Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities
SOC 585 (#4418)
Spring 2015

Instructor: Dr. Abigail A. Sewell  
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to provide a broad overview of racial and ethnic health disparities. Despite medical advances over the past century, racial and ethnic disparities persist. People of color in the United States carry an unequal burden of chronic disease and have higher mortality rates compared to their white counterparts. Since the publication of the Institute of Medicine’s report, *Unequal Treatment*, health disparities have been a fixture on the “front-burner” of America’s health policy agenda. Moreover, the U.S. is in the midst of massive demographic changes; for instance, Census projections indicate that ethnoracial minorities will become the numerical majority before mid-century. In light of these changes, health inequities pose certain problems that threaten the economic vitality of our nation.

As the United States continues to diversify, it will become increasingly important that we, as a nation, begin to address racial and ethnic inequities in health. In order to do so, it is necessary to increase our understanding of the multiple pathways by which race and ethnicity enter the body and produce disparate health outcomes. During the course of the semester, students will examine health inequities; how race, ethnicity and health intersect; explore the nature of racial and ethnic categories; and learn about current US demographic trends. Students will also explore approaches for addressing health inequity, including health care inequities. Students are encouraged to pay critical attention to the multiple pathways by which race and ethnicity enter the body, and how they lead to negative health consequences for people of color in the United States.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
Student will understand:

1. How race and ethnicity impact health both directly and indirectly
2. The multiple pathways by which race and ethnicity can impact health
3. How race and ethnicity are defined and conceptualized
   a. What these terms and concepts do, and do not, mean
   b. How terms and concepts have been constructed and evolved over time
   c. How this terminology fits into discussions of health
   d. The implications of using race/ethnicity as variables in epidemiology, health services, and research in general
4. How policies, and the services and programs they inform, impact health, and how this varies within and across groups
5. To develop a broad understanding of health as a complex construct
6. How inequities are being addressed at the local level by diverse community and public health stakeholders

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

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<td>Weekly Discussion Questions</td>
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**PARTICIPATION (5%)**
The assignments outlined herein serve as preparation for seminar discussions. Your active participation in seminar throughout the semester constitutes a separate element of your final grade. I expect active and constructive participation.

**WEEKLY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (5%)**
Each Tuesday, by 5pm on the day before class, please post discussion questions via the course website to all seminar participants (you can choose one or several of each week’s readings). I will pick some of those questions and reserve part of meeting time just to address those.

**PEER REVIEW PAPER (15%)**
The purpose of this paper assignment is to socialize you to the peer review process. You will serve as a peer reviewer for a paper of my choosing. Provide constructive feedback for the author. You are expected to provide comments on the original paper, the rebuttal letter, and the revised paper. *The comments for the peer review paper are due Wednesday, February 18, 2015.*

**ORAL PRESENTATIONS (20%)**
Each student will give two (2) oral presentations during the semester – one lecture style and one discussion style. For the lecture style oral presentation, prepare a 40-minute lecture based off of the final paper (see following section) that you intend to write. For the discussion style oral presentation, focus on providing an overview of the readings for a week. Please aim for interaction among students in a matter where you will be leading class discussion for that day and involving your peers in an in-depth debate about the readings. In both instances, the student leaders will provide integrative, summative, and empirical questions and serve as moderators, responding to questions and inviting peers into conversation. Remember to adjudicate what’s conceptually important and what's interesting for discussion purposes. *It might make sense to sign up for a discussion-style presentation for the same week for which you plan to turn in your reflection essays.*
Reflection Essays (15%)

Two (2) reflection essays are required for this course. The purpose of the reflection essays is to put the readings in perspective through critical consideration. This means: relate the readings to each other (where feasible), to readings from other weeks (where feasible) and pay close attention to the theoretical frameworks on which they draw. Use this lens to ascertain how/why arguments complement or contradict each other. Start out with a question that begs an accompanying response/explanation for each of the week's readings. You may, but do not have to, ask a question that encompasses all readings. Do not write several questions (or answers) for different readings. One good question and one comprehensive answer will do. Draw on all relevant materials from this course to answer your question and feel free to draw on related, relevant materials you have encountered in other seminars. Just make sure you stick to the issue you raised in the beginning.

Reflection essays should contain three parts:

1. Your summary (brief!) of the most important point(s) of the week's core readings. This should include a discussion of the links between the readings (or lack thereof). 1 page.
2. One question of clarification, interpretation, relevance etc. you would like us to address in class. You may ask abstract theoretical questions, raise conceptual issues, issues concerning textual analysis/interpretation, or even methodological questions for the empirical pieces assigned. ½ page.
3. For the question you ask, make sure you explain why that question is important. What is at stake? Try to find an answer to your question, but keep in mind that you do not have to have answers to everything in advance. It is my hope that the seminar discussion will serve that purpose—finding answers to questions. 3 pages.

The first reflection essay should focus on readings from Sessions 4-8. The first reflection essay is due by Friday, March 20, 2015. The second reflection essay should focus on readings from Sessions 9-14. The second reflection essay is due by Friday, April 24, 2015.

Final Paper (40%)

The final paper should help you integrate issues raised in this seminar with your own research interests. You will have discretion of the format of your final paper. Some of you may choose to write a research proposal (including, but not limited to, a literature review), while others may prefer to use this opportunity to write a dissertation chapter or provide an ongoing research project with the theoretical framework necessary to submit a paper for publication. The length of these proposals will vary depending on their purpose, but you should aim for about 20 double-spaced pages. To help you get an early start on this paper, please discuss your paper ideas with me before Wednesday, February 4, 2015.

An initial 5-page prospectus is due by noon on Wednesday, February 25, 2015. Please submit your prospectus via the course website and give a paper copy of your prospectus to one of your peers. This initial prospectus is worth 15 percent of your Final Paper grade. In turn, please provide one of your peers with written comments on their own proposals by noon on Wednesday, March 25, 2015. Peer comments are worth 10 percent of your Final Paper grade. The due date for the final paper is Monday, April 27 at midnight. I will not accept late papers.
PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE

Participation is encouraged and considered as part of your final grade. Attendance is required. One excused absence is allowed for any reason. One point of the final grade will be deducted for each session of the class missed beyond the excused absence. One point will be deducted for missing any portion of the lecture beyond the excused absence.

You are expected to be in class, on time, every day.

Roll call will be taken.

If you are not in your seat by the time your name is called, you will be considered late. After the second tardy mark, there will be a three (3) percent reduction in your grade for the course. No exceptions.

Turning assignments in late is not acceptable. A ten (10) percent reduction in assignments will be levied against any work turned in late. No exceptions.

REQUIRED READING MATERIALS

(6) Selected readings available under the “Course Content” tab of the Blackboard site. These are articles/chapters from sources other than the textbooks.
**WEEKLY SCHEDULE**

* Located in LaVeist Reader  
^ Locate via Online Resources

**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 14, 2015**

*Session 1. Patterns of Health Disparities in the United States*

**Readings:**


Session 2. Historical Issues in Race, Ethnicity and Health

Readings:


**Wednesday, January 28, 2015**

*Session 3. Conceptualizing Race and Ethnicity in Health and Healthcare Research*

**Readings:**


**Recommended:**

Wednesday, February 4, 2015

Session 4. Patient Factors in Healthcare Disparities

Readings:


Recommended:


Session 5. Healthcare Disparities: Healthcare Provider/Health System Factors

Readings:


Recommended:

Session 6. Why Health Status Disparities Exist: Racial segregation and the excess risk exposure hypothesis

Readings:


Recommended:

Session 7. Why Health Disparities Exist: Resource Mis-Allocation

Readings


Wednesday, March 4, 2015

Session 8. Why Health Disparities Exist: Psychosocial

Readings:


Recommended:


Wednesday, March 11, 2015

SPRING BREAK
Wednesday, March 18, 2015

Session 9. Are Race Disparities in Health Really Just Socioeconomic Differences?

Readings:


Recommended:

EDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 2015

Session 10. Immigration and Health Disparities

Readings:


Recommended:


Session 11. Discrimination and Health Disparities

Readings:


**Wednesday, April 8, 2015**

*Session 12. Race and Mental Health*

**Readings:**


**Recommended:**

**Wednesday, April 15, 2015**

**Session 13. Race, Gender, and Health (Care).**

**Readings:**


**Recommended:**

Session 14. Race, Sexuality, and Health

Readings:


Recommended:
