

Sociology 34 Health Disparities

Winter 2021
Dartmouth College
Emily Walton

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Class: Zoom in the E-Block, MWF 1:10-2:15pm EST

Office Hours: Zoom Tuesdays 12:30-1:30pm EST and by appointment

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 examine 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. We will explore 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 related policy ideas. 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 specific health disparity.

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.

Required reading

All 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.

Course requirements

Participation (20 pts)

Small group discussions (10 pts total; 5 pts for facilitating one discussion and 5 pts for actively participating in all discussions). We will form six permanent groups of about seven students each. On small group discussion days, you will meet during the class period for discussions related to articles that apply or extend the week's conceptual topic.

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.

The discussion facilitator should post these discussion questions and supplementary materials to Slack on your Group channel at least an hour before class. Please assign a note-taker to sketch an outline of your discussion on Slack.

Large group discussions and activities (10 pts). Participation in class discussions and group activities makes up a very important part of your grade. How does one demonstrate participation?

1. By actively contributing to class discussion in a critical, insightful manner; and,
2. By actively contributing to small group exercises.

If you come class and sit attentively every day without actively contributing to larger group discussions or small group exercises, you will receive a 0 for your participation grade. I will keep track of your participation in discussions and in-class activities, and report these to you in weeks 5 and 10.

Response Memos (40 pts)

You will have an opportunity to write four Response Memos regarding the content of small-group discussions during the term (*10 pts. each*). There are seven small-group discussions, so you may choose to skip three Response Memos for whichever discussions you want. Each memo should be a one-page, single-spaced, critical, synthetic response to all the readings for the days you choose. I suggest that you spend less time summarizing the main arguments, and more time analyzing common threads you discover across readings. Please upload an electronic copy to Canvas before class on the day the readings are being discussed.

Response Memos should consist of two parts. First, you will work to determine the argument of the piece, and a concise summary of the strategies/evidence the author is using to support it. The first paragraph of your memo should *briefly* explicate how the authors convey and support their arguments. I suggest that this paragraph take the form of a critical synthesis, especially if there are more than one reading. The following questions may serve as a guide:

- What are the authors' main arguments?
- What evidence do they use to support their arguments?
- **How do these ideas fit together into a larger argument that *you* are making in this Response Memo?**

Second, you should focus on your analysis and reflections on the piece(s). The following questions may serve as a guide:

- What questions/reflections does this piece bring up for you? If you ask questions, take a stab at answering them yourself! Hypothesize ... it doesn't matter if you're right. If you had the best possible data to answer these questions, what would it look like, and what do you think it would tell you?
- Do the ideas in this reading relate to other concepts from the course, your life, ideas that are important to you, or current events? In other words, what do these authors' arguments *mean*? What are the implications?

Research Paper (40 pts)

Health Equity Research Project (40 pts total). In support of this research project, you are responsible for:

- A one-page proposal (5 pts) describing your topic and your research approach.
- An outline (5 pts) containing your thesis statement (your argument), topic sentences (your main claims), and supporting bullet points for each body paragraph (your evidence).
- A final paper (30 pts), which should be approximately 8-10 pages, double spaced.

Grading

I follow the grading conventions as defined by the Organization, Regulations, and Courses (ORC) at Dartmouth. https://www.dartmouth.edu/reg/transcript/grade_descriptions.html

- A Excellent** mastery of course material (student performance indicates a very high degree of originality, creativity, and excellent performance in analysis, synthesis, critical expression, and independence)
- B Good** mastery of course material (student performance indicates a high degree of originality, creativity, and good performance in analysis, synthesis, critical expression, and independence)
- C Acceptable** mastery of course material (student performance indicates some degree of originality, creativity, and acceptable performance in analysis, synthesis, critical expression, and independence)
- D Deficient** in mastery of course material (student performance indicates some degree of originality, creativity, and deficient performance in analysis, synthesis, critical expression, and independence)

E Serious deficiency in mastery of course material (student performance clearly lacking originality, creativity, and seriously deficient performance in analysis, synthesis, critical expression, and independence)

I will determine your final letter grade according to the following percentage breakdown:

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Percent</u>
A	95-100%	C+	77-79.9%
A-	92-94.9%	C	73-76.9%
B+	89-91.9%	C-	70-72.9%
B	83-88.9%	D	60-69.9%
B-	80-82.9%	E	< 60%

Please note the following about grades: 1) I do not round grades; 2) I do not negotiate grades unless an error was made.

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.

Late Policy

All students will receive one 24-hour extension on any class assignment of their choosing, no questions asked. Students should notify me via email if/when you plan to use your extension. After that, on any assignment, your grade will be reduced by 10 percentage points for each day late (e.g., 1 day late a grade of 100 would be reduced to a 90; 2 days, 80; and so on.) These are extraordinary times and I am willing to be flexible with this policy, within reason. Please reach out to me if you are having difficulty keeping up with the coursework.

Accommodations

Students requesting disability-related accommodations and services for this course are encouraged to schedule a phone/Zoom meeting with me as early in the term as possible. This conversation will help to establish what supports are built into my course. In order for accommodations to be authorized, students are required to consult with [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) and to request an accommodation email be sent to me. We will work together with SAS if accommodations need to be modified based on the learning environment. If students have questions about whether they are eligible for accommodations, they should contact the SAS office. All inquiries and discussions will remain confidential. (student.accessibility.services@dartmouth.edu; 603-646-9900)

Wellness

The academic environment at Dartmouth is challenging, our terms are intensive, and classes are not the only demanding part of your life. There are a number of resources available to support your wellness, including [Undergraduate Deans](#), [Dartmouth College Health Service](#), and the [Student Wellness Center](#).

Communication

My office hours are for you. I have decided to try “walking office hours” this winter to support social distancing. You are welcome to come and talk with me about *anything* during office hours. I am also

available by appointment if my office hours do not work with your schedule. 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 also expect you to regularly check your Dartmouth e-mail and Canvas for class announcements and updates.

Academic Honor

I assume you will follow intellectual honor and integrity in this class. For more guidance see the [Academic Honor Principle](#). 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. For a broad overview on academic integrity, see this page on [Sources and Citations at Dartmouth](#).

Classroom Responsibility and Courtesy

All students are expected to have a voice in our class dialogue. Class participation involves thinking carefully, listening, and posing questions to others as much as it is about sharing your ideas. This requires us to be present, set aside distractions, and focus our attention on engaging with one another. Please put your cell phones on vibrate, do not text, and do not use your laptop for anything other than being fully present in our seminar discussions.

The tone with which we engage one another is also extremely important and should come from a place of mutual respect and understanding. You are free to disagree with the views raised in the material or by others in the class, but must do so with a reasoned critique based on a complete consideration of their argument. Your own argument should be supported by evidence rather than personal opinion or anecdotes. Disrespectful behavior such as talking while others are talking, dominating the floor, or engaging in personal attacks will not be tolerated. You are expected to treat one another and me with respect at all times.

Additional Support for Learning

Student Center for Research, Writing, and Information Technology (RWIT): At RWIT, you can meet one-on-one with an undergraduate tutor to discuss a paper, research project, or multimedia assignment. <https://students.dartmouth.edu/rwit/>

Academic Skills Center (ASC): The mission of Dartmouth's Academic Skills Center is to assist students in achieving academic success through a wide variety of services and programs. The Center is available to all students who wish to improve their academic skills and ability to learn, thereby maximizing their academic experience and allowing them to achieve greater academic performance and personal fulfillment. <https://students.dartmouth.edu/academic-skills/>

Course Plan and Readings

Week One (Jan 8)

Friday **Introduction to the course: Defining health disparities**

- Gladwell (2008), *Outliers*

Week Two (Jan 11-15)

Monday Health, disease, and equity

- Sen (2002), “Why Health Equity?”
- Braveman et al. (2011), “Health Disparities and Health Equity”

Wednesday Please watch film during class time

- *Unnatural Causes*, Episode 1: “In Sickness and In Wealth”

Friday Education, income, and occupation

- Adler and Newman (2002), “Socioeconomic Disparities in Health”
- Leonhardt and Thompson (2020), [“How Working-Class Life Is Killing Americans”](#)

Week Three (Jan 18-22)

Monday NO CLASS, Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Wednesday Fundamental Cause

- Link and Phelan (1995), “Social Conditions as Fundamental Causes of Disease”

Friday Small group discussion 1: Fundamental cause applied

- Montez, Hayward and Zajacova (2019), “Educational Disparities in Health”
- Lutfey and Freese (2005), “Fundamentals of Fundamental Causality”
- Clouston, Nataleb and Link (2020, journal pre-proof), “SES inequalities in covid-19”

Week Four (Jan 25-29)

Monday Health behaviors

- Pampel, Krueger and Denney (2010), “Socioeconomic Disparities in Health Behaviors”
- Mirowsky and Ross (2015), “Education, Health, and the Default American Lifestyle”
- Creswell and Kaplan (2019), “How Juul Hooked a Generation on Nicotine”

Wednesday The stress process

- McEwen (1998), “Stress, Adaptation, and Disease”
- Thoits (2010), “Stress and Health”

Friday Small group discussion 2: Behavioral interventions

- Verplanken and Wood (2006), “Interventions to Break and Create Habits”
- Ehrenreich (2018), “Why are the Poor Blamed and Shamed for their Deaths?”
- Marantz (1990), “Blaming the Victim”
- Carroll (2019), “Health Facts Aren’t Enough”

Week Five (Feb 1-5)

- Monday Institutional racism**
- Jones (2000), “Levels of Racism”
 - Massey (2004), “Segregation and Stratification”
 - Hammonds and Reverby (2019), “Toward a Historically Informed Analysis”
 - In class: we will watch a segment of *The House We Live In*
- Wednesday The interpersonal and intrapersonal burden of racism**
- Kwate and Meyer (2011), “On Sticks and Stones and Broken Bones”
 - Viruell-Fuentes (2011), “It’s a lot of Work”
- Friday Small group discussion 3: Racism**
- Kendi (2019), “The Greatest White Privilege Is Life Itself”
 - Siddiqi et al. (2019), “Growing Sense of Social Status Threat”
 - Wezerek (2020), [“Racism’s Hidden Toll”](#)

Week Six (Feb 8-12)

- Monday Neighborhood context**
- Chang (2018), “Living in a Poor Neighborhood Changes Everything”
 - Sharkey and Faber (2019), “Where, When, Why, and For Whom?”
 - Keene and Padilla (2010), “Race, Class, and the Stigma of Place”
- Wednesday Legal violence**
- Cervantes and Menjivar (2020), “Legal Violence, Health, and Access to Care”
 - Asad and Clair (2018), “Racialized Legal Status”
- Friday Small group discussion 4: Macro-Level Inequality**
- Seamster and Purifoy (2020), “What is Environmental Racism For?”
 - Green (2019), “Flint’s Children Suffer”
 - Flowers (2020), “Mold, Possums and Pools of Sewage”

Week Seven (Feb 15-19)

- Monday Women’s health**
- Homan (2019), “Structural Sexism”
 - Criado-Perez (2019), “The Deadly Truth about a World Built for Men”
- Wednesday Masculinity**
- Courtenay (2000), “Constructions of Masculinity”
 - Victor (2020), “Coronavirus Safety Runs into Masculinity”
 - Research paper proposal due

- Friday Small group discussion 5: Intersectionality**
- López and Gadsden (2016), “Health Inequities, Social Determinants, and Intersectionality”
 - Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2007), “You Have to Show Strength”
 - Villarosa (2018) <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/11/magazine/black-mothers-babies-death-maternal-mortality.html>
 - Felner, Dudley and Ramirez-Valles (2018), “Anywhere but Here”

Week Eight (Feb 22-26)

- Monday The sick role**
- Trillin (1981), “Of Dragons and Garden Peas”
 - Glenton (2003), “Striving for the Sick Role”
- Wednesday Medicalization**
- Loe (2008), “The Prescription of a New Generation”
 - Schwartz (2016), “Generation Adderall”
 - Research paper outline due

- Friday Small group discussion 6: Physician-Patient Interaction and Social Construction**
- Conrad and Barker (2020), “The Social Construction of Illness”
 - Timmermans (2020), “The Engaged Patient”
 - White III (2011), “Seeing Patients”

Week Nine (March 1-5)

- Monday Health care in the U.S.**
- Carroll (2017), “The Real Reason the U.S. Has Employer-Sponsored Health Insurance”
- Wednesday Please watch film during class time**
- “Money Driven Medicine: Inside the Medical-Industrial Complex”
- Friday Health care reform**
- Gawande (2009), “The Cost Conundrum”

Week Ten (Mar 8-10)

- Monday Small group discussion 7: Health care and public health**
- Light and Terrasse (2017), “Immigrant Access in the Affordable Care Act”
 - Interlandi (2019), “Why doesn’t the United States have universal health care?”
 - Yong (2020), “How the Pandemic Defeated America”

Wednesday Course wrap-up

- Woolf (2009), "Social Policy as Health Policy"
- Kolata and Tavernise (2019), "It's Not Just Poor White People"
- Bye, Ghirardelli and Fontes (2016), "How Americans' Views Differ"
- Research paper due, midnight

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