



## **SOCI 225: Medicine and Health in Modern Society**

Winter 2025

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:35am-12:55pm

EDUC 129

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### Official course overview

“Socio-medical problems and ways in which sociological analysis and research are being used to understand and deal with them. Canadian and Québec problems include: poverty and health; mental illness; aging; death and dying; professionalism; health service organization.”

### What to expect

In this course, students will be introduced to key concepts and ideas in the sociology of health and use those to think about current socio-medical problems. In the first part of the course, we will discuss the forces that shape the social construction of health. In the second part of the course, we will critically examine the institutions that seek to address health problems and inequalities. In the third part of the course, we will delve into contemporary controversies over medical knowledge. I aim to balance more traditional lectures with small group activities and interactive lessons. This course assumes no prior knowledge in the social or medical sciences. Assigned readings are necessary to your success in this course and should be completed prior to lectures. I will sometimes use [Slido](#), an instant polling application, during lectures.

### Course policies

**Presence in class:** Students are expected to be seated and ready for lecture on time. I reserve the right to admit or not students who come in after the beginning of class. If you miss a lecture, you are responsible for catching up on the materials. Classes will not be recorded by the instructor and shall not be recorded by the students.

**Respect:** Health is intimate and personal. With that in mind, I require that everyone pays extra attention to how they formulate and express their views in class. While everyone is entitled to their own opinion, views should be formulated with the utmost respect for the experience of others. Being respectful in the classroom also includes general class etiquette, like raising your hand before speaking, avoiding packing your things before the class is over, chatting while your colleagues are asking a question, etc. Everyone deserves a positive experience in this course.

**Emails:** When sending me emails, please include “SOCI 225” and your name in the email object. I reserve the right not to answer to your email if you ask about something that is clearly stated in the syllabus. The course policy on respect (see previous rubric) obviously applies to emails. I usually respond to my emails within 48 hours.

**Accommodations:** I will do my very best to accommodate students who need it in this course. If you need any type of accommodation, please let me know as early as possible. Please also reach out to Student Accessibility and Achievement (SAA) to receive accommodations from the University and let me know how I can help in the process. As an instructor, I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. If you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me.

**Grade appeals:** As an instructor, I take the marking of assignments seriously and strive to be fair, consistent, and accurate. Despite this, I still make mistakes. If you would like to appeal your grade, please follow these procedures:

- a) If the error deals with mathematical calculations of the grade, send me an email.
- b) For substantive appeals, you must wait at least 24 hours after having received your grade before contacting me. When that delay is passed, you may write me an email within a week detailing why you believe your grade should be modified. If I choose to regrade your assignment, note that your grade can go up, down, or stay the same.

**Electronic devices:** Research has shown that the use of electronic devices in class, including when taking notes on laptops, reduces comprehension and retention for the user and other students. Here are two resources that support this claim:

Mueller, Pam A., and Daniel M. Oppenheimer. 2014. "The Pen Is Mightier Than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking." *Psychological Science* 25(6):1159–68.

Hall, Amanda C. G., Tara T. Lineweaver, Eileen E. Hogan, and Sean W. O'Brien. 2020. "On or off Task: The Negative Influence of Laptops on Neighboring Students' Learning Depends on How They Are Used." *Computers & Education* 153:103901.

Given this, I advise against using an electronic device to take notes in class. With that said, there will be plenty of opportunities in class for you to make a productive use of electronic tools!

**Statement on academic integrity at McGill:** "McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity) for more information)."

**Use of AI:** It is prohibited for students to submit any work that is not entirely their own creation. This includes submissions that are either entirely or in part generated by AI tools. The use of AI for assignments will be regarded as a breach of academic integrity and will be addressed in accordingly. A good rule of thumb: if you wouldn't ask a class colleague to do it for you, then you shouldn't ask ChatGPT to do it.

**Policy for the Accommodation of Religious Holy Days:** "1) Students are not to be penalized if they cannot write examinations or be otherwise evaluated on their religious holy days where such activities conflict with their religious observances. (...) 2) Students who because of religious commitment cannot meet academic obligations, other than final examinations, on certain holy days are responsible for informing their instructor, with two weeks' notice of each conflict. (...) 3) When the requested accommodation concerns a final examination, students are responsible for advising their faculty office as soon as possible and not later than the deadline for reporting conflicts. Additional documentation confirming their religious affiliation may be requested." (Approved by Senate - November 20, 1996 - Minute 92)

## Assessment

Assessment task	Worth	Due date
Case study report I	20%	February 12 <sup>th</sup> , 11:59pm
Case study report II	20%	March 24 <sup>th</sup> , 11:59pm
Case study report III	20%	April 16 <sup>th</sup> , 11:59pm
Final exam	40%	TBD, during final exam period (April 14 <sup>th</sup> to April 30 <sup>th</sup> )

**Case study reports:** Around the end of each the three sections of this course, we will hold a case study session. In groups of 4-6 students, you will discuss the case study prompts posted on MyCourses using readings for that day as well as all course materials from the section. You will produce a written summary of your discussions. Excellent case study reports will: 1) cover all relevant course materials with precision, 2) use relevant concepts from the course in a productive way and 3) display high quality discussions between group members. You will be graded as a group for this assignment. The due date for assignments is a little less than a week after our in-class session. This will leave you time to organize and polish your work. Absence to the in-class part of this assignment will result in a 0 grade. Lack of participation in group discussions may result in deducted points for the concerned group member(s).

**Final exam:** The final exam will be held during the exam period and will last 3 hours. It will be an in-person, closed books exam. All course materials, i.e., contents of lectures and assigned readings, may be subject to examination. The goal of the final exam is to assess whether you understand the broad themes of this course and how important concepts are linked with each other. There will be a mix of multiple choice, short answer and long answer questions.

McGill's Grading Scale	
A	85-100%
A-	80-84%
B+	75-79%
B	70-74%
B-	65-69%
C+	60-64%
C	55-59%
D	50-54%
F	0-49%

**Extraordinary circumstances:** “In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the control of McGill University, assessment tasks in a course are subject to change, provided students are sent adequate and timely communications regarding the change” (PASL 6.3).

**Language of submission:** “In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives.” (Approved by Senate on 21 January 2009).

« Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté, sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue. » (Énoncé approuvé par le Sénat le 21 janvier 2009).

## Course schedule and readings

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- Readings should be completed before lectures. Lectures will complement and not simply restate what is included in the readings. I advise reading in the suggested order (see below).
  - Readings that are posted on *MyCourses* are in the "Readings" file in the general rubric.
  - **Readings that are not posted on *MyCourses* can be retrieved on *Sofia* through the [McGill online library](#). If you are having trouble finding a text on *Sofia*, try Google Scholar or another external database.**
  - Number of pages to read vary from lecture to lecture, from a gracious 0 (Feb 27<sup>th</sup>) to a daunting 78 (March 20<sup>th</sup>)! Please plan accordingly.
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Jan. 7<sup>th</sup> // Introduction

Jan. 9<sup>th</sup> // Key concepts in the sociology of health and contemporary disease patterns

Clouston, Sean A. P., and Bruce G. Link. 2021. "A Retrospective on Fundamental Cause Theory: State of the Literature and Goals for the Future." *Annual Review of Sociology* 47: 131–156.

Weindling, Paul. 1992. "From infectious to chronic diseases: changing patterns of sickness in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries." Pp. 303–316 in *Medicine in Society*, edited by A. Wear, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. **On *MyCourses*.**

## SECTION I. Medicine and Health

Jan. 14<sup>th</sup> // Deviance, medicalization, stigmatization, normalization

Conrad, Peter, and Joseph W. Schneider. 1992. "Deviance, Definitions, and the Medical Profession," Pp. 1–16 in *Deviance and Medicalization*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. **On *MyCourses*.**

**\*\* Jan. 14: Add/drop period \*\***

Jan. 16<sup>th</sup> // Measuring stigma

Best, Rachel Kahn, and Alina Arseniev-Koehler. 2023. "The Stigma of Diseases: Unequal Burden, Uneven Decline." *American Sociological Review* 88(5): 938–969.

Jan. 21<sup>st</sup> // Medical knowledge and the medical profession

Conrad, Peter. 2005. "The Shifting Engines of Medicalization." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 46(1): 3–14.

Timmermans, Stefan, and Hyeyoung Oh. 2010. "The Continued Social Transformation of the Medical Profession." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 51(1\_suppl): S94–106.

Jan. 23<sup>rd</sup> // Disease entities

Horwitz, Allan V. 2011. "Creating an Age of Depression: The Social Construction and Consequences of the Major Depression Diagnosis." *Society and Mental Health* 1(1): 41–54.

Mulder, Roger, and Peter Tyrer. 2023. "Borderline Personality Disorder: A Spurious Condition Unsupported by Science That Should Be Abandoned." *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 116(4): 148–150.

Jan. 28<sup>th</sup> // Biographical disruption and biographical illumination

Kolata, Gina, "First Day of a 'New Life' for a Boy With Sickle Cell," *New York Times*, September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024. **On *MyCourses*** or here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/16/health/sickle-cell-gene-therapy-kendric-cromer.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare&ngrp=mn&pvid=EFc085F5-0179-4ECD-AC36-E27797312FB1>.

Tan, Catherine D. 2018. "I'm a Normal Autistic Person, Not an Abnormal Neurotypical': Autism Spectrum Disorder Diagnosis as Biographical Illumination." *Social Science & Medicine* 197: 161–167.

#### Jan 30<sup>th</sup> // The professional-patient relationship

Oh Nelson, Hyeyoung. 2021. "Doctor–Patient relationship." Pp. 495–515 in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Medical Sociology*, edited by W. C. Cockerham. Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell. **On MyCourses.**

#### Feb. 4<sup>th</sup> // Racial patterns in the social construction of health

Along, Sirry M. 2016. "Black Folk Don't Get No Severe Depression': Meanings and Expressions of Depression in a Predominantly Black Urban Neighborhood in Midwestern United States." *Social Science & Medicine* 157: 1–8.  
Chowkwanyun, Merlin. 2022. "What Is a 'Racial Health Disparity'? Five Analytic Traditions." *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* 47(2):131–58.

**\*Supplementary reading:** Monk, Ellis P. 2015. "The Cost of Color: Skin Color, Discrimination, and Health among African-Americans." *American Journal of Sociology* 121(2):396–444.

#### Feb. 6<sup>th</sup> // **Case Study I:** Fat acceptance and the "obesity epidemic"

Saguy, Abigail C., and Kevin Riley. 2005. "Weighing Both Sides: Morality, Mortality, and Framing Contests over Obesity." *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* 30(5): 869–921.

Jutel, Annemarie. 2006. "The Emergence of Overweight as a Disease Entity: Measuring up Normality." *Social Science & Medicine* 63: 2268–2276.

"The Body Mass Index," Maintenance Phase. **Podcast available on all platforms.**

Belluz, Julia. "Are We Thinking About Obesity All Wrong?," *New York Times*, September 19<sup>th</sup> 2024. **On MyCourses** or here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/19/opinion/obesity-disease-ozempic-weight-loss.html>.

#### Feb. 11<sup>th</sup> // Sleep

Williams, S., R. Meadows, and S. Arber. 2010. "The Sociology of Sleep." In *Sleep, Health and Society: From Aetiology to Public Health*, edited by F. P. Cappuccio, M. A. Miller, and S. W. Lockley. Oxford University Press. **On MyCourses.**

Derickson, Alan. 2014. "Sleep is for Sissies: Elite Males as Paragons of Wakefulness," Pp. 1–24 in *Dangerously Sleepy. Overworked Americans and the Cult of Manly Wakefulness*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. **On MyCourses.**

#### Feb. 13<sup>th</sup> A lifestyles perspective on fat acceptance and the "obesity epidemic"

Cockerham, William C. 2021. "Health Lifestyles. Bringing Structure Back," Pp. 150–170 in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Medical Sociology*. Newark, UK: John Wiley & Sons. **On MyCourses.**

## **SECTION II. Health Institutions**

#### Feb. 18<sup>th</sup> // Healthcare in Canada

Marchildon, Gregory P., Sara Allin, and Sherry Merkur. 2020. *Canada: Health System Review. Health Systems in Transition*. Copenhagen: World Health Organization. Executive summary. **On MyCourses.**

#### Feb. 20<sup>th</sup> // Healthcare in comparative perspective

Beckfield, Jason, Sigrun Olafsdottir, and Benjamin Sosnaud. 2013. "Healthcare Systems in Comparative Perspective: Classification, Convergence, Institutions, Inequalities, and Five Missed Turns." *Annual Review of Sociology* 39:127–46.

#### Feb. 25<sup>th</sup> // Screening and preventive care

Armstrong, David. 2012. "Screening: Mapping Medicine's Temporal Spaces." *Sociology of Health & Illness* 34(2):177–93.

#### Feb. 27<sup>th</sup> // Public health

\*No readings!

March 4<sup>th</sup> & March 6<sup>th</sup> // Spring break

March 11<sup>th</sup> // Critique of public health

Lupton, Deborah. 1995. "Introduction," Pp. 1–15 in *The Imperative of Health. Public Health and the Regulated Body*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE. **On MyCourses.**

March 13<sup>th</sup> // Health crises

Klinenberg, Eric. 2002. "Prologue. The Urban Inferno" and "Introduction. The City of Extremes," Pp. 1–36 in *Heat Wave. A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*. Chicago: Chicago University Press. **On MyCourses.**

Klinenberg, Eric. 2024. "The Bridge," Pp. 200–218 in 2020. *One City, Seven People, and the Year Everything Changed*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. **On MyCourses.**

March 18<sup>th</sup> // **Case Study II: The opioid crisis**

Thombs, Ryan P., Dennis L. Thombs, Andrew K. Jorgenson, and Taylor Harris Braswell. 2020. "What Is Driving the Drug Overdose Epidemic in the United States?" *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 61(3): 275–289.

King, Lawrence, Gábor Scheiring, and Elias Nosrati. 2022. "Deaths of Despair in Comparative Perspective." *Annual Review of Sociology* 48: 299–317.

Health Canada. 2024. Opioid- and Stimulant-related Harms in Canada. <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/substance-related-harms/opioids-stimulants/maps.html>. *Browse key findings, maps and graphs.*

Tierney, Allison. How the Opioid Crisis Is Different in Small Communities, February 12, 2018, Vice, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/how-the-opioid-crisis-is-different-in-small-communities-canada/>.

Browne, Rachel. Sault Ste. Marie residents are mobilizing against the city's opioid crisis, February 13, 2018, Vice, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/sault-ste-marie-residents-are-mobilizing-against-the-citys-opioid-crisis/>.

### **SECTION III. Medical Controversies and Social Conflict**

March 20<sup>th</sup> // Regulatory agencies

Carpenter, Daniel. 2010. "Reputation and the Organizational Politics of New Drug Review," Pp. 465–543 in *Reputation and Power. Organizational Image and Pharmaceutical Regulation at the FDA*, Princeton: Princeton University Press. **On MyCourses.**

March 25<sup>th</sup> // Medical research – *\*Lecture by Nicolás Díaz de León\**

"Are psychedelics breaking science?," Unexplainable (Vox), **Podcast available on all platforms**

Epstein, Steven. 2007. "Introduction," Pp. 1–16 in *Inclusion. The Politics of Difference in Medical Research*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. **On MyCourses.**

March 27<sup>th</sup> // Health advocacy

Best, Rachel Kahn. 2019. "Budget Battles," Pp. 109–130 in *Common Enemies. Disease Campaigns in America*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. **On MyCourses.**

April 1<sup>st</sup> // Visibility of health problems

Armstrong, Elizabeth M., Daniel Carpenter, and Marie Hojnacki. 2006. "Whose Deaths Matter? Mortality, Advocacy, and Attention to Disease in the Mass Media." *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* 31(4): 729–772.

April 3<sup>rd</sup> // Occupational health

Rosner, David and Gerald Markowitz. 2006. "Appendix: The 'Science' of Thresholds," Pp. 235–244 in *Deadly Dust. Silicosis and the On-Going Struggle to Protect Workers' Health*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. **On MyCourses**

## April 8<sup>th</sup> // Environmental health

- Voyles, Traci Brynne. 2015. "Introduction," Pp. 1–26 in *Wastelanding. Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. **On MyCourses.**
- Beaumont, Hilary. "Them plants are killing us': inside a cross-border battle against cancer in Ontario's rust belt," *The Narwhal*, April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020. <https://thenarwhal.ca/them-plants-are-killing-us-inside-a-cross-border-battle-against-cancer-in-ontarios-rust-belt/>.
- Abi-Habib, Maria. "Is a 'Green' Revolution Poisoning India's Capital?," *New York Times*, November 9<sup>th</sup> 2024 <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/09/world/asia/india-air-quality-trash.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare>

## April 10<sup>th</sup> // Case Study III: Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)

- Richter, Lauren, Alissa Cordner, and Phil Brown. 2021. "Producing Ignorance Through Regulatory Structure: The Case of Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)." *Sociological Perspectives* 64(4):631–56.
- Tabuchi, Hiroko. "Trump Promises Clean Water. Will He Clean Up 'Forever Chemicals'?" *New York Times*, November 20<sup>th</sup> 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/20/climate/trump-pfas-lead-clean-water.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare>.
- Esri Staff. 2024. "What's in the water we drink?" November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024. <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/63f918a2d9d9432784360eb0d6f99b9f>.

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