

University of California, Berkeley
Department of Sociology

Sociology 190

Seminar and Research in Sociology: Health, Biomedicine, and Inequality

Fall 2020

Tuesdays 2-4p

Office hours: Tuesdays 4-4:45p (office)

Thursdays 1-1:45p (via Zoom, sign up in advance)

Instructor: Mel Jeske

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

In recent months, the global coronavirus pandemic has highlighted pervasive health inequalities that inundate the US, as well as challenges with our biomedical research infrastructures. These disparities and challenges, however, are not novel. Why are health outcomes often stratified along racial and class lines? How do various intersections of identity – such as gender, sexuality, race, age, and religion – make some groups more vulnerable to health risk and disease? Why do we, as a society, invest in particular health interventions over others? And why do some groups have better and more access to new innovations in biomedicine? This course explores the social and political aspects of health, illness, and the ways we produce biomedical and public health knowledge. We will cover sociological perspectives on health inequity, the production of biomedical knowledge, and our current biomedical moment. This course will draw on frameworks from medical sociology as well as science and technology studies. Additionally, we will utilize popular media and documentaries sources.

As an advanced seminar in sociology, it is expected that you will have a solid foundation in sociological concepts such as stratification, inequality, and social institutions. This class is organized in three thematic units:

- Theorizing Inequity in Health and Biomedicine
- Social Difference & the Production of Biomedical Knowledge
- The Political Economy of Biomedicine

COURSE MATERIALS

In this course, we will read scholarly books and articles, as well as utilize popular media sources. We will read multiple, selected chapters from the following books. You are responsible for attaining a copy of these books, electronic or hard copy. All other course materials will be made available on bcourses.

- Alondra Nelson. 2011. *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Roberts, Dorothy. 2011. *Fatal Invention: How Science, Politics, and Big Business Re-create Race in the Twenty-First Century*. The New Press.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your grade will be comprised of four components.

Assignment	% of Grade
Participation	20%
Response Papers (3 @ 15% each)	45%
Final Paper	35%

Grade Distribution

A+ 97-100%	B+ 86-89%	C+ 76-79%	D+ 66-69%	F <60%
A 94-96%	B 83-85%	C 73-75%	D 63-65%	
A- 90-93%	B- 80-82%	C- 70-72%	D- 60-62%	

COURSE ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Brief descriptions of course assignments are outlined below. More information about each assignment will be provided on bcourses.

Response Papers (45% - 3 @ 15% each)

You will write a response paper for each of the three themed units in the course. These papers should be 3-4 pages (double spaced) and should draw on multiple readings from the unit. Response papers should engage the core concepts from the unit, the empirical evidence discussed in course readings, and your reflections to the material.

Final Paper (35%)

Your final paper for this course will be a 15-20 page paper that analyzes a topic related to our class that you will select (in consultation with the instructor). You will use course texts as well additional sources to develop your analysis.

Final paper scaffolding:

- No later than Thurs, October 28: meet with me to discuss topic for final paper (*required*)
- Friday, November 12: submit draft abstract, outline, and draft reading list for feedback on bcourses (*optional, but recommended*)
- Monday, December 13: final paper due

Participation (20%)

Engaging with others' ideas is critical to a productive seminar. Sharing ideas, challenging your peers (respectfully), and engaging with one another's' reflections are the core benefits of seminar style courses. Your participation grade will be evaluated based on your engagement throughout the semester. In the event that the course moves to remote learning, participation will be based on in synchronistic seminars, as well as asynchronistic activities (e.g., engaging with other student posts and discussions).

COURSE POLICIES

Late Policy

Late papers are subject to the following penalties: 10 percentage points per 24 hrs late, and will not be accepted beyond 72 hrs after the deadline.

Email Policy

Before emailing me with a question about the course, please first make sure that the answer is not provided in the syllabus or on bcourses. When emailing, include the course number in your email subject line, include all pertinent information, and be courteous.

Policy on Remote Participation

In the event that at any point the semester goes to online instruction, I ask that you turn your video on during our class meetings. This is particularly important for class and group discussion times. I recognize that this may not always be possible, given internet connectivity issues, etc. To the extent possible, I encourage you to turn your video on during our class meetings.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Do not turn in any work that is not your own effort and thinking: plagiarism is a serious offense and will be treated as such. We will discuss what plagiarism is and how to avoid it in class. Any suspected offense will be investigated, and if necessary reported to the Office of Student Conduct. Find more information about plagiarism guidelines here:

<https://sa.berkeley.edu/conduct/integrity/definition>

You are a member of an academic community at one of the world's leading research universities. Universities like UC Berkeley create knowledge that has a lasting impact in the world of ideas and on the lives of others; such knowledge can come from an undergraduate paper as well as the lab of an internationally known professor. One of the most important values of an academic community is the balance between the free flow of ideas and the respect for the intellectual property of others. Researchers don't use one another's research without permission; scholars and students always use proper citations in papers; professors may not circulate or publish student papers without the writer's permission; and students may not circulate or post materials (handouts, exams, syllabi, or any class materials) from their classes without the written permission of the instructor. Any assignment, paper or report submitted by you and that bears your name is presumed to be your own original work that has not previously been submitted for credit in another course unless you obtain prior written approval to do so from your instructor. In all of your assignments, including your drafts of papers, you may use words or ideas written by other individuals in publications, web sites, or other sources, but only with proper attribution. Moreover, it is not permitted to reuse course materials you developed in other courses. If you are not clear about the expectations for completing an assignment or paper, be sure to seek clarification from your instructor beforehand. Finally, you should keep in mind that, as a member of the campus community, you are expected to demonstrate integrity in all of your academic endeavors and will be evaluated on your own merits. The consequences of cheating and academic dishonesty—including a formal discipline file, possible loss of future internship, scholarship, or employment opportunities, and denial of admission to graduate school—are simply not worth it.

All papers turned in for this course will be subject to plagiarism checks using Turnitin software.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Please see me as soon as possible if you need particular accommodations as indicated by DSP, and we will work out the necessary arrangements.

H*E*A*L*S

In the event that something comes up in class (verbally or otherwise) that you feel is offensive or taken out of context, please bring this to the attention of the class right away. Should you prefer, you can always talk to the instructor after class, or bring it up anonymously at a later time. These conversations are important and help everyone in the class learn how to create a more inclusive environment. The HEALS framework, developed at the UCSF School of Nursing, can help us have a productive class discussion about the situation. More information is provided here:

<https://nursing.ucsf.edu/about/DIVA-HEALS>

Halt - the discussion.

Engage - with the issue - Who is/could be affected?

Allow - trading opinions/stories/perspectives/articles/reactions

Learn - listen to one another

Synthesis - why does this discussion matter?

WRITING RESOURCES

Writing is crucial not only to your success in this class, but also in your future career. UCB has a writing center where you can work with writing tutors online and in person to improve your papers. These services are available remotely. For more information see:

<https://slc.berkeley.edu/writing>

A NOTE ON THIS SYLLABUS

A syllabus provides a roadmap for a given course for both the students and the instructor. The instructor reserves the right make changes to the syllabus—including due dates and content—as necessary. Students will be notified right away and given an updated version.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Theme I: Theorizing Inequity in Health and Biomedicine

Week 1 (Tues, Aug 31): Introduction to the course & *Theme I*

Readings:

No readings due before our first meeting. Obtain copies of the course books.

Recommended Readings:

Lisa Bowleg. 2020. We're not all in this together: COVID-19, Intersectionality, and Structural Inequality. *American Journal of Public Health*, 110(7): 917.

Gravelee, Clarence. 2020. Racism, Not Genetics, Explains why Black Americans are Dying of COVID-19. <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/voices/racism-not-genetics-explains-why-black-americans-are-dying-of-covid-19/>

Williams, David and Lisa Cooper. 2020. COVID-19 and Health Equity – A new kind of “herd immunity.” *JAMA* 323(24): 2478-2480.

Assignment:

- Write an introductory post to your fellow classmates on bcourses. Respond to at least 2 other students. (We will also do introductions in class, but use this as an opportunity to get to know your classmates a bit more!)

Week 2 (Tues, Sept 7)

Readings:

Nelson, Alondra. 2011. *Body and Soul*, preface, Chapter 1 & 2, pp. ix-xvi, 1-74

Week 3 (Tues, Sept 14)

Readings:

Nelson, Alondra. 2011. *Body and Soul* Ch. 3 & 4, pp. 75-114, 115-152.

Week 4 (Tues, Sept 21)

Readings:

Nelson, Alondra. 2011. *Body and Soul* Ch. 5 & Conclusion, pp. 153-180, 181-189.

Rollins, O. 2021. Towards an antiracist (neuro)science. *Nature Human Behaviour* 5: 540-541.

Assignments due:

- Theme 1 response paper due via bcourses on Friday 9/24 by 5:00 PM.

Theme 2: Social Difference & the Production of Biomedical Knowledge

Week 5 (Tues, Sept 28): Introduction to *Theme 2*

Readings:

Hatch, Anthony. 2014. Chapter 1: Race, Biomedicine, and Health Injustice. In *Blood Sugar: Racial Pharmacology and Food Justice in Black America*. pp. 21-40.

Roberts, Dorothy. 2011. *Fatal Invention* Introduction & Part I, pp. 1-55.

Week 6 (Tues, Oct 5)

Readings:

Epstein, Steven. 2007. Chapter 3: The Rise of Resistance: Framing the Critique of the Standard Human. Pp. 53-72. In *Inclusion: the Politics of Difference in Medical Research*. Chicago University Press.

Fisher, Jill. 2020. Inclusive Vaccine Trials are Vital, but lets not boost biological views of race. Truthout News. <https://truthout.org/articles/inclusive-vaccine-trials-are-vital-but-lets-not-boost-biological-views-of-race> (~2 pp)

Week 7 (Tues, Oct 12)

Readings:

Roberts, Dorothy. 2011. *Fatal Invention* Part II (Chapters 3, 4), pp. 56-103

Pitts-Taylor, Victoria. 2019. Neurobiologically poor? Brain phenotypes, inequality, and biosocial determinism. *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 44(4), 660-685.
doi:10.1177/0162243919841695

Week 8 (Tues, Oct 19)

Readings:

Roberts, Dorothy. 2011. *Fatal Invention* Part II (Chapters 5, 6), pp. 104-146

The Edge Podcast, "Understanding Bias in Technology and Data", Dr. Ruha Benjamin, Princeton University (30 minutes)

Week 9 (Tues, Oct 26)

Readings:

Roberts, Dorothy. 2011. *Fatal Invention* Part III (Chapter 7, 8), pp. 147-201.

Vyas, Darshali A., Leo G. Eisenstein, and David S. Jones. 2020. Hidden in plain sight—reconsidering the use of race correction in clinical algorithms. *New England Journal of Medicine*. P. 1-9.

Week 10 (Tues, Nov 2)

Readings:

Roberts, Dorothy. 2011. *Fatal Invention* Part IV (Chapter 11, 12 & Conclusion), pp. 259-312.

Boyd, Rhea, Edwin Lindo, Lachelle Weeks, Monica McLemore. 2020. "On Racism: A New Standard For Publishing On Racial Health Inequities, " Health Affairs Blog, July 2. DOI: 10.1377/hblog20200630.939347. (~3 pp)

Assignments due:

- Theme 2 response paper due by Friday, November 5 by 5:00PM.

Theme 3: Political Economy of Biomedicine

Week 11 (Tues, Nov 9): Introduction to *Theme 3*

Readings:

Clarke, Adele, Janet K. Shim, Laura Mamo, Jennifer Fosket, and Jennifer Fishman. 2003. Biomedicalization: Technoscientific transformations of health, illness, and US biomedicine. *American Sociological Review*, 161-194.

Conrad, P. 2005. The shifting engines of medicalization. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 46(1), 3-14.

Week 12 (Tues, Nov 16)

Readings:

Jeske, Melanie. 2020. Constructing Complexity: Collective Action Framing and Rise of Obesity Research. *Biosocieties*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41292-020-00182-9> (26 pgs).

Brown, Dana and Elizabeth Pfeister. “Insulin: a case study for why we need a public option in the pharmaceutical industry.” STAT. <https://www.statnews.com/2019/09/10/insulin-public-option-pharmaceutical-industry/>

Watch *The Bleeding Edge* (available on Netflix), documentary film about FDA regulation of medical devices and inequality. (1hr 40 min) – available on bcourses, access code for 7 days

Week 13 (Tues, Nov 23)

Readings:

Robinson, Mark D. 2019. Financializing epistemic norms in contemporary biomedical innovation. *Synthese* 196(11): 4391-4407.

Jeske, Melanie. 2021. ‘Conflict of Interest’ or simply ‘interest’? Shifting values in translational medicine. Pp. 49-66 in *Conflict of Interest and Medicine: Knowledge, Practices, and Mobilizations* edited by Boris Hauray, Henri Boullier, Jean-Paul Gaudilliere, and Hélène Michel. London: Routledge.

Sismondo, Sergio. 2008. How pharmaceutical industry funding affects trial outcomes: causal structures and responses. *Social Science & Medicine*, 66(9): 1909–1914.

Week 14 (Tues, Nov 30)

Reading:

TBD

Assignments due:

- Theme 3 response paper due by Friday, December 3 by 5:00 PM.

Week 15 (RRR): No readings or course activities. Office hours will be held virtually.

Final papers are due Tuesday, December 14 by 11:59 PM on bcourses.