Course Description

This course will critically examine the unequal distribution of disease and mortality in the United States along the axes of race, ethnicity, class and place. Through in-depth engagement with case studies, historical texts and public health literature we will explore why individuals from some race/ethnicities, class backgrounds, and geographies are more vulnerable to premature death and adverse outcomes than others. What is the role of history, politics and institutions in the epidemiological patterns of disease and illness in the United States? Students will explore topics such as the high levels of cardiovascular disease in the U.S. Deep South, the public health impacts of the War on Drugs, disparities in mental health, and the persistent racial disparity in HIV/AIDS. We will pay particular attention to the role of public policy in addressing health inequalities, and students will analyze how federal, state and local policies shape life chances of vulnerable citizens. Student work will culminate in a policy memo and presentation, allowing them to hone valuable skillsets for future participation in the research and policy processes.

Assignments & Grading

Participation (15%): Class discussions are an integral part of the course and all students are expected and encouraged to participate. Each week, students will submit a brief (300 word max) discussion post to the Course Forum describing a new insight or an issue that was left unaddressed in the readings. In your posts, include at least one discussion question for the upcoming seminar. Responses are due every Tuesday night by 11:59pm.

Short Essay (20%): An essay prompt will be posted to Trunk on 9/21 and short essays will be due on 10/14.
**Presentation (15%):** Students will choose a health inequality topic and present on the epidemiological data, the history of the issue, past and current policy responses and future directions. *Presentations will take place during the final week of class.*

**Policy Memo (15%):** Submit a 3-page policy memo proposing a solution to the issue covered in your presentation. *Policy memos due in-class on 12/07.*

**Final Paper (35%):** Students will submit their 8-10 page final papers on 12/14.

I look forward to getting to know all of you this semester! Please don’t hesitate to reach out to me during office hours with any questions or concerns.

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**Week 1 (9/7): Introduction to Health Disparities in the U.S.**

- Institute of Medicine, 2012. *How Far Have We Come in Reducing Health Disparities?: Progress Since 2000.* Introduction & Chapter 2

*Film (to be screened in class): Unnatural Causes (PBS, 2008)*

**Week 2 (9/14): Disease and Health among Native Americans**

Week 3 (9/21): Explaining Health Inequalities: Competing Theories


Week 4 (9/28): Race, Geography and Health: Disparities in the U.S. Deep South


Week 5 (10/5): Realities Plaguing Appalachia

- hooks, b. 2012. *Appalachian Elegy: Poetry and Place (Kentucky Voices)*.
Documentary to be screened in class: Reichert J, Zaman F. “Remote Area Medical” 2012

Week 6 (10/12): Health in the Postindustrial City


To view in class: Frazier, LaToya Ruby. “A visual history of inequality in industrial America.” TED Talk.

Week 7 (10/19): Health Inequalities in Massachusetts


Optional

Week 8 (10/26): Racial Disparities in HIV/AIDS in the United States


In-class: How to write a policy memo


Week 10 (11/9): The War on Drugs: Criminal Justice or Public Health?


Week 11 (11/16): Violence as a Public Health Issue


No Classes November 23rd. THANKSGIVING BREAK
Week 12 (11/30): Misdiagnosing Mental Illness?: Race, Ethnicity and Mental Health Diagnosis and Care


Week 13 (12/7): Student Policy Presentations

IN CLASS PRESENTATIONS & DISCUSSION

Final Papers Due 12/14 at 5pm