Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place.

-- Susan Sontag

Description of the course

What does it mean to dwell in “the night-side of life”? In this course, we will use our sociological imaginations to examine the role and meaning of health and illness in modern US society. Social, economic, and political forces powerfully influence who gets sick, the types of diseases that affect them, the treatments that are available, and the outcomes of those treatments. We will explore key social determinants of health, including: socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, neighborhood environments, social relationships, gender, and healthcare. We will discuss explanations for the relationships between these factors and various health outcomes, as well as related policy ideas. Students will spend a substantial amount of time developing their own specific interests in this field, culminating in a research paper that analyzes the relevant literature and discusses research-based policy solutions to a specific health disparity.

Course objectives

By the end of the course, students can expect to:

- Describe multiple aspects of the social environment that matter for health and identify the ways they contribute to health disparities.
- Critically evaluate evidence for social determinants of health and identify key gaps in knowledge.
- Apply a theoretical framework to understand one social determinant of health through research experience in a specific topic area.

Required reading

All of the required readings are posted in electronic format on the course Canvas site. The reading load in this course is high, commensurate with an upper-level course. I expect you to read all course material before class on the day that we are discussing it.
Course requirements

1. Participation (20%)

*Small group discussions (50 pts total; 25 pts for facilitating one discussion, and 25 pts for actively participating in all discussions).* We will form 7 permanent groups of 5 students each. On most Fridays, we will use the first 45 minutes of the class period for small group discussions related to articles that apply or extend the week’s conceptual topic. During the last 15 minutes of class, we will reflect on the readings as a class to ensure that all of our questions were answered.

Each week, one student will serve as discussion leader in the small groups. Discussion leaders should come prepared with:

1. Questions that help us come to a common understanding of the readings’ main arguments.

2. Outside information related to the topic. This can take the form of recent news articles, websites, examples of organizations that are taking up these issues in the real world, or other related materials that add depth to our understanding of the reading.

3. Questions that that reflect on the greater implications of the findings.

The discussion facilitator should post these discussion questions and supplementary materials to Canvas under your Project Group Discussion thread at least an hour before class.

*Large group discussions and activities (50 pts).* Participation in class discussions and group activities makes up a very important part of your grade. How does one demonstrate participation? 1) By actively contributing to class discussion in a critical, insightful manner; and, 2) actively contributing to small group exercises. If you come class and sit attentively every day without actively contributing to larger group discussions or small group exercises, you will receive a 0 for your participation grade. I will keep track of your participation in discussions and in-class activities, and this record will comprise your participation grade.

2. Critical writing (20%)

*Response Memos (75 pts).* You will have an opportunity to write five Response Memos during the term. Each memo should be a 1-page, single-spaced critical response to the readings. If there is more than one reading assigned for the day, you must include a synthetic account of all the readings. I suggest that you spend less time summarizing the main arguments, and more time analyzing common threads you discover across readings. Please upload an electronic copy to Canvas before class (by noon) on the day the readings are being discussed.

Response Memos should consist of two parts. First, you will work to determine the argument of the piece, and what strategies/evidence the author is using to support it. The first paragraph of your memo should *briefly* explicate how the authors convey and support their arguments. The following questions may serve as a guide:

- What is the author’s argument?
• What evidence does he or she use to support the argument?

Second, you should focus on your analysis and reflections on the piece(s). The following questions may serve as a guide:

• What are the strengths and weaknesses of this reading (from your perspective)?
• What questions/reflections does this piece bring up for you?
• Do the ideas in this reading relate to other concepts from the course, your life, ideas that are important to you, or current events?

News reflections (25 pts). Over the course of the term, I will post current news articles to the Discussion board on Canvas. You are responsible for reading and critically reflecting on these posts by commenting before class.

3. Papers (40%)

You are required to write two papers in this course. I will hand out detailed descriptions of each writing assignment before it is due.

Paper 1 (50 pts). A reflection on behavior modification. (3-5 pages, double spaced, 12 pt font.)

Paper 2 (150 pts). A research paper on a health disparities topic that interests you. In support of this research project, you are also responsible for writing a one-page proposal describing your topic and your research approach; and an outline containing your thesis statement (your argument), topic sentences (your main claims), and supporting bullet points for each body paragraph (your evidence). (8-10 pages, double spaced, 12 pt font.)

4. Exams (20%)

Midterm exam (50 pts). This will be a 1-hour, in-class, closed-book exam.

Final exam (50 pts). This will be a 3-day take-home exam. The final exam will be cumulative and entirely essay-based. Exam questions will require you to synthesize and analyze the course readings, discussion and lecture material. You will be graded on how well you incorporate all elements of course material into your essay answers.
Grading

I follow the grading conventions as defined by the Organization, Regulations, and Courses (ORC) at Dartmouth. [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~reg/transcript/grade_descriptions.html](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~reg/transcript/grade_descriptions.html)

A **Excellent** mastery of course material (student performance indicates a very high degree of originality, creativity, and excellent performance in analysis, synthesis, critical expression, and independence)

B **Good** mastery of course material (student performance indicates a high degree of originality, creativity, and good performance in analysis, synthesis, critical expression, and independence)

C **Acceptable** mastery of course material (student performance indicates some degree of originality, creativity, and acceptable performance in analysis, synthesis, critical expression, and independence)

D **Deficient** in mastery of course material (student performance indicates some degree of originality, creativity, and deficient performance in analysis, synthesis, critical expression, and independence)

E **Serious deficiency** in mastery of course material (student performance clearly lacking originality, creativity, and seriously deficient performance in analysis, synthesis, critical expression, and independence)

I will determine your final letter grade according to the following percentage breakdown:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>95-100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>92-94.9%</td>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>89-91.9%</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>83-88.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60-69.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>&lt; 60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please note the following about grades: 1) I do not round grades; 2) I do not negotiate grades unless an error was made.
**Important Notes**

**Teaching Assistant**
You will notice that we have a teaching assistant for the course, Lydia Shahi. Lydia is a graduate student in the MALS program at Dartmouth. She will participate in class, provide feedback on your written work, and be available to assist you with questions about the material or your approach to understanding it. Lydia is available for meetings by appointment and can be reached by email at Lydia.T.Shahi@dartmouth.edu. Please be sure email her at least 24 hours in advance of your requested meeting time, and she can meet you in Baker Library Monday through Friday during regular work hours (9-5).

**Attendance**
It is my expectation that you will attend each class meeting—and that you will arrive to each class on time and stay for the duration. I will circulate an attendance sign-in sheet at the beginning of each class meeting; it is your responsibility to make sure you sign it each day. There are no opportunities to make up missed in-class participation work. If you miss more than three days of class, your course grade will decrease by one whole letter grade (e.g., A to B), and decrease by one step (e.g., B to B-) for each additional absence. In the event that you miss a class for any reason, you are responsible for getting notes from another student. As a general policy, I do not make my notes available. After you review your classmate’s notes, I would be happy to meet with you to talk about the material or answer questions about anything that is unclear. If you anticipate missing class meetings because of athletic team participation, religious observances, or some other reason, please arrange a meeting with me at the start of the term, and bring documentation of the expected conflicts.

**Late work**
Unexpected things will come up over the course of the term. To ensure you don’t wind up in a difficult position, plan ahead: start your assignments early and finish them in advance of the deadline. Please speak with me at the beginning of the term if you anticipate any circumstances that might affect your ability to get your work in on time.

Response Memos are designed to help you prepare for in-class discussion, so we can make the most of our time together; therefore, they will not be accepted late.

For the papers (and all their components), the maximum grade you may earn will be reduced by one letter grade for each day late. In other words, if you turn your assignment in 1-24 hours after the deadline, the maximum grade you can receive is a B; if you turn your assignment in 25-48 hours after the deadline, the maximum grade you can receive is a C; if your turn your assignment in 49-72 hours after the deadline, the maximum grade you can receive is a D. I will not accept your assignment after 72 hours.

Extensions will only be given if a deadline was missed because of extreme circumstances beyond your control. For example: severe illness requiring a doctor’s visit or hospitalization, or death in the family. Generally not feeling well, forgetting about the deadline, having computer problems, needing to help your friend or family member with something, scheduling conflicts with interviews, appointments, or exams in other classes, etc. are not considered extreme circumstances. If you believe you are eligible for an extension, it is your responsibility to notify me before missing the deadline, and explain in writing why your circumstances warrant an exception.
Accommodations
Students requiring disability-related accommodations must register with the Student Accessibility Services office. Once SAS has authorized accommodations, students must show the originally signed SAS Services and Consent Form and/or a letter on SAS letterhead to their professor. As a first step, if students have questions about whether they qualify to receive accommodations, they should contact the SAS office. All inquiries and discussions about accommodations will remain confidential.

Communication
My office hours are for you. You are welcome to come in and talk with me about anything during my posted hours. I am also available by appointment if my office hours do not coincide with your schedule. I regularly check e-mail during the school day (9am-4pm) and will make every effort to reply to messages as soon as possible. I expect students to regularly check their Dartmouth e-mail and Canvas accounts for class announcements and updates.

Academic Honor
I will be following the Academic Honor Principle described in the Dartmouth College Student Handbook and will enforce this policy to the full extent. Students must do their own work—they will write their own papers and exams, prepare their own presentations, and cite the original sources of any material they draw on for their papers. Any student who submits work which is not his or her own, or commits other acts of academic dishonesty is subject to disciplinary action, up to and including suspension or separation. For a broad overview on the practice of citing sources, see http://dartmouth.edu/writing-speech/learning/materials/sources-and-citations-dartmouth.

Classroom Responsibility and Courtesy
All students are expected to have a voice in our class dialogue. Class participation involves thinking carefully, listening, and posing questions to others as much as it involves sharing your own ideas. This requires us to be present, set aside distractions, and focus our attention on engaging with one another. Please put your cell phones on vibrate, do not text, and do not use your laptop during class.

The tone with which we engage one another is also extremely important, and should come from a place of mutual respect and understanding. You are free to disagree with the views raised in the material or by others in the class, but must do so with a reasoned critique based on a complete consideration of their argument. Your own argument should be supported by sociological evidence rather than personal opinion or anecdotes. Disrespectful behavior such as talking while others are talking, dominating the floor, or engaging in personal attacks will not be tolerated. You are expected to treat one another and me with respect at all times.

Additional Support for Learning
Student Center for Research, Writing, and Information Technology (RWIT): At RWIT, you can meet one-on-one with an undergraduate tutor to discuss a paper, research project, or multimedia assignment.

Academic Skills Center (ASC): The mission of Dartmouth's Academic Skills Center is to assist students in achieving academic success through a wide variety of services and programs. The Center is available to all students who wish to improve their academic skills and ability to learn, thereby maximizing their academic experience and allowing them to achieve greater academic performance and personal fulfillment.
**Course Plan and Readings**

**Week One (March 27-31): What are health disparities?**

**Monday**  Introduction to the course: Defining health disparities
- Gladwell (2008), *Outliers*

**Wednesday**  Health, disease, and equity
- Braveman and Gruskin (2003), “Defining Equity in Health”

**Friday**  Unnatural Causes
- Film: *Unnatural Causes*, Episode 1: “In Sickness and In Wealth”

**Week Two (April 3-7): Socioeconomic status**

**Monday**  Education, income, and occupation

**Wednesday**  SES as a fundamental cause of health and disease

**Friday**  Small group discussion 1: Fundamental cause, an application
- Response Memo 1 due

**Week Three (April 10-14): Unpacking the black box**

**Monday**  Health behaviors
- Pampel, Krueger and Denney (2010), “Socioeconomic Disparities in Health Behaviors”
- Marantz (1990), “Blaming the Victim”

**Wednesday**  The stress process
- Sapolsky (2005), “Sick of Poverty”
- Almeida et al. (2005), “Do Daily Stress Processes Account for Socioeconomic Health Disparities?”

**Friday**  Small group discussion 2: Behavioral interventions
- Response Memo 2 due
Week Four (April 17-21): Race and ethnicity

Monday  Institutional racism
• Behavior Modification paper due

Wednesday  The burden of race
• Kwate and Meyer (2011), “On Sticks and Stones and Broken Bones”
• Williams (2012), “Miles to Go before We Sleep”

Friday  Small group discussion 3: Racism, two applications
• Gee (2002), “A Multilevel Analysis”
• Response Memo 3 due

Week Five (April 24-28): The built environment

Monday  Neighborhood context
• Fitzpatrick and LaGory (2000), Unhealthy Places (Ch.3 and 5)

Wednesday  Access to healthy food and recreational opportunities
• Cummins and Macintyre (2005), “Food Environments and Obesity”
• Bedimo-Rung, Mowen and Cohen (2005), “The Significance of Parks”

Friday  Small group discussion 4: Race and environmental equity
• Response Memo 4 due

Week Six (May 1-5): Place and social relationships

Monday  Midterm Exam in class

Wednesday  Social networks, social capital, and attachment
• Research paper proposal due

Friday  Library research methods
• Amy Witzel, Social Sciences & Humanities Reference Librarian
Week Seven (May 8-12): Gender

Monday  
Disparities  
- Bird and Rieker (1999), “Gender Matters”

Wednesday  
Masculinity  

Friday  
Small group discussion 5: Intersectionality  
- Response Memo 5 due

Week Eight (May 15-19): The patient experience

Monday  
The sick role  
- Frank (2013), “From Sick Role to Practices of Health and Illness”  
- Research paper outline due

Wednesday  
Medicalization  
- Schwartz (2016), “Generation Adderall”

Friday  
Money-driven medicine  
- Film: Money Driven Medicine, “Inside the Medical-Industrial Complex”

Week Nine (May 22-26): Health care past, present, and future

Monday  
Health care in the U.S.  
- Guest lecture: “History of the US Healthcare System”  
- Denise Anthony, Professor of Sociology and Vice Provost for Academic Initiatives

Wednesday  
Health care reform, the ACA and the ACHA  
- Gawande (June 1, 2009), “The Cost Conundrum”  
- Kaiser Family Foundation (2013), “Summary of the Affordable Care Act”  
- TBD: Reading on ACHA

Friday  
Course wrap-up  
- Woolf (2009), “Social Policy as Health Policy”  
- Research paper due
Week Ten (May 29-June 2)

Monday  NO CLASS: Memorial Day
- Receive Final Exam at 5pm (due Thursday, June 1st at 5pm)

References


Beauboeuf-Lafontant, Tamara. 2007. "You Have to Show Strength: An Exploration of Gender, Race, and Depression." *Gender & Society* 21(28-51).


