“Medical science can address the biological pathways involved in disease, the pathology and the opportunities for treatment, but in so far as health is a social product and some forms of social organization are healthier than others, advances in our understanding of health will depend on social research” (Wilkinson 1996:13-14).

This course is designed to provide students with an overview of current and enduring topics in the sociology of health and medicine, offering a critical alternative and complement to the biomedical perspective on health. Put simply, we are looking for nothing short of a revolution in the way you think about health and medicine. This may require that you offer up for critical examination a number of long-held assumptions and beliefs. We will examine such topics as: the social determinants of health and health disparities both domestically and globally; the social underpinnings of HIV/AIDS in Africa; the institutional design of health care systems, America’s exceptional arrangement, and the associated politics of policy reform; the rise of medical authority, along with recent challenges; the medicalization of behaviors and conditions; and the social dynamics of the medical encounter. More specifically, we will occupy ourselves with the following questions:

- How are health, illness, and disease distributed across both domestic and global populations? What social factors account for health disparities across socially defined groups?
- What factors account for the spread and patterning of HIV/AIDS in Africa? What factors should inform our efforts at intervention?
- How might we think of social policy as health policy? How can these connections be made more transparent?
- The U.S. spends more on health care than any other country, yet ranks near the bottom in health among its peer nations. What factors account for this?
- Why is the U.S. the only Western industrialized nation with no national health insurance? How can we understand the emergence of America’s complex public-private system of health insurance? What are the consequences of America’s reliance on the market in organizing health care?
- What are the social, economic, and political dynamics of health care reform? What are the obstacles to national health insurance?
- How and why are social problems, “deviant” behavior and statuses, and even common conditions and behaviors defined as medical conditions? How are Western conceptions of mental illness changing the manifestation and experience of mental illness around the world?
- What is the social meaning of illness? How is illness experienced and performed?
The objectives of the course are as follows:

- Ability to critically assess the bio-medical perspective on health, disease, and illness.
- Understand the social determinants of health and health disparities; see social policy as health policy.
- Ability to analyze quantitative health data using both statistical and GIS techniques.
- Understand the social organization of the US health care system from a comparative perspective.
- Ability to contextualize health policy debates and come to terms with the current health care reform effort.

**Course Materials**

There are two required books in this course.


In addition to these books, there are a number of required articles for this course which have been made available on the course PROWL site.

The site can be accessed at: [https://prowl.coloradocollege.edu/course/view.php?id=1498](https://prowl.coloradocollege.edu/course/view.php?id=1498)

Username/password are the same as your email info.

I recommend the following sites as reliable and thoughtful sources of information on health care:

- [Commonwealth Fund](http://www.commonwealthfund.org)
- [The Kaiser Family Foundation](http://kff.org)
  - [State Health Facts](http://www.statehealthfacts.org)
- [Families USA](http://www.familiesusa.org)
- [Urban Institute](http://www.urban.org)
- [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](http://www.cbpp.org)
- [Tax Policy Center](http://www.taxpolicycenter.org)
- [Center for American Progress](http://www.americanprogress.org)
- [NYTimes Health Care Reform Archive](http://www.nytimes.com/section/Science/HealthCareReform)
- [CQ Weekly](http://www.cqweekly.com) (search “Health” since ~2007)
- [CQ Researcher](http://www.cqresearcher.com)

**Class Format and Requirements**

*Attendance and Participation.* This is a participation-intensive course. Unfailing attendance and preparation are important and assumed on your part. You will be expected to have read the material by the start of every day and be prepared to raise questions, address issues, offer connections, or make extensions during class. Please note that reading entails more than passively consuming the material. You are expected to actively engage the material each day, making connections across readings, raising questions, and systematizing important sociological
principles and insights. As part of your reading habits, I ask that you not only read and underline, but get in the habit of doing “brainstorming” sheets. You can expect for me to ask for these on occasion. Also, I ask that you spend at least 20 minutes thinking about the material after you have completed a day’s readings. If I’m being honest, I find most people’s level of preparation for class to be uninspired. I expect a lot more from each of you and have weighted participation points for the course accordingly. Fair warning: each of these points must be earned.

Although I will sometimes buffer discussion with short lectures and contextual material, class discussion is primarily your responsibility. When discussing the material, be sure to address your ideas, questions, and formulations to the entire class.

Projects. There are three separate projects required in this course. A) A quantitative analysis (research brief) examining a health disparity, framed by a brief literature review on the social determinants of health and health inequality. B) A second quantitative analysis (research brief) on disparities in health resources. C) A small-group policy analysis and presentation, framed and informed by the literature from class.

Final Exam. There is one exam in this course—a small group oral exam that will cover material from the entire course.

Grading

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Epidemiology Brief</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health Resources Brief</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Analysis and Presentation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
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</tbody>
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Academic Integrity

Students are required to abide by the Honor Code. Any violations of the code will be reported and will result in either the loss of the grade on the exam or assignment at issue, a failing grade for the course, or any other penalty deemed appropriate by the Honor Code Council.

COURSE SCHEDULE

The Sociology of Health and Medicine

Monday, March 22: Introduction to the Course

Tuesday, March 23: Sociology of Health and Medicine

The Role of Sociology in Public Health

- Fact Sheet (for fun)
- Mechanic, “The Role of Sociology in Health Affairs”
- Spitler, “Medical Sociology and Public Health”

The (Not So) Surprising Importance of Social Context

- Christakis and Fowler, “In the Thick of It”
- Christakis and Fowler, “This Hurts Me as Much as It Hurts You”

Statistics

- Correlations and Regression Reading
Social Epidemiology

Wednesday, March 24: Social Epidemiology—Impact of Inequality and Poverty on Health
- Wilkinson, “Health Becomes a Social Science”
- Kawachi, “Why the US Is Not Number One in Health”
- Link and Phelan, “Social Conditions as Fundamental Causes of Disease”

Video: Unnatural Causes

Thursday, March 25: Race/Ethnic and Gender Disparities in Health
Race/Ethnic Disparities
- Center for American Progress, “Fact Sheet: Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities” (weblink)
- Williams, “Race and Health: Basic Questions, Emerging Directions”
- Lauderdale, “Birth Outcomes for Arabic-Named Women in California Before/After September 11”
- USDHHS, Health Disparities Profiles (weblink)

Gendered Health
- Lorber and Moore, “Women Get Sicker but Men Die Quicker”
- Courtenay, “Constructions of Masculinity and their Influence on Men’s Well-Being: A Theory of Gender and Health”

Health Impact Assessments and Public Policy
- Hall and Taylor, “Health, Social Relations, and Public Policy”
- Health Impact Assessment Project (weblink)

Video: Unnatural Causes

Friday, March 26: The Global Patterning of Health
Global Health
- WHO, “WHO on Health and Sustainable Development”
- Human Development Index (weblink to data)
- UNICEF Data on Child Well-Being (weblink to data)
- Evans, “Population Health and Development”
- Levine, “Educating Girls, Unlocking Development”

Related websites
- Gapminder – Health Themes (weblink)
- Google Public Data (weblink): fertility; life expectancy; mortality rate; GNI per capita

Monday, March 29: HIV/AIDS in Africa
- Craddock, “Introduction—Beyond Epidemiology: Locating AIDS in Africa”
- Akeroyd, “Coercion, Constraints, and ‘Cultural Entrapments’”
- Lyons, “Mobile Populations and HIV/AIDS in East Africa”
- Lurie et al., “Socioeconomic Obstacles to HIV Prevention and Treatment in Developing Countries”
- Swidler, “Responding to AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa: Culture, Institutions, and Health”
The Medical Profession and Medicalization

Tuesday, March 30: The Medical Profession and Medicalization

Medical Authority and the Professional Project
- Starr, “The Growth of Medical Authority”
- Brandt and Gardner, “Antagonism and Accommodation”

Medicalization
- Conrad, “Medicalization and Social Control”
- Oliver, “What Is Fat?”
- Oliver, “How Obesity Became an Epidemic Disease”
- Moynihan et al., “Selling Sickness: The Pharmaceutical Industry and Disease Mongering”
- Moynihan and Cassels, selections from Selling Sickness: Prologue + choice of:
  - Ch 1 “Selling to Everyone” (High cholesterol)
  - Ch 4 “Partnering with Patients (Attention deficit disorder)
  - Ch 6 “Advertising Disease (Premenstrual dysphoric disorder)
  - Ch 10 “Subverting the Selling” (Female sexual dysfunction)

Experiencing Illness and the Medical Encounter

Wednesday, March 31: Reading Day
- Watters, Crazy Like Us (discuss first half of book with group)

Thursday, April 1: Experiencing Illness
- Watters, Crazy Like Us
- Klawiter, “Breast Cancer in Two Regimes: The Impact of Social Movements on Illness Experience”
- Ehrenreich, “Welcome to Cancerland”

Friday, April 2: The Medical Encounter
- Freidson, “The Social Organization of Illness”
- Rosenhan, “On Being Sane In Insane Places”
- Lupton, “Power Relations and the Medical Encounter”
- Smedley et al., “Executive Summary” from Unequal Treatment"
- Commonwealth Fund on cultural competency (weblink)

Video: Under Our Skin

The Social Organization of Health Care Systems

Monday, April 5: The Organization of Health Care—Comparative Models
- Models of Health Care Systems and Country Models (weblinks)
- Klein, “The Health of Nations: How Europe, Canada, and Our Own VA Do Health Care Better”
- Lipman, “Changing Our Disease Care System to a Health Care System”
- Mahar, Money-Driven Medicine
Video: *Sick around the World* (Frontline weblink)

**Tuesday, April 6: The Organization of Health Care**
- Mahar, *Money-Driven Medicine*
- Orszag, on the rising cost of health care (weblink)
- CQ Researcher: (through Tutt Library):
  - Rising Health Costs
  - Universal Coverage
  - Health-Care Reform

**Wednesday, April 7: The Organization of Health Care—America’s Dysfunctionalism**
- Washington Post (overview of costs/reform) (weblink)
- Mahar, *Money-Driven Medicine*
- Quadagno, “Why the United States Has No National Health Insurance”
- EPI (skim), “The Erosion of Employment-Based Health Insurance”
- Klein, “Ten Reasons Why American Health Care Is So Bad”
- Klein, “Why Health Insurance Doesn’t Work”

  **Video: Money-Driven Medicine**

**Thursday, April 8: The Politics of Health Care Reform**
- Skocpol, “The Rise and Resounding Demise of the Clinton Plan”
- Peterson, “The Congressional Graveyard for Health Care Reform”
- Klein, “The Elusive Politics of Reform”
- Klein, “Wealth Care Reform”
- Cutler and Klein on cost controls
- [NYTimes Overview of Health Care Reform](#)
- [Washington Post Health-Care Reform Tracking Site](#)

**Friday, April 9: Buffer Day (in case we need to make space earlier in the schedule)**

**Monday, April 12: Recap and Review**

**Tuesday, April 13: Final Exams**

**Wednesday, April 14: Final Exams**