SOCIOMETRY OF HEALTH AND ILLNESS

Course Description
The sociology of health and illness (also known as medical sociology) is a broad field examining the social production of health, wellness, illness and mortality. We cannot understand the topics of health and illness simply by looking at biological phenomena and medical knowledge, but, instead, we must also consider a variety of social, political, economic, and cultural forces. We will survey the central topics in the field with an emphasis on the following themes: the structural and cultural dimensions of health; health inequalities; the profession of medicine; the experience of illness; and attempts to reform healthcare. Throughout the course, we will apply sociological theory and the recent scholarship of anthropology, history and social and cultural studies of science to make sense of contemporary issues in medicine.

Course Logistics
This is a seminar course. The quality of our discussions depends on your full participation. Students must fulfill the following requirements:

1) Over the course of the semester, each student will be expected to write a single page memo responding to each week’s readings. These comments will be posted into the discussion section on sakai the day before class (Sunday) by 6pm, so that everyone has time to read each other’s comments by Monday morning. Comments may be informal, but they must be a critical response. Memos will be graded as ‘check,’ ‘check plus,’ or ‘check minus.’ You can take four exemptions from writing these memos. If you choose to take an exemption, please let me know by email.

These memos should help you focus your ideas in a way that can contribute to our collective conversation during class time. In general, each memo should include both a synthetic analysis of some dimension of the course readings that you found compelling and warrants further discussion and two to three well-crafted questions for the class to consider as a group. These memos ought to address readings within that particular week, but you may also compare that week’s readings to themes and theories discussed earlier in the semester. This is also a good opportunity to raise questions and concerns about the substance of the readings. Finally, these memos are a great opportunity to develop a killer set of notes.

These memos are worth 20% of your grade.

2) Students taking the course for credit are expected to submit a 15-20 page paper on a topic related to this course. The paper can be analytical, critically reflecting on a substantive issue related to the sociology of health and illness or you may choose to write
a research proposal, drawing on theoretical perspectives and existing empirical work to identify an interesting and until now unsolved empirical question.

In order to get approval for your topic, you must submit a 2-3 page memo describing your project, complete with a brief bibliography by October 19th, after which you are expected to make an appointment to discuss this paper with me further. Of course, I'm happy to discuss this with you in advance. **Final paper is due on December 16th.** Late papers are strongly discouraged.

The paper is worth 70% of your grade.

4) Students will present their research in progress in class on the last day of class.

The presentation is worth 10% of your grade.

**Required Texts**


**Course Schedule**

**Week 1 (9/8/09):** Introduction

**Week 2 (9/14/09):** Cultures of Medicine
Anne Fadiman. *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down,* Chapters 1-9, 11, 13-15, 17

**Week 3 (9/21/09):** Health inequalities
Chapters 1-2, 4-5, SHI

David Williams. 1999. Race, socioeconomic status and health: The added effects of racism and discrimination

**Week 4 (9/28/09):** The social production of illness
Chapters 7-9, SHI

**Week 5 (10/5/09):** Biomedical dominance and transformation
Paul Starr, p. 3-29, 79-144
Chapters 17, 19, SHI

**Week 6 (10/12/09):** (Bio)medicalization and the social construction of disease
Chapters 37-38, SHI

**Week 7 (10/19/09) Health Care Reform**
*Guest speaker: David Mechanic. We’ll meet at IHHCPAR, 24 College Ave.*


**Week 8 (10/26/09) Medical Training**
Bosk, Forgive & Remember

**Week 9 (11/2/09) Medical Practice**
SHI 29, 30, 32

**Week 10 (11/9/09) Experiencing Illness**
Kristen Barker, The Fibromyalgia Story, selections
Week 11 (11/16/09) Meanings and Metaphors in Illness
Emily Martin. 1994. Flexible Bodies: The Role of Immunology in American Culture from the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDS. Pp. 1-81, 91-112

Week 12 (11/23/09) Conceptualizing Difference in Medicine

Week 13 (11/30/09) To be determined by class
Ideas: Social movements in health
   Lay expertise
   Medical technology
   Reproduction
   The body
   Bioethics
   Genetics
   Medical decision-making
   Risk, uncertainty and testing

Week 14 (12/7/09) Presentations