

**Sociology 34**  
**Health Disparities**

Spring 2014  
Dartmouth College

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Place: Dartmouth 217  
Time: MWF 1:45-2:50  
x-hour: Th -1:50  
Office Hours: Th 2-3

*Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place.*

-- Susan Sontag

**Description of the course**

What does it mean to dwell in “the night-side of life”? In this course, we will use our sociological imaginations to explore the role and meaning of health and illness in modern US society. Social, economic, and political forces powerfully influence who gets sick, the types of diseases that affect them, the treatments that are available, and the outcomes of those treatments. This course explores key social determinants of health, including: socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, neighborhood environments, social relationships, gender, and healthcare. We will discuss explanations for the relationships between these factors and various health outcomes, as well as possible policy solutions. Students will spend a substantial amount of time developing their own specific interests in this field, culminating in a research paper that analyzes the relevant literature and discusses research-based policy solutions to a particular health disparity.

**Required reading**

All of the required readings are posted in electronic format on the course Canvas site. The reading load in this course is high, commensurate with an upper-level course. I expect you to read all course material before class on the day that we are discussing it. Discussion is a frequent part of this course and everyone is expected to contribute.

**Course objectives**

By the end of the course, students can expect to:

- Describe multiple aspects of the social environment that matter for health and identify the ways they contribute to health disparities.
- Critically evaluate evidence for social determinants of health and identify key gaps in knowledge.
- Apply a theoretical framework to understand one social determinant of health through research experience in a specific topic area.

## **Assignments**

### **1. Participation (75 points)**

*Small group discussions (10 pts for leading discussion; 25 pts for participation).* We will form 7 permanent groups (5 students each) for small, focused discussions each week. On most Fridays, we will use the first 45 minutes of the class period for small group discussions related to articles that apply or extend the week's conceptual topic. During the last ten minutes of class, we will reflect on the readings as a class to ensure that all of our questions were answered. Each week, one student will serve as discussion leader in the small groups. Discussion leaders should come prepared with:

1. Questions that help us come to a common understanding of the readings' main arguments.
2. Outside information related to the topic. This can take the form of recent news articles, websites, examples of organizations that are taking up these issues in the real world, or other related materials that add depth to our understanding of the reading.
3. Questions that reflect on the greater implications of the findings.

*Group activities and large group discussion (40 pts).* Participation in class discussions and activities makes up a very important part of your grade. You must be able to demonstrate in class – verbally in discussion, through group work, and through in-class writing – that you have read and understood the material. I will keep track of your participation in our in-class work and discussion and this record will comprise your participation grade.

### **2. Critical writing (90 points)**

*Response Memos (50 pts).* You will be responsible for writing five Response Memos during the term. Your memo should be a 1-page, single-spaced, *critical* response to the readings. Please upload an electronic copy to Canvas by **noon** on the day the readings are being discussed. Response Memos are an opportunity for you to apply your critical thinking skills to determine the main argument of the reading and your reflections on it. Reading critically means more than just being moved, affected, informed, influenced, and persuaded by a piece of writing; it also means analyzing and understanding how the work has achieved its effect. The following questions can guide your memo:

- What is the author's argument?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of this reading (from your perspective)?
- What questions/reflections does this reading bring up for you?
- What would you propose as possible next steps for advancing this research agenda?
- In what way does this study inform your understanding of other sociological phenomena?

*News reflections (40 points).* Over the course of the term, I will post news articles and current events to the Discussion board on Canvas. You are responsible for reading and critically reflecting on these posts by commenting before class.

### **3. Papers (160 points)**

You are required to write two papers in this course. I will hand out detailed descriptions of each writing assignment before it is due.

- Paper #1 (3-5 pages) is a reflection on behavior modification. Due **Wednesday, April 16** (50 pts).
- Paper #2 (8-10 pages) is a research paper on a health disparities topic that interests you. A one-page proposal describing your topic and your research approach will be due **Monday, April 28** (10 pts). An outline containing your thesis statement, topic sentences, and supporting bullet points for each paragraph is due **Wednesday, May 7** (10 pts). Your final paper will be due **Monday, May 19** (90 pts).

#### 4. Exams (175 points)

*Midterm exam (75 pts).* This will be a 1-hour, in-class, closed-book exam.

*Final exam (100 pts).* This will be a 3-hour take-home exam. The final exam will be cumulative and entirely essay-based. Exam questions will require you to synthesize and analyze the course readings, discussion and lecture material. You will be graded on how well you incorporate all elements of course material into your essay answers.

#### Final Course Grade

Points	Percent	Grade
470-500	94-100%	A
450-469	90-93%	A-
435-449	87-89%	B+
420-434	84-86%	B
400-419	80-83%	B-
385-399	77-79%	C+
370-384	74-76%	C
350-369	70-73%	C-
335-349	67-69%	D+
320-334	64-66%	D
300-319	60-63%	D-

## Important notes

### **Attendance**

It is my expectation that you will attend each class meeting – and that you will arrive to each class on time and stay for the duration. I will circulate an attendance sign-in sheet at the beginning of each class meeting; it is your responsibility to make sure you sign it each day. There are no opportunities to make up in-class assignments, and there is no need to seek my approval for any absences. Please contact your fellow students for notes on material you may have missed. **Because it is necessary to be in class to participate, missing more than four class periods without a valid medical excuse will result in failure of the course.** In case of extended absences, please inform me as soon as possible. We will discuss whether you can successfully complete the class.

### **Health and Well-Being**

Please use your best judgment about coming to class if you have any of the symptoms of the flu (e.g. fever, cough, body aches). None of us want to be contaminated!

### **Accommodations**

Students requiring disability-related accommodations must register with the Student Accessibility Services office. Once SAS has authorized accommodations, students must show the originally signed SAS Services and Consent Form and/or a letter on SAS letterhead to their professor. As a first step, if students have questions about whether they qualify to receive accommodations, they should contact the SAS office. All inquiries and discussions about accommodations will remain confidential.

### **Communication**

My office hours are for you. You are welcome to come in and talk with me about anything during my office hours. I regularly check e-mail during the school day (9am-4pm) and will make every effort to reply to messages as soon as possible. I expect students to regularly check their Dartmouth e-mail accounts for class announcements and updates.

### **Academic Honor**

I will be following the Academic Honor Principle described in the Dartmouth College Student Handbook and will enforce this policy to the full extent. Students must do their own work—they will write their own papers and exams, prepare their own presentations, and cite the original sources of any material they draw on for their papers. Any student who submits work which is not his or her own, or commits other acts of academic dishonesty is subject to disciplinary action, up to and including suspension or separation.

### **Classroom Responsibility and Courtesy**

This is a course in which we will sometimes discuss sensitive topics. Students are welcome to express their opinions, but they should be expressed (and received) respectfully. Please put your cell phones on vibrate (or off!), do not text, and limit laptop use to note-taking. It is distracting to me and to your fellow students when you ‘abuse’ technology during class. Fair warning - if it becomes an issue, I may ban laptops altogether. I know it is tempting to check email/facebook/twitter during class but it ultimately harms everyone’s experience and learning (not to mention that it irks your professor). There may also be times during the quarter when I ask you to close your laptops so we can have a better discussion. Thus, you may wish to have an alternate way of taking notes.

## **Course Plan and Readings**

### **Week One: What are health disparities?**

- Mon., Mar. 24 Introduction to the course: Defining health disparities
- (Gladwell 2008)
- Wed., Mar. 26 Health, disease, and equity
- (Braveman and Gruskin 2003)
  - (Sen 2002)
- Fri., Mar. 28 Unnatural Causes
- Film: *Unnatural Causes*, Episode 1: "In Sickness and In Wealth"

### **Week Two: Socioeconomic status**

- Mon., Mar. 31 Education, income, and occupation
- (Adler and Newman 2002)
- Wed., Apr. 2 SES as a fundamental cause of health and disease
- (Link and Phelan 1995)
- Fri., Apr. 4 Small group discussion 1: Fundamental cause, an application
- (Lutfey and Freese 2005)
  - Response Memo 1 due

### **Week Three: Unpacking the black box**

- Mon., Apr. 7 Health behaviors
- (Marantz 1990)
  - (Pampel, Krueger, and Denney 2010)
- Wed., Apr. 9 The stress process
- (Sapolsky 2005)
  - (Almeida, Neupert, Banks, and Serido 2005)
- Fri., Apr. 11 Small group discussion 2: Behavioral interventions
- (Verplanken and Wood 2006)
  - Response Memo 2 due

### **Week Four: Race and ethnicity**

- Mon., Apr. 14 Institutional racism
- (Jones 2000)
  - (Williams and Collins 2001)

- Wed., Apr. 16    Interpersonal racism
- (Kwate and Meyer 2011)
  - Health Behavior Modification paper due
- Fri., Apr. 18    Small group discussion 3: Racism, two applications
- (Gee 2002)
  - (Orsi, Margellos-Anast, and Whitman 2010)
  - Response Memo 3 due

### **Week Five: The built environment**

- Mon., Apr. 21    Neighborhood context
- (Fitzpatrick and LaGory 2000) – Chapters 3 and 5
- Wed., Apr. 23    Access to healthy food and recreational opportunities
- (Cummins and Macintyre 2005)
  - (Bedimo-Rung, Mowen, and Cohen 2005)
- Fri., Apr. 25    Midterm Exam in class

### **Week Six: Place and social relationships**

- Mon., Apr. 28    Social networks and social capital
- (Carpiano 2006)
  - Research paper proposal due
- Wed., Apr. 30    Identity and attachment
- (Cattell, Dines, Gesler, and Curtis 2008)
- Fri., May 2    Library research methods
- Amy Witzel, Social Sciences & Humanities Reference Librarian

### **Week Seven: Gender**

- Mon., May 5    Disparities
- (Bird and Rieker 1999)
  - (Hill and Needham 2013)
- Wed., May 7    Masculinity
- (Courtenay 2000)
  - Research paper outline due
- Fri., May 9    Small group discussion 4: Intersectionality
- (Jackson and Williams 2006)

- (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2007)
- Response Memo 4 due

### **Week Eight: The patient experience**

- Mon., May 12 The sick role
- (Burnham 2012)
  - (Trillin 1981)
- Mon., May 12 Mario Small: "Everyday Experience in American Ghettos: Are Some Cities More Punishing than Others?" (3:30-5:00pm, Location TBD)
- Wed., May 14 Medicalization, the case of ADHD
- (Conrad and Potter 2000)
  - (Loe 2008)
- Fri., May 16 Small group discussion 5: Biomedicalization
- (Clarke, Shim, Mamo, Fosket, and Fishman 2013)
  - Response Memo 5 due

### **Week Nine: Health care past, present, and future**

- Mon., May 19 Money-driven medicine
- Film: *Money Driven Medicine*, "Inside the Medical-Industrial Complex"
  - Research paper due
- Wed., May 21 History of U.S. healthcare system
- Guest lecture: Denise Anthony, "History of the US Healthcare System"
- Fri., May 23 Healthcare reform, the Affordable Care Act
- (Gawande June 1, 2009)
  - (Kaiser Family Foundation 2013)
  - (Burke 2011)

### **Week Ten: Putting it all together**

- Mon., May 26 NO CLASS (Memorial Day)
- Wed., May 28 Course wrap-up
- (Woolf 2009)
  - (Mechanic 2002)
- Fri., May 30 Final Exam TBD

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