

Social Determinants of Health (working syllabus)

Instructor Information

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- Office Location: TBD
- Office Hours: TBD

Course Details

- Days: TBD
- Time: TBD
- Location: TBD

General Information

Description

What determines our health? Is it our DNA and genetics? Or our health behaviors, such as diet and exercise? In this course, we examine many of the social determinants, or fundamental causes, of health. We explore how our social world and environment affect our health and create health disparities in society. We will cover topics related to race/ethnicity, sex, gender, income, education, class, and healthcare, and more. We will uncover that there is a lot more to health than just what individuals do, but that our society affects all our health.

Course Objectives

At the end of this course, you will understand that many of the health outcomes and disparities we observe in our population are a result of social circumstances and not just individual behaviors. Additionally, you will:

- Describe the major themes and theoretical frameworks for studying population health and social behavior
- Identify the upstream causes of health from a social perspective
- Understand how social constructs, such as race/ethnicity, gender, and social class affect our population's health and health disparities
- Identify, describe, and articulate the rationale for community involvement in public health
- Develop concrete skills, such as effectively reading academic texts, interpreting published quantitative data, professional writing, and engage in debates and discussions.

Course Materials

Required Materials*

Cockerham, William C. 2013. *Social Causes of Health & Disease* (2nd Edition).

Ratcliff, Kathryn Strother. 2017. *The Social Determinants of Health: Looking Upstream*.

Marmot, Michael. 2015. *The Health Gap: The Challenge of an Unequal World*.

All other reading and media materials will be provided by the instructor and available on the course website.

Course Requirements & Policies

Requirements

The format of this course is a combination of lecture and discussions based on the social determinants of health and health disparities between social groups. It is important that you come to each prepared to participate. Preparation for the class includes having read the assigned text for each day, taking notes on the main points and key ideas, and having prepared comments and questions related to the readings.

Grading

Your work will be graded on a point system, which will be converted to a percentage. In this course, there are 1,000 cumulative points available, which corresponds to a 100% scale. In some courses, students begin with a full grade, and points are deducted throughout the semester; this is not how I grade. In this course, everyone starts with zero points, and as you complete and turn in assignments, quizzes, and tests, points are added to your total. This is to ensure that students continue to work toward earning their grade, and not merely picking and choosing what assignments to focus on to "keep" their grade.

Grades are distributed as follows:

Attendance	150 points	15% of final grade
Participation	150 points	15% of final grade
Weekly Responses	100 points	10% of final grade
Policy Brief	150 points	15% of final grade
Exams	300 points	30% of final grade
Final Paper/Proposal	150 points	15% of final grade
Total	1,000 points	100%

Late or Missed Work

It is important to stay on task and complete your assignments on time. However, life circumstances sometimes get in the way. I will allow late work to be turned in no later

than one class period late but will include a 10% reduction on any work that is turned in late. Any assignments turned in more than one class period late will not be accepted and will be given zero points.

There are some exceptions to the late work policy. First, if you are aware of an upcoming absence that will conflict with an in-class quiz, test, or assignment, you may complete an excused absence form.

Second, if you experience an unavoidable, verifiable, emergent, and extenuating circumstance preventing you from submitting work on time, you may have the opportunity to submit late work.

**Additional exceptions and policies regarding an inability to complete an assignment on time will be permitted based on college policies.

Attendance Policy

Students may miss a total of three class periods, no questions asked, without penalty. Once a student misses more than three class periods, each period missed beyond three will be a 50-point deduction, up to 150-point deduction, from the final grade.

Students may arrive to class up to five minutes late without penalty, any tardiness beyond five minutes will have a 20-point deduction, up to 100-point deduction, from the final grade. Any tardiness beyond 30 minutes will be considered as an absence.

Participation

It is vital that every student participates in the course to the extent that they are comfortable. This course is designed to function on discussion and debate, for this to work, everyone must come to class prepared and ready to participate. If you have any questions or concerns about your willingness or ability to participate, please let me know.

Weekly Responses

The purpose of these weekly responses is to ensure that students are keeping up with the reading and are prepared to discuss the topics we are covering in class. I will post a question related to the assigned reading for the week ahead, and students must submit a thoughtful response of 2-3 paragraphs making specific reference to the text. Weekly responses will be due before class begins on the first day of class for the week.

Policy Brief

You will spend the semester working in small groups (3-4 students per group) to research a topic of your choosing related to social causes of health and health policy. The topic should be based in the U.S. context and have contemporary relevance. This research will result in two graded products; an infographic (1 page) produced as a group, and a five-minute in-class group presentation.

Exams

Exams will cover the chapters listed next to each exam on the course schedule. Even if we do not discuss a specific topic or section of the reading in class, it will be on the test. In addition to the readings, exams will also cover anything covered in class discussion.

Final Paper/Research Proposal

During the course, we will cover a variety of topics related to the social determinants of health. For your final paper, you will pick a topic, approved by the instructor, related to medical sociology and will compose a solo-authored paper of 5-7 double-spaced pages. You have three options for this final paper. 1) Write a research paper, including some data analysis. 2) Write a literature review on a specific topic with a research question in mind. 3) Propose a research idea, including a literature review and suggested methods and possible datasets.

Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading	Due
Week 1			
Class 1	Review syllabus and course introduction	Syllabus	
Class 2	Social Conditions as Fundamental Cause of Disease	Link & Phelan (1995); Phelan et al. (2010); Chang & Lauderdale (2009)	
Week 2			
Class 1	Social Conditions as Fundamental Cause of Disease	Marmot Ch. 1	Weekly Response
Class 2	Social Conditions as Fundamental Cause of Disease	Ratcliff Ch. 2	
Week 3			
Class 1	Social Construction of Health & Illness	Cockerham Ch. 2	Weekly Response
Class 2	Social Construction of Health & Illness	Conrad & Barker (2010); Barker (2008)	
Week 4			
Class 1	Poverty & Health	Ratcliff Ch. 3	Weekly Response
Class 2	Poverty & Health	Marmot Ch. 3	
Week 5			
Class 1	Poverty & Health	In-class screening "Unnatural Causes: In Sickness & In Wealth"	
Class 2	Exam 1	Link & Phelan; Phelan et al.; Chang & Lauderdale; Conrad & Barker; Barker; Marmot Ch. 1 & Ch. 3; Ratcliff Ch 2. & Ch. 3; Cockerham Ch.2; Unnatural Causes	
Week 6			
Class 1	Group Work	Policy Brief Ideas	
Class 2	Individual Health Behaviors	Marmot Ch. 2	Individual Research Idea

Week 7			
Class 1	Individual Health Behaviors	Cockerham Ch. 3	Weekly Response
Class 2	Environment & Health	Ratcliff Ch. 4	
Week 8			
Class 1	Environment & Health	Ratcliff Ch. 5	Weekly Response
Class 2	Environment & Health	Cockerham Ch. 7	
Week 10			
Class 1	Health Behaviors & Environment	In-class debate	
Class 2	Exam 2	Marmot Ch. 2; Ratcliff Ch. 4 & Ch. 5; Cockerham Ch. 7	
Week 11			
Class 1	Group Work	Policy Briefs	
Class 2	Race/Ethnicity & Health	Lukachko et al. (2014); Cockerham Ch. 6	
Week 12			
Class 1	Gender & Health	Gorman et al. (2015); Homan (2019)	Weekly Response
Class 2	Education & Health	Marmot Ch. 5 & Ch. 7	
Week 13			
Class 1	Occupation & Health	Marmot Ch. 6	Weekly Response
Class 2	Occupation & Health	Ratcliff Ch. 7	
Week 14			
Class 1	Solutions/Conclusion	Ratcliff Ch. 8; Marmot Ch. 8 & Ch. 9	
Class 2	Exam 3	Lukachko et al.; Gorman et al.; Homan; Cockerham Ch. 6; Marmot Ch. 5, Ch. 6, Ch. 7, Ch. 8, Ch. 9; Ratcliff Ch. 7 & Ch. 8	
Week 15			
Class 1	Group Policy Brief Presentations		
Class 2	Group Policy Brief Presentations		Final Paper Due

*Other possible texts include, but are not limited to: A reading list of journal articles related to the social determinants of health.