Overdose Rates Are Highest in Places with the Most Economic and Family Distress"
10/30	Opioid Epidemic: US vs. Other Countries	"The Contemporary American Drug Overdose Epidemic in International Perspective"

Final Paper Proposal Due Sunday, 11/1

Week 11

11/2	Maternal Mortality	"Maternal Mortality: A US Public Health Crisis"
11/4	Maternal Mortality	"Black Maternal and Infant Health: Historical Legacies of Slavery" <i>Optional:</i> "Nothing Protects Black Women from Dying in Pregnancy and Childbirth"
11/6	Infant Mortality	"What's Killing America's Black Infants?"

Week 12

11/9	Relationships	Pages S54-S58 of "Social Relationships and Health: A Flashpoint for Health Policy"
11/11	Loneliness	"Is Loneliness a Health Epidemic?"
11/13	Mental Health	"Teen Suicides are Increasing at an Alarming Pace"

Week 13

11/16	Health Care Systems	"Different Models, Common Principles"
11/18	Health Care/Policy	"Moving Forward from the Affordable Care Act to a Single-payer System" "Lessons for the United States from Single-payer Systems"
11/20	Health Care/Policy	"Single-payer Reform: Heed the Evidence, Not the Soothsayers"

Week 14

No Class - Thanksgiving Break

Week 15

11/30		No Synchronous Class Meeting. No reading due. Peer Review Assignment Online.
12/2		Last Synchronous Class Meeting. No reading due. Finishing up and answering questions about final paper.
12/4		No Synchronous Class Meeting. Focus on writing paper. FINAL PAPER DUE BY 11:59 PM
