S660: Social Origins of Health Inequality
Wednesday 3-5pm
Fall 2020

Elaine Hernandez
Email: ehernan@indiana.edu
Office hours: by appointment

Course description:
Medical sociology can be subdivided into two broad areas: (1) the sociology of health, illness, and treatment-seeking, and (2) the organization of medical care. We focus on the first area in this course, exploring the social origins of illness and the ways it shapes health inequalities. We will begin by reading classic and contemporary work on the social construction of illness as well as the subjective experiences of illness. Next, we will read about the unequal distribution of disease, disability, and death by social status and race/ethnicity. We will end by examining theories that seek to explain how these inequalities are generated and reproduced including fundamental causes, stress, cumulative disadvantage, and access to health care.

Course objectives:
This course was designed with five objectives in mind:

1. To provide an introduction to major classic and contemporary works in medical sociology;

2. To create a forum for the discussion of controversies within medical sociology (e.g., theory, substance, and methodological approach) as well as across the various disciplines that are concerned with health, illness, and healing;

3. To illuminate the connections between medical sociology, the broader concerns of sociology, and the pragmatic concerns of health policy and public health;

4. To improve your skills at reading, critiquing, and integrating sociological theory and research; and

5. To help you identify important unaddressed questions for future research.

Course organization:
We will start most classes with a brief introduction and overview of relevant intellectual history, controversies, and debates. During the remainder of the class we will have discussions about the readings. You will alternate leading these discussions. During warmer months, we will attempt to meet outdoors for our seminar. You should always plan to bring a mask and a blanket to sit on the grass. During inclement weather, we will meet via Zoom. I will be sure to notify you about the class meeting location.
**Course readings:**

The field of medical sociology is very broad. The readings encompass classic and contemporary works, essential readings and readings that are nonessential but thought provoking. Although most are from sociology, I also draw from other relevant disciplines. Even within the topics selected for this course, I was not able to assign every piece that has made a major contribution to the field.

*Locating the readings:* Most readings are available on Canvas. Most chapters from *Handbooks* are available as chapters in e-books through the IU Library. The Charmaz book should be easy to obtain online.

**Course requirements:**

Everyone is required to complete the required readings before the class session during which they will be discussed, prepare questions to share with the group, and participate actively in class discussions. I reserve the right to lower your final grade by up to one full grade if it becomes evident that you are regularly unprepared for class meetings.

Graded course requirements include (a) a seminar paper on an issue grounded in the sociology of health and illness (40% of grade), (b) commentaries and responses on readings (50% of grade), and (c) course participation (10% of grade).

**A. The seminar paper is worth 40% of your grade.**

You will write a major paper concerning a specific topic in medical sociology (15-20 pages in length). You are required to submit a brief (1-2 pages, single-spaced) proposal describing the focus of the paper that will be due October 7th (see guidelines below). In addition, an extensive outline or draft of the paper will be due on November 11th, and a classmate will provide written feedback on your draft by November 18th. Your final paper is due December 14th at 5pm.

There are two options for this assignment, described more fully at the end of the syllabus:

1. You may write an empirical research paper that develops a research question, analyzes relevant data, and provides an answer to the question. Ideally, the final product will constitute a solid draft of a paper that you might eventually submit for publication. Your paper should follow the general organization and structure of an empirical research article. Conventions vary across subfields of sociology and related disciplines, so you may choose any suitable organization for your paper.

2. You may conduct a focused review of a specific topic area that includes an annotated list of recommended readings, a qualifying examination style question that pertains to those readings, and the answer to that question.

*An important point:* Your paper must be significantly different from and/or more developed than papers you have submitted elsewhere previously. If you plan to continue developing a paper that you began for your MA thesis or for another class, you need to discuss it with me beforehand.
Collaboration: You may work on this paper with another member of the class. If you do, we expect the final paper to be longer and more developed than the papers written by individuals. You will also be required to submit a brief statement detailing the division of labor for the project.

B. Commentaries and responses are worth 50% of your grade.

You will alternate providing (1) a brief commentary on a reading or a (2) brief response to the commentary, responding from the author’s point of view. By the end of the semester, everyone will have completed the same number of commentaries or responses. Commentaries and responses should be single-spaced and no longer than 1 page.

1. **Commentary:** Spend a few sentences summarizing the material, but concentrate your remarks on your reflections about the reading. Commentaries include questions about the definition of central topics, important exceptions to the argument or limitations to the study, substantive applications of the author’s ideas, connections to other concepts or theories covered in the course or outside of it, or criticisms of theory, methods, or implications. Complaints about the author’s writing style do not constitute substantive comments. It is not necessary to be critical or find fault to provide good comments; thinking through applications of an argument or the ways in which it contrasts with or relates to other readings is often more fruitful and interesting.

2. **Responses:** Imaginatively take on the role of the author(s) and clarify concepts or theoretical assertions that the commentator misunderstood (tactfully, please), refute the commentator’s points, spell out possible scope conditions or underlying assumptions, elaborate research directions you see following from the argument, etc. As a responder, you may add your own personal thoughts about the commentator’s points, distinguishing between what the author(s) might say and your own contributions.

3. **Weekly deadlines:**
   a. Commentators will post their reflections on their assigned readings to the Canvas weekly discussion section no later than **Saturday** by noon.
   b. Responders will post their responses on **Tuesday** by noon.
   c. All seminar members will be responsible for having read the comments and responses by class time on **Wednesday**.

4. **Class time:** During class, we will sketch out the basics of each author’s argument (concepts, meanings, key propositions, and underlying assumptions), then we will use the commentaries and responses as a launching point for further discussion.

5. **Grading:** Commentaries and responses will be graded using a system of check (satisfactory preparation), check-minus (lack of preparation, misunderstanding of the reading, or overly
lengthy, overly terse, or unfocused remarks), or check-plus (especially careful, thoughtful and articulate, or creative responses). These correspond roughly to B, C, or A quality work, respectively.

C. Participation is worth 10% of your grade.

The remaining 10% of your grade will be assigned based on the depth and level of your participation in the course. I realize that some people do not feel comfortable sharing their ideas in this type of setting. If you would prefer, you may submit brief journal-style papers occasionally throughout the semester to demonstrate your engagement with the course material. I recognize that participating, either outdoors physically distanced or via Zoom, is not the norm or will present unique challenges. You will not be penalized in any way for issues that arise due to the way we need to adapt during the Fall 2020 semester.

Rights and Responsibilities:

Academic Integrity

As a student at IU, you are expected to adhere to the standards detailed in the Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct (Code). Academic misconduct is defined as any activity that tends to undermine the academic integrity of the institution. Violations include: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, interference, violation of course rules, and facilitating academic dishonesty. When you submit an assignment with your name on it, you are signifying that the work contained therein is yours, unless otherwise cited or referenced. Any ideas or materials taken from another source for either written or oral use must be fully acknowledged. All suspected violations of the Code will be reported to the Dean of Students and handled according to University policies. Sanctions for academic misconduct may include a failing grade on the assignment, reduction in your final course grade, and a failing grade in the course, among other possibilities. If you are unsure about the expectations for completing an assignment or taking a test or exam, be sure to seek clarification from your instructor in advance.

Online Course Materials

The faculty member teaching this course holds the exclusive right to distribute, modify, post, and reproduce course materials, including all written materials, study guides, lectures, assignments, exercises, and exams. While you are permitted to take notes on the online materials and lectures posted for this course for your personal use, you are not permitted to re-post in another forum, distribute, or reproduce content from this course without the express written permission of the faculty member. Any violation of this course rule will be reported to the appropriate university offices and officials, including to the Dean of Students as academic misconduct.
**Student Rights**

Any student who believes another person in a class is threatening the safety of the class by not wearing a mask or observing physical distancing requirements may leave the class without consequence.

**Attendance**

The student responsibility form requires that you take your temperature every morning and that you refrain from attending class if you have a temperature of 100.4 or other symptoms of illness. In order to ensure that you can do this, attendance will not be a factor in the final grade. Attendance may still be taken to comply with accreditation requirements.

**Assigned Seating**

In order to ensure we can contact you in the event you are exposed to COVID-19, you must remain in your assigned seat for the entire semester.

**Accommodations**

Students with special needs and students who have athletic, performing arts, or similar commitments should make requests for such accommodations. With the exception of unusual circumstances, such requests should include university documentation, and should be made during the first two weeks of the semester so that appropriate arrangements can be made. Please refer to the following web sites for more information about disability services: [http://studentaffairs.indiana.edu/disability-services-students/index.shtml](http://studentaffairs.indiana.edu/disability-services-students/index.shtml).

**Bias Reporting**

As your instructor, one of my responsibilities is to create a positive learning environment for all students. Bias incidents (events or comments that target an individual or group based on age, color, religion, disability, race, ethnicity, national origin, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status or veteran status) are not appropriate in our classroom or on campus. Any act of discrimination or harassment based on race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or disability can be reported through any of the options: 1) email biasincident@indiana.edu or incident@indiana.edu; 2) call the Dean of Students Office at (812) 855-8188; or 3) use the IU mobile App (m.iu.edu). Reports can be anonymous.

**Sexual Misconduct**

As your instructor, one of my responsibilities is to create a positive learning environment for all students. Title IX and IU’s Sexual Misconduct Policy prohibit sexual misconduct in any form, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, and dating and domestic violence. If you have experienced sexual misconduct, or know someone who has, the University can help. If you are seeking help and would like to speak to someone confidentially, you can make an appointment with:

- The Sexual Assault Crisis Services (SACS) at (812) 855-8900 (counseling services)
- Confidential Victim Advocates (CVA) at (812) 856-2469 (advocacy and advice services)
- IU Health Center at (812) 855-4011 (health and medical services)

It is also important that you know that Title IX and University policy require me to share any information brought to my attention about potential sexual misconduct, with the campus Deputy Title IX Coordinator or IU’s Title IX Coordinator. In that event, those individuals will work to ensure that appropriate measures are taken and resources are made available. Protecting student privacy is of utmost concern, and information will only be shared with those that need to know to ensure the University can respond and assist. I encourage you to visit stopsexualviolence.iu.edu to learn more.

Digital Access

Digital devices (like laptops and cell phones) are becoming increasingly important to success in college. In this course, you may need digital devices to access readings, complete and submit written assignments, complete online quizzes, verify your attendance, take in-class polls, coordinate with other students regarding group projects, complete and submit group projects.

I recognize that some students are unable to afford the cost of purchasing digital devices and that other students rely on older, more problem-prone devices that frequently break down or become unusable. I also recognize that those technology problems can be a significant source of stress for students. Given those challenges, I encourage students to contact me if they experience a technology-related problem that interferes with their work in this course. This will enable me to assist students in accessing support.

I also encourage students to be aware of the many technology-related resources that Indiana University provides, including:
- Free on-campus wireless internet (wifi) access through the “IU Secure” network.
- Free software for download and for cloud-based use.
- Free unlimited, secure online storage through Box (a great way to back up files).
- Free 24/7 IU tech support (e.g., email, Canvas, wifi, printing, device setup, etc.).
- Discounts on devices from leading technology companies, including Apple, Dell, and Microsoft.

Masks and Physical Distancing Requirements

In recognition of what all IU community members owe to each other all students, staff, and faculty signed an acknowledgement of their responsibility to follow public health measures as a condition returning to the campus this fall. Included in that commitment were requirements for wearing masks in all IU buildings and maintaining physical distancing in all IU buildings. Both are classroom requirements.

Both requirements are necessary for us to protect each other from transmission of COVID-19.

- Therefore, if a student is present in class without a mask, the instructor will ask the student to put a
mask on immediately or leave the class.

- If a student comes to class a second time without a mask, the student’s final grade will be reduced by one letter (e.g., from an A to a B, for instance), and the instructor will report the student to the Office of Student Conduct of the Division of Student Affairs.
- If a student refuses to put a mask on after being instructed to do so, the instructor may end the class immediately, and report the student to the Office of Student Conduct. The student will be summarily suspended from the university pursuant to IU’s Summary Suspension Policy.
- If Student Conduct receives three cumulative reports from any combination of instructors or staff members that a student is not complying with the requirements of masking and physical distancing, the student will be summarily suspended from the university for the semester.

*Summary Suspension Policy*

A student may be summarily suspended from the university and summarily excluded from university property and programs by the Provost or designee of a university campus. The Provost or designee may act summarily without following the hearing procedures established by this section if the officer is satisfied that the student’s continued presence on the campus constitutes a serious threat of harm to the student or to any other person on the campus or to the property of the university or property of other persons on the university campus.

The Provost has determined that refusal to comply with the public health requirements specified in the Student Responsibility form, including the requirement of wearing a mask in all IU buildings, constitutes “a serious threat of harm to other persons” within the meaning of the summary suspension policy. In addition, the Provost has determined that a person who does not comply with these requirements, as evidenced by three credible violations of the policy reported to the campus from any source, constitutes “a serious threat of harm to other persons” within the meaning of the summary suspension policy.

*Counseling and Psychological Services*

CAPS has expanded their services. For information about the variety of services offered to students by CAPS visit: [http://healthcenter.indiana.edu/counseling/index.shtml](http://healthcenter.indiana.edu/counseling/index.shtml). Disability Services for Students (DSS). The process to establish accommodations for a student with a disability is a responsibility shared by the student and the DSS Office. Only DSS approved accommodations should be utilized in the classroom. After the student has met with DSS, it is the student’s responsibility to share their accommodations with the faculty member. For information about support services or accommodations available to students with disabilities and for the procedures to be followed by students and instructors, please visit: [https://studentaffairs.indiana.edu/disability-services-students/](https://studentaffairs.indiana.edu/disability-services-students/).
Class Schedule

Week 1: August 26 – Introduction: theories and themes in medical sociology


Week 2: September 2 – Medicalization, biomedicalization, and social control


Week 3: September 9 – The social construction of disease

Week 4: September 16 – Subjective experiences of illness


Week 5: September 23 – Fundamental cause theory


Week 6: September 30 – Stress process theory

Week 7: October 7 – Integrating biology and genetics with sociology – promises and pitfalls

*** Paper proposal due ***


Week 8: October 14 – Health over the life course


Week 9: October 21 – Social networks and social relationships

Week 10: October 28 – Socioeconomic position and health


Week 11: November 4 – Race, ethnicity, and health

Week 12: November 11 – Gender and health

*** Extensive outline/draft due ***


Week 13: November 18 – Managing risk – guest lecture Jennifer Reich

*** Peer comments on outline/draft due ***

- Marcus, Julia and Jessica Gold. “Colleges Are Getting Ready to Blame Their Students.” *The Atlantic* July 21, 2020

Week 14: Thanksgiving break

Week 15: December 2 – Policies and interventions


Week 16: December 9 – Wrap up
Monday, December 14 – Seminar paper due at 5pm