SOCIOLOGY 220:
Health, Biomedicine, Culture, and Society

Tuesday and Thursday, 5 p.m. – 6:20 p.m., University Hall Room 122

Instructor: Dr. Christine Wood (c-wood@northwestern.edu)
Office Hours: Thursday, 2p.m. – 4 p.m., 515 Clark Street Room 205

Teaching Assistant: Andrew Owen (AndrewOwen2020@u.northwestern.edu)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Modern scientific medicine continues to advance at a rapid pace, with new and emerging possibilities for treatment and health care accessibility. But medicine and health care systems are also sources of contention and controversy. While there is social consensus regarding the inherent good of medical breakthroughs, many facets of modern medicine, like the prevention of sexually transmitted infections, vaccines, and embryonic stem cell research, are fraught with conflict.

This course provides a broad introduction to healthcare and biomedicine, as they are practiced and as they are contested culturally in the modern West. Current problems within the field of medicine and health care provision we will consider are:

- The social and cultural meanings of health and illness;
- The role of the state in establishing, intervening in, and defining health priorities;
- The development of health care systems and decisions about how health resources should be distributed;
- The trustworthiness and reliability of medical knowledge in the face of illness;
- The ethics of biomedical research and conduct in clinical trials;
- How research recruitment and health care should be distributed across social groups delineated by income, race, gender, nationality, and sexual orientation.

In five parts, this course will consider the social and cultural meanings of health and illness; medicalization; the practices of biomedical research and making medical knowledge; diversity in biomedical research and its implications for knowledge and innovation; and the structure and organization of health care systems.

COURSE FORMAT

The course comprises lecture, media (film and news segments), and class discussion. All films listed on the syllabus will be viewed in class, but I will try to provide links to those films as often as possible so you may re-watch them on your own time.
COURSE MECHANICS

This course will make use of the “Canvas” course management system (http://www.it.northwestern.edu/education/learning-management/login.html)

On Canvas, you can:

- Access ALL required readings (there is nothing to purchase)
- Read periodic announcements from Dr. Wood or TA Andrew
- Access this syllabus
- Access course assignments once they are posted

I do allow use of technology in class (laptops, tablets, and other electronic devices that assist in learning and note-taking). Please do not abuse this privilege by accessing social media sites during class. If web surfing during class becomes a problem, I will change my policy on technology.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS/EVALUATION

1. A take-home response essay (4-5 pages) that will assess your understanding of the theoretical concepts in the first part of the course. The prompt for this essay will be distributed on Thursday, October 8. The paper will be due in-class on October 15. This essay is worth 25% of your final grade.

2. We will have an in-class exam on Tuesday, November 3. I will distribute a review guide prior to the exam and will review the course material in advance. The exam will include all material from course readings and lectures up to that point. The exam will consist of a series of multiple choice/fill-in-the-blank response questions and a series of short answer questions. The exam is worth 25% of your final grade.

3. The take-home final will consist of two essays (4-5 pages each). I will base the prompts on the entirety of the course material. I will distribute prompts for these essays in advance. The essays will be due on Monday, December 7 by 12 p.m. in Dr. Wood’s faculty mailbox in 1810 Chicago Avenue. The final is worth 40% of your final grade.

4. I take attendance daily using a sign-in sheet. Attendance is worth 10% of your final grade. Participation in class discussion is encouraged, and I will consider your contributions favorably in my assessment of your final grade.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Please familiarize yourself with Northwestern’s policies regarding academic integrity: http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/index.html
Schedule of Reading and Assignments

Tuesday, September 22, 2015: Introduction

PART 1: Social meanings of health and illness

Thursday, September 24: The social construction of illness


Tuesday, September 29: Institutional influences on health outcomes


Thursday, October 1: Framing disease: the case of obesity


Tuesday, October 6: Health inequalities (or, health and inequality)


Film – Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick? (Episode 5 – “Place Matters”) - http://northwestern.kanopystreaming.com/node/62852

PART 2: Medicine and culture

Thursday, October 8: Medicalization

Tuesday, October 13: Mental illness as a mirror to culture


Thursday, October 15: Medicine as a metaphor


**Response essay due in-class today**

**PART 3: Clinical practice, knowledge, and the public**

Tuesday, October 20: Health crises and lay expertise


Thursday, October 22: Vaccinations and the public


**PART 4: Difference, diversity, and biopolitics**

Tuesday, October 27: The “standard human” and difference in medicine


Thursday, October 29: Women’s health in global context


Tuesday, November 3: IN-CLASS EXAM
PART 5: Structure, organization, and accessibility of health care systems

Thursday, November 5: The US health “disadvantage”


Tuesday, November 10: Commodification and Health Care Systems (Part 1)

Reich, Adam. 2014. Excerpts from Selling Our Souls: The Commodification of Hospital Care in the United States.

Thursday, November 12: Commodification and Health Care Systems (Part II)


Tuesday, November 17: Restructuring US healthcare


Thursday, November 19 – Conclusion (+ review of relevant material for final)

NO CLASS on November 24 and November 26 – Thanksgiving Holiday

READING WEEK on December 1 and December 3 (Office hours available)

TAKE HOME FINAL due on December 5 by 12 p.m.