Course Description:

Poor mental health and mental illness are often viewed as biological or genetic flaws. Sociologists, however, argue that mental illness is socially constructed, and that population mental health is profoundly shaped by social conditions. In this course, we will explore sociological understandings of mental health and illness. We will focus on a range of topics, including (but not limited to):

- The medicalization of deviant behavior; and how the definition of mental illness changes across time and place
- How sociologists think about, define, and measure mental health in research
- The social determinants of stress and mental health
- How inequalities in resources, power, and status “get under the skin” and influence the prevalence of mental health and well-being
- Societal responses to the mentally ill and the stigma of mental illness
- Innovative new research that brings together perspectives from multiple disciplines (sociology, economics, epidemiology, public health, etc.)

This course is intended to give you an introduction to the Sociology of Mental Health, but because it is such a broad field, there will be many topics that are left uncovered. Due to my own research interests and expertise, this course will skew more towards contemporary, quantitative, and U.S. focused sociological research. In addition, we will mainly examine research that appears in academic journals—rather than textbooks—so that you can get a feel for the types of questions researchers are addressing in the major journals, and better understand the types of questions social science researchers are asking as well as potential gaps in the literature. You will have an opportunity to explore topics not covered in class in your research paper or in the student-led seminars in the final week (see below). For those of you who would like to further explore the topics that we do cover, I also include a list of optional readings (some of which will be lectured on) to peruse at your leisure. You may also use these optional readings in your student-led seminars. I am also happy to point you in the direction of other relevant research if you are so inclined.

Course Structure

This course will skew heavily towards seminar so students are expected to come prepared to discuss and critically engage with the readings. My hope is that we can have an engaging discussion about the topics, with little need for powerpoint lectures.
**Evaluation and Grading**

*Midterm (25%) –* The midterm will be a take-home exam, and you will be free to use any readings, notes, and other sources (with proper citation) in your completion of the exam. I will make the mid-term available via Canvas on 10/24. **It is due by 11:59pm on 11/2. Please email all completed mid-terms to Jason.Houle@Dartmouth.edu.** Late papers (yes, even those that are time stamped at 12:00am 11/3) will be graded according to the late paper policy.

*Research Paper Prospectus (5%):* The research prospectus is a short summary of your final paper research topic. The prospectus must include: a brief summary of your paper topic, and at least five citations from academic sources. I will provide you with feedback on your prospectus that you must incorporate into the final draft of your paper. The research prospectus is **due at the beginning of class on 10/6.** Please make an appointment with me BEFORE 10/6 if you have any questions about the assignment or want to bounce some ideas off me.

*In-Class Writing Prompts (15%):* We will start off most classes with a brief (5-10 minute) writing prompt on the readings for the day. I will provide you with a prompt (perhaps a quote from a reading, or a topic) and you will need to reflect on that prompt based on the readings. As part of the prompt, you should begin with a brief summary of the authors’ argument, findings, and conclusions, as well as your reflections on the topic. For example—did you find the study useful? Did something bother you about the question/theory/methods? This is the place to get some of these ideas down. You will receive feedback on these reading prompts. You can only turn in the reading prompts in-person on the day of class. If you are absent, you are not allowed to turn in the prompts via email. If you come into class, complete the prompt, and duck out the back door, you will not get credit. For this reason, I will drop the two lowest reading prompt grades. In essence, each student has two freebies.

*Reading Questions (10%):* In addition to the prompts, you will need to submit at least ONE question for each reading for every class (so, 2 readings x 1 questions = 2 questions). This can be a critical question about the article, or a more basic question about how the study was conducted or the theories driving the study. The questions must be submitted on the discussion forum on Canvas **no later than 9:00am on the day of the class.** I have set up the discussion forum so it will not accept posts after that time. These questions are extremely important, as they will help me guide discussion and let me know if anything from the readings needs to be clarified. Like the reading summaries, each student gets two freebies.

The purpose of the reading prompts and questions are fourfold: (1) to encourage the practice of note-taking and critically engaging with the readings; (2) to help spark class discussion; (3) to alert me if anything needs to be clarified from the readings; and (4) to let me know that you have, in fact, done the reading.

*Class Participation (5%):* Although I will lecture during this course, over half of the course will be a seminar-style class discussion of the readings and topics at hand. Thus, class participation is imperative to the success of this class. What does class participation entail? It means you must be an active participant in the class. This includes: 1) contributing to class discussion; 2) actively contributing to small group exercises. If you come into class, sit quietly every day, and do not contribute to class discussion you will receive a 0 for class participation.

*Student Lead Seminars (15%):* During the last week of class, small groups of students will be responsible for leading a seminar on the topic of their choice. This can be a more in-depth look at a topic already covered in class, or it can be a topic that wasn’t covered in the course. Early in the semester, you will join a group of 3-5 classmates and select your topic. During the last week of the term, each group will lead seminar for 20-25 minutes. Each group should schedule a meeting with me during X hour and inform me
of their topic **no later than 10/14**, Groups will select 1-2 readings to assign to the class, and must submit the reading(s) for my approval **no later than 11/4**. I am happy to offer suggested readings. You are also welcome to use the optional readings on the syllabus. I will then distribute the readings to the rest of the class in time for the student-led seminars via Canvas. Groups are welcome to lead seminar in any way they see fit—be as creative as you want! Note: unless I approve otherwise, the readings must be from sociological books or journals. The student-led seminars are considered part of your class participation grade.

**Final Research Paper (25%)** Final research papers will be **due 11/23 by 11:59pm**. Final papers must be handed in to me before the deadline, or emailed to me by the deadline. Late papers will be graded according to the late paper policy. These research papers should be structured like the academic journal articles we read in this class, including: 1) a short introduction; 2) a literature review where you summarize prior research, identify the gap in the literature you intend to fill, and your study hypotheses; 3) a methods section that states how you would go about testing your study hypotheses; 4) a concluding section that summarizes the implications and importance of your study. Alternatively, you could write a theoretical “think piece” that challenges and attempts to advance sociological theories of mental health and illness. Please note that you will not actually have to analyze data or do fieldwork in this paper.

*I will use the following scale in assigning grades:*

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<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>93%-100%</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>83%-86.9%</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>73%-76.9%</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>Below 60%</td>
<td>F</td>
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<tr>
<td>90%-92.9%</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<td>80%-82.9%</td>
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<td>70%-72.9%</td>
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<td>87%-89.9%</td>
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<td>77%-79.9%</td>
<td>C+</td>
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<td>60%-69.9%</td>
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**Attendance Policy**

As a general rule, I do not believe in attendance policies for college-aged students. If you must miss class, **you do not need to provide me with an explanation**. More importantly, do not ask whether you missed anything important (if the material you missed wasn’t important, it wouldn’t have been covered in class). Do not ask me for lecture notes—ask your classmates. I will assume that you are serious about your commitment to this class. As such, I presume that if you miss class you have a good reason (e.g., you are very sick, you are caring for someone who is very sick, or you are trapped under something very heavy). **One exception:** If your absences become chronic, or if you anticipate chronic absences, then it’s time to consult with me.

All that said, if you blow off class and do so on a regular basis, your class participation and reading summary grades will suffer.

**Late Policy**

On any assignment, your grade will be reduced by one unit for each day late (e.g., 1 day, from A to A-; 2 days, B+; 3 days, B; and so on). **One exception: reading prompts and questions will not be accepted if they are late.**

**Make-up exams:** There will be no make-up examinations except in extremely rare cases in which some unforeseen crisis/emergency arises. If you know ahead of time that you have a conflict with the exam schedule, discuss this with me as soon as possible to make arrangements for the exam. Do not expect to arrange different exam schedules simply because it is more convenient.
**Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner and all members of the Dartmouth community are expected to act in accordance with this principle. Academic integrity includes a commitment not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation or deception. Such acts of dishonesty violate the fundamental ethical principles of the Dartmouth community and compromise the worth of work completed by others. As such, dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated and students found in violation of the Dartmouth honor code will be notified and reported to the appropriate authorities. Cheating and other forms of dishonesty (such as plagiarizing) often result when students feel too much pressure to perform and that they do not have the tools to achieve their goals. If you are falling behind or feeling overwhelmed, please come sit down and chat with me BEFORE you decide to cheat.

**Disability Needs**

Any student with a disability-related need for modifications or reasonable accommodations in this course must let me know as soon as possible (by the second week of the term) and contact the Student Disabilities Coordinator. I will keep this information strictly confidential, but please note that the Student Disabilities Coordinator may be consulted to verify the disability. See [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~accessibility/] for more information.

**Course Readings**


*Note: The Ronson reading is what I would consider to be a “companion” reader to this course. As a popular paperback book, it repackages much of the course material in a very accessible and entertaining way. You will be responsible for the Ronson material (don’t be surprised if you see it on a midterm…), but we will not discuss it in class, for the most part, unless you choose to bring it up in discussion. Consider this book your light, entertaining reading for the term.

All readings for this course will be available on Canvas, with the exception of Ronson. You are expected to complete the readings by the date listed on the syllabus and come to class prepared to discuss these readings—if you were at all confused or lost by the readings, then you must come to class with questions for discussion.

A general note on reading academic journal articles in this course: Much of the reading in this course will be from the major sociological journals (e.g. *American Journal of Sociology, American Sociological Review, Journal of Health and Social Behavior*). For this reason, the reading may be a bit more arduous for those of you who are unfamiliar with the technical style of academic journal articles. Please do not get too caught up or tripped up by the details of the analytical methods and results. I’m more concerned that you come away with the general arguments and conclusions of an article than I am with whether you understand the intricacies of multiple regression (or whatever method is used). Thus, you should pay closest attention to the “front end” of the paper (that is, the literature review and hypotheses) and the conclusion section. You should do your best with the methods and results sections of the paper, as they can provide important clues about the strengths and weaknesses of the study (e.g. how well do their variables actually measure the concepts they’re interested in? Do their data actually allow a good test of their hypothesis? Do we believe their findings?), but don’t let yourself get lost in the weeds.
TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Unit 1 (9/15-9/17): Introduction and Overview: What is the Sociology of Mental Health?
Monday: Introduction to the Course

Wednesday: An Overview of the Field

Unit 2 (9/19-24): The Social Construction of Mental Illness, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) and Pharmaceuticals
Friday:

Monday:

Wednesday:

Unit 3 (9/26-10/1): How does society respond to the mentally ill? Labeling and Stigma
Friday:

Monday:
**Wednesday**

**Unit 4 (10/3-6): Mental Health Care and Social Policies in the U.S.**

**Friday:**

**Monday:**
Saloner, Brendan, and Benjamin Lê Cook. 2014. “An ACA Provision Increased Treatment For Young Adults with Possible Mental Illnesses Relative To Comparison Group.” *Health Affairs* 33:1425-1434.

**Unit 5 (10/8-10/10): Mental Health: How do we define it? How do we measure it?**

**Wednesday**

**Friday**

**Unit 6 (10/13-10/15): Social Causation and Social Selection**

**Monday**

**Wednesday**

**Unit 7 (10/17-10/20): How does social status get under the skin? Social Stress Theory**

**Friday**

**Monday**

**Unit 8 (10/22-10/27): Stratification and Mental Health I: Social Class and Social Inequality:**

**Wednesday**
*note: these are excerpts from a classic study in the sociology of mental health—Hollingshead and Redlich’s *Social Class and Mental Illness* (1958).
Link, Bruce and Jo Phelan*. 1995. “Social Conditions as Fundamental Causes of Disease.” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 35:80-94. *Note: this paper tends to focus on physical health, but it has important implications for mental health, and the general framework is important for understanding sociological perspectives on the social causes of health and mental health more generally

**Friday**
Monday:

Unit 9 (10/29-11/3): Stratification and Mental Health II: Gender

Wednesday

Thursday (X HOUR—no class Friday)

Monday

Unit 10 (11/5-11/10): Stratification and Mental Health III: Race, Ethnicity, and Legal Status

Wednesday

Thursday X Hour (NO CLASS FRIDAY)
Monday

Unit 11: Student Led Seminars (11/12-11/17)

Optional Readings by Unit
Unit 1

Unit 2

Unit 3


Kroska, Amy, Sarah K. Harkness, Lauren S. Thomas and Ryan P. Brown. 2014. “Illness Labels and Social Distance.” Society and Mental Health (Forthcoming)


Unit 5


Horwitz, Allan. 2002. Outcomes in the Sociology of Mental Health and Illness: Where Have We Been and Where are We Going?” Journal of Health and Social Behavior 42:143-151.


Unit 6


Unit 7


Unit 8


Unit 9


Unit 10
http://m.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/03/how-racism-is-bad-for-our-bodies/273911/


For interested parties, some additional optional texts:

Classical Sociological Perspectives on Mental Health and Illness