

University of California, Berkeley
Department of Sociology

Sociology 190

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

Fall 2020
Mondays 4-6p (Synchronistic)
Remote Instruction

Instructor: Mel Jeske
Email: mel.jeske@berkeley.edu

Offices hours: TBD
(via Zoom)

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 inequities and inequalities, 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. In this course, we will tackle three thematic units that challenge common perceptions about social aspects of health, health disparities, and the institution of medicine. We will employ sociological perspectives to dive into the histories of racism and inequality in healthcare and biomedicine. This class will be organized in three thematic units:

- Conceptualizing health disparities: unequal access, unequal outcomes
- Inequality and inclusion: the production of biomedical knowledge
- Utilizing the sociological imaginary: envisioning justice in biomedicine and beyond

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:

- Alondra Nelson. 2011. *Body and Soul: the Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Jill Fisher. 2020. *Adverse Events: Race, Inequality, and the Testing of New Pharmaceuticals*. New York University Press.

You are responsible for attaining a copy of these books, electronic or hard copy. All other course materials will be made available on bcourses.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your grade will be comprised of four components.

Assignment	% of Grade
Participation	10%
Reading Engagement Assignments	20%
Response Papers (3 @ 10% each)	30%
Final Paper	40%

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.

Reading Engagement Assignments (20%)

Each week you will have specific assignments to complete on bcourses that focus on the core concepts from the readings and media assigned for that week. You may be asked to respond to question prompts, offer brief reflections, find news articles and write about them, engage with your classmates, and so on. Your grade for this component will be evaluated on your overall engagement in these activities over the semester (i.e., there are not specific point values assigned to each week's engagement assignments). You will have an allowance of 2 unexplained or "missed" assignments. After these two, any missing assignments will impact your grade.

Response Papers (30% - 3 @ 10% 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, and your reflections to the material.

Final Paper (40%)

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:

- Before October 30: meet with me to discuss topic for final paper
- Friday, November 13: submit draft abstract, outline, and draft reading list for feedback

- Wednesday, December 16: final paper due

Participation (10%)

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 courses. Your participation grade will be evaluated based on your engagement in synchronistic seminars, as well as asynchronistic activities (e.g., engaging with other student posts and discussions).

COURSE POLICIES

Late Policy

Participation assignments will have open windows where you can participate using the course website in order to receive credit. For instance, you may have a 3-4 day period to respond to posts, questions, other students, etc. In order to receive credit, these assignments must be completed within the designated time frame.

- Late response 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 unless accompanied by a written medical excuse.
- Late final papers will lose 10 points per 24 hrs, and will not be accepted beyond 72 hrs after the deadline unless accompanied by a written medical excuse. Failure to complete your final paper will result in an "incomplete."

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. Include the course number in your email subject line, include all pertinent information, and be courteous.

Policy on Video Participation

In order to make the most out of our virtual seminar style course, I ask that you turn your video on during our synchronistic 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. However, 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, 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: Conceptualizing health disparities: unequal access, unequal outcomes

Week 1 (Aug 31): Introduction to the course & theme I

Readings:

No readings due before our first meeting.

Online Engagement: Taking a Sociological Perspective on COVID and Health Disparities (Due Friday following class)

- Assn 1: Write an introductory post to your fellow classmates. Respond to at least 3 other students to say hello.
- Assn 2: Select 2 readings from ASA Footnotes, “Sociological Perspectives on COVID-19” and write a post. <https://www.asanet.org/news-events/footnotes/may-jun-2020#research-policy> You may select any that you are interested in, and write one post about what you read and your reflections on these issues. In your post title, include the two topics (e.g., aging & environmentalism; disability & immigration)
 - Respond to a post of at least 2 other classmates

Week 2 (Sept 7 – Labor Day – no class, online engagement only)

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.

Nelson, Alondra. 2011. *Body and Soul*, preface and chapter 1 (pp. ix-xvi, 1-48)

Watch: The Coronavirus Pandemic: Unequal Risk for Communities of Color. (30 minutes)

<https://theforum.sph.harvard.edu/events/the-coronavirus-pandemic-17/>

Week 3 (Sept 14)

Readings:

Nelson, *Body and Soul* Ch. 2 (pp. 49-74)

Watch: PBS Frontline “Flint’s Deadly Water” (60 minute watch)

Week 4 (Sept 21)

Readings:

Nelson, *Body and Soul* Ch. 3 pp. 75-114; Conclusion, pp. 181-189.

Strings, Sabrina. 2020. "It's not Obesity. It's Slavery." New York Times.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/25/opinion/coronavirus-race-obesity.html>

Theme 2: Inequality and inclusion: the production of biomedical knowledge

Week 5 (Sept 28)

Introduction to *Theme 2*

Readings:

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

Assignments due:

- Theme 1 response paper due via bcourses on Wednesday 9/30 by 5pm.

Week 6 (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.

Garrison, Nanibaa'. 2013. Genomic Justice for Native Americans: Impact of the Havasupai Case on Genetic Research. *Science, Technology and Human Values* 38(2): 201-223.

Popejoy, Alice & Stephanie M. Fullerton. 2016. Genomics is Failing on Diversity. *Nature* 538: 161-164.

Week 7 (Oct 12)

Readings:

Fisher, *Adverse Events*. Introduction and ch. 1, pp. 1-48.

Watch *The Bleeding Edge* (available on Netflix), documentary film about FDA regulation of medical devices and inequality. (1hr 40 min)

Week 8 (Oct 19)

Readings:

Fisher, *Adverse Events*. Ch. 4 & 7 pp. 100-128; 179-205.

Week 9 (Oct 26)

Readings:

Fisher, *Adverse Events*. Conclusion pp. 253-257.

Washington, H.A., 2006. *Medical apartheid: The dark history of medical experimentation on Black Americans from colonial times to the present*. Doubleday Books. Introduction, pp. 1-24.

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.

Theme 3: Utilizing the sociological imaginary: envisioning justice in biomedicine and beyond

Week 10 (Nov 2)

Introduction to *Theme 3*

Readings:

Matthew, Dayna Bowen. 2018. Just Medicine: A cure for racial inequality in American health care. NYU Press. Chapter 8: A Structural Sociology pp. 75-94.

Assignments due:

- Theme 2 response paper due by Wednesday, Nov 4 by 5pm.

Week 11 (Nov 9)

Readings:

Clarke, Adele, Janet K. Shim, Laura Mamo, Jennifer Fosket, and Jennifer Fishman. 200). Biomedicalization: Technoscientific transformations of health, illness, and US biomedicine. *American Sociological Review*, 161-194.

Roberts, 2008. Is Race-Based Medicine Good for Us?: African American Approaches to Race, Biomedicine, and Equality. *Journal of Law, Medicine, and Ethics* 36(3): 537-545.

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.

Week 12 (Nov 16)

Readings:

Benjamin, Ruha. 2013. Chapter 5: Depathologizing Distrust. Pp. 135-156 In *People's Science: Bodies and Rights on the Stem Cell Frontier*. Stanford University Press.

Bell, Joyce & Douglas Hartman. 2007. Diversity in Everyday Discourse: The Cultural Ambiguities and Consequences of "Happy Talk". *American Sociological Review* 72(6): 895-914.

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 13 (Nov 23)

Readings:

Scheffler, Robin Wolfe. 2020. "A coronavirus vaccine can't come at the expense of fighting the virus now." *Washington Post*. July 24.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/07/24/covid-19-vaccine-cant-come-expense-fighting-virus-now/>

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/>

Week 14 (Nov 30)

Reading:

TBD

Assignments due:

- Theme 3 response paper due by Wednesday, Dec 2 by 5pm.

Week 15 (RRR)

No readings or course activities.

FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE ON WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 16 by 11:59 PM.