SYA4930: RACE INEQUALITIES IN HEALTH
Spring 2014

Instructor Dr. Robert G. White, Turlington 3356 (rwhite@ufl.edu)
Office hours: Monday (3:00-4:30), Thursday (10:45-12:15) and by appointment.

Meeting Times Tuesday 5th and 6th periods (11:45-1:40) Thursday 6th period (12:50-1:40)
Psychology #130

Course Description

The persistence of racial and ethnic disparities in health remains a critical public policy failure in the United States. Despite a revolution in medical technology and unprecedented gains in life expectancy over the 20th century, large differences continue in countless measures of human health between race and ethnic groups. Race gaps in rates of heart disease, diabetes, diseases of the lung and many preventable illnesses continue alongside stark differences in disability and mortality among young and old alike. After decades of public health information and explosive health spending and long past the reforms of the civil rights movement, progress has stalled in closing many of the gaps in health between race and ethnic groups in the United States.

This course introduces students to the social patterning of illness that lies at the many intersections between race and health in the United States. The course will begin by considering the biological conceptions of race that guided the history of explanations of human variation and which have earned renewed interest in an era of decoded genomes and personalized medicine. We will then review accounts from epidemiology and sociology that emphasize the importance of economic factors for human health. These include inequalities in education and workplace conditions and their consequences for individual health behaviors and health services use. Relationships between social hierarchies and stress will also be considered. We will examine the lasting effects from experiencing stress during childhood and pay particular attention to the many ways in which experiences of racial discrimination shape lifetime health.

We will then turn to the clinical experience. Readings will include studies of health care quality within the hospital as well as stories from patients and doctors about their experiences in the doctor’s office. Our stories will extend to the unique challenges facing low-income urban populations and recent immigrants navigating the American health care system. The course will conclude by introducing how new epidemiologic frameworks incorporate individual behaviors and social structure to account for social inequalities in health.

Understanding how inequalities in health persist in a nation rich in resources and civil liberties is essential for informed citizenship and may even be good for your health. This course is appropriate for any undergraduate student interested in social inequality. There is no prerequisite for the course or any requirement of having completed prior sociology coursework. The course is relevant for any students planning careers in public policy, social services, law and education. It may also be of particular relevance for students planning careers in health who are especially interested in understanding sociological and epidemiologic approaches to studying human health.

Course Requirements

The course requirements provide many opportunities for engaging in different ways with our course material. The most important requirement is completing the assigned readings before class and arriving to class prepared to discuss your reactions. Our class will greatly benefit from your insights about our readings’ findings (and follies) as well as your questions about the material. We will especially value any thoughts you might share about how your own life experiences relate to our readings.

You will also have the chance to be a discussion leader during one class of the semester. You and one other students will be scheduled to lead discussions for a single Tuesday class. Prior to class, you will meet with the other designated discussion leaders to plan a creative and fun presentation of your Tuesday class readings and develop a set of discussion questions. At the start of class, your group will jointly present a
15 minute summary of the readings before then leading small group discussions for approximately 25 minutes. Your discussion questions will be distributed to your classmates and we'll talk in small groups before rejoining as a large group to share our findings and continue the discussion. Explicit guidelines will be provided at the beginning of the semester for preparing the group presentation. Your participation as a discussion leader and your group's discussion questions will contribute 15% of your grade.

Six quizzes will reward your timely reading and preparation for class. The quizzes will occur at the start of every other Tuesday class and will involve a small number of questions that assess whether you completed all the readings since the prior quiz. The quizzes do not assess your understanding of conceptual issues but rather are designed to simply determine whether you completed all the required readings. Each quiz will be worth 4 points. The lowest quiz grade will be dropped at the end of the semester, giving the quizzes a total of 20 points (20% of the overall course grade). There will be no make-up quizzes. All the quizzes are open note – you will be allowed use of all your notes and lecture slides during the quiz (but not the readings themselves).

A mid-term exam on Tuesday, February 26 and a final exam during finals week will both consist of multiple choice, short answers and essay questions. Review sessions will be held in the Thursday classes preceding each exam. The final exam will cover only the class material since the mid-term exam. Make-up exams will not be permitted for any reason other than the extraordinary circumstances described in the Course Policies section at the end of the syllabus.

You can earn up to an additional 7 bonus points for your participation in class! Although we are a large group, you will find many opportunities to participate during class. I keep track of who participates and how much they participate throughout the semester in order to assign any possible bonus points at the end of the semester. And asking questions counts as participation!

The final course grade will be based on the following:

- Participation as Discussion Leader: 15 points
- Six in-class quizzes: (1/22, 2/5, 2/19, 3/19, 4/2, 4/16) 20 points
- In-class midterm: (Tuesday, February 26) 30 points
- Final exam: 35 points
- Extra Credit Bonus Participation Points: 7 points

Letter grades will be determined by the following:

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UF policies for assigning grade points may be found at https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx
Weekly Readings

Our class experience will be excellent if everyone comes to class prepared to discuss the readings. Participation in class discussion is essential for both your own and your classmates’ success in the course. Please come to class having read the assigned readings and prepared to discuss your reactions, questions and concerns. Be careful to always plan for longer reading assignments for Tuesday classes than for Thursday classes on account of the longer class time on Tuesdays. Below are the topics covered over the semester and their required readings. All readings are available for download from the class website on e-learning.

1. Introduction to Race and Ethnic Differences in Health
2. Biology and Human Variation
3. Race as Medical Knowledge
4. Individual Behaviors in Social Context – The Case of Type 2 Diabetes
5. Health Care Systems in the United States
6. Socioeconomic Status and Race Inequalities in Health
7. Stress and Social Hierarchies
8. The Lifetime Consequences of Early Childhood Stress
9. Racial Discrimination and Individual Health
10. Modern Medicine and Diagnostic Uncertainty
11. Immigration and Acculturation
12. Neighborhood Settings and Individual Health
13. Policy Matters: Roadmaps to Reduce Race Disparities in Health

The development of this course was supported by a grant from the University of Florida’s Center for the Study of Race and Race Relations (CSRRR) [http://www.law.ufl.edu/centers/crrr](http://www.law.ufl.edu/centers/crrr). The CSRRR is committed to de-stigmatizing race in America. With the objective of fostering communities of dialogue, the Center embraces thinking, talking, teaching, and writing on race.
Course Policies

Academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty includes: plagiarism; giving or receiving assistance during an exam; falsification, forgery or alteration of academic records or documentation. Any academic dishonesty detected in this course will result, at the very least, in the student(s) receiving a zero on that assignment or exam. Academic dishonesty may also result in dismissal from this course and disciplinary action.

Plagiarism. The University of Florida Academic Honesty Guidelines description of plagiarism:

*The attempt to represent the work of another as the product of one's own thought, whether the other's work is published or unpublished, or simply the work of a fellow student. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, quoting oral or written materials without citation on an exam, term paper, homework, or other written materials or oral presentations for an academic requirement; submitting a paper which was purchased from a term paper service as your own work; submitting anyone else’s paper as your own work.*

If you’re concerned whether you might be plagiarizing, simply ask me for clarification about the acceptable guidelines for collaboration. The University of Florida’s regulations concerning plagiarism are outlined in [http://regulations.ufl.edu/chapter4/4041.pdf](http://regulations.ufl.edu/chapter4/4041.pdf)

Accommodation. Students with disabilities who require classroom accommodation must register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean’s Office will determine the accommodation required. This process must be completed at least one week in advance of the needed accommodation. See [http://www.dso.ufl.edu/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/) for more information.

Make-up exams. Students who do not attend a regularly scheduled examination are not entitled to take the examination at another time. Make-up exams are allowable only when a student demonstrates to the instructor's satisfaction that he or she has an excusable reason (detailed next) for missing an exam. Note that our final exam time cannot be changed. It is determined by the university registrar’s office.

Excusable absences. While there are some health and family obligations which constitute reasonable excuses for missing a class or exam, the standard is whether a motivated student would reasonably place the personal consideration before the academic obligation. If such a situation arises, students should consult with me at the earliest possible time before the class or exam. In situations that arise at the last minute, students should e-mail me. Do not phone me. Sending an email before the scheduled event does not by itself grant a student an excusable absence and/or entitlement to a later examination. In the absence of prior notification, the student must demonstrate that prior notification was not reasonably possible. Make-up exams are never given in advance of the class exam.

Incomplete grades. No "Incomplete" grades will be given in this course. Exceptions to this rule are granted only in the most compelling circumstances. If such a situation arises, students should consult with the instructor at the earliest time. Incomplete grades require a standard written contract establishing conditions for completion of the course and a date by which all requirements must be completed.

Course Evaluation: Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course. These evaluations are conducted online at [https://evaluations.ufl.edu](https://evaluations.ufl.edu). Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at [https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/](https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/).

Contacting me. If you need to email me, please email me directly. Do not email me through the Sakai course website. I do not check that email. Always put SYA4930 in the subject line of your message. If you neglect to do this, I will not receive your email. I normally check and respond to email once daily during normal working hours, Monday through Friday. E-mail is best suited for discussion of simple matters. Please come to office hours if you have a complex question.