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375 Sociology of Health

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Sociology is the study of the social structures and processes that make up society and the complex relationships between individuals and the societies in which they live. There are few areas where the relationship between individuals and the larger society is more apparent than in health, as evident in several ways. First, an individual’s health is certainly a function of individual choices, behaviors, and lifestyles, including such things as smoking, alcohol consumption, dietary habits, and exercise. At the same time, these choices take place in a larger social context that may make them easier or more difficult. Second, aspects of the social environment itself may put individuals at risk of poor health. Consider, e.g. the impacts of such things as the level of air pollution, worker safety legislation, or the provision or lack of universal health care coverage. Third, there is overwhelming evidence that health varies by socially constructed characteristics such as gender, race/ethnicity, and social class, to name just a few. Fourth, not only individuals, but societies themselves can be characterized as relatively healthy or unhealthy, based on such criteria as average life expectancy and infant mortality rates. Finally, societies have a stake in individual health and consequently develop institutions, such as medicine, to directly address the health needs of their populations.

The relationship between individuals and society is clearly recognized by the medical field in the U.S. In November 2011, the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) issued a report titled, “Behavioral and Social Science Foundations for Future Physicians,” which stated, “a complete medical education must include, alongside physical and biological science, the perspectives and findings that flow from the behavioral and social sciences.” Reflecting this view, the AAMC substantially revised the MCAT exam for entrance into medical school. Since 2015, approximately 25% of the points on the exam relate to introductory sociology and general psychology. This section of the MCAT, the Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behavior, is based on five Foundational Concepts:

1. Biological, psychological, and socio-cultural factors influence the ways that individuals perceive, think about, and react to the world.
2. Biological, psychological, and socio-cultural factors influence behavior and behavior change.
3. Psychological, socio-cultural, and biological factors influence the way we think about ourselves and others.
5. Social stratification and access to resources influence well-being.

Throughout the course we will critically examine and apply these foundational concepts as we explore the varied relationships between individual health and the larger social context.

**Course Learning Objectives**

In this course we apply a sociological perspective to the study of health. You will learn how sociologists examine and understand the social world, including the research methods they use and the theories
that guide their research. In the process you will develop a sociological imagination – the ability to identify, analyze, and understand the many ways in which individuals affect and are affected by the societies in which they live.

By the end of the course you should be able to:

1. Assess the relative strengths and limitations of functional, symbolic interactionist, conflict, feminist, and postmodern theories in explaining health issues in contemporary societies.
2. Distinguish between biomedical, social, traditional medicine, and alternative medicine approaches to health.
3. Identify major changes in health and healing over time.
4. Interpret and critique research journal articles in the sociology of health.
5. Analyze the effects on health of social inequalities based in class, gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality.
6. Provide specific examples of how the experiences of mental health and illness, chronic illness and disability, aging, death, and dying are socially constructed.
7. Analyze the effects on health of the larger social and cultural context, including the organization of medicine, governmental policies, leisure and exercise, and technological developments.
8. Critically reflect on the impacts of the larger societal context on your own experiences of health and illness.

Course readings, assignments, activities, and papers have all been chosen carefully to assist you in achieving these learning outcomes.

**Academic Honesty**

The Xavier University Catalog states:

*The pursuit of truth demands high standards of personal honesty. Academic and professional life requires a trust based upon integrity of the written and spoken word. Accordingly, violations of certain standards of ethical behavior will not be tolerated at Xavier University. These include theft, cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized assistance in assignments and tests, unauthorized copying of computer software, the falsification of any academic record including letters of recommendation.*

*All work submitted for academic evaluation must be the student’s own. Certainly, the activities of other scholars will influence all students. However, the direct and unattributed use of another’s efforts is prohibited as is the use of any work untruthfully submitted as one’s own.*

If you have any questions about what is considered a violation of the Academic Honesty Code in the context of this class, I strongly encourage you to discuss this with me, either individually or in class. Any assignment, project, or exam that I find to be in violation of the Honesty Code will be assigned a grade of 0 points, i.e. an “F.” Repeated violations may result in a grade of “F” for the course.

**Attendance Policy**

*I expect you to attend every class.* I understand that absences are sometimes unavoidable. If for any reason it is necessary for you to miss several classes, for example, due to extended illness or athletic
team travel, I will work with you to come up with an appropriate and fair solution for you to make up any missed work.

If religious observance will cause you to be absent from class or otherwise affect your ability to complete assignments, you must notify me in advance to make necessary arrangements to complete the work. **Repeated unexcused absences will result in a reduction in your participation grade.**

**Personal Technology in the Classroom**

The unauthorized use of personal technology in the classroom can be distracting and disruptive.

1. Cell phones should be turned off or silenced **before the start of class.**
2. You may bring a tablet or laptop computer to class but it should not be used for any purpose other than taking notes or class-related work.
3. Your first unauthorized use of personal technology in class will result in a warning. Subsequent unauthorized uses will each result in 5 points being subtracted from your total participation points.

There are times we may use cell phones and/or computers for activities in class. There will be a reminder in the Module on Canvas that will let you know in advance when we will be using phones or computers. If you do not have a computer you can bring to class, you can check one out at the Connection Center Desk on the 3rd floor of the Conaton Learning Commons (CLC).

**Course Requirements**

**Required Reading**

*Understanding the Sociology of Health, 4th edition*, by Anne-Marie Barry and Chris Yuill, 2016 (Sage)

Either a paper or electronic version of the textbook is acceptable. **However, be sure that you have the correct edition.**

Additional required readings will be available electronically through Canvas.

**Participation: Discussion Starters, In-Class Activities, Discussion Boards**

The majority of our in-class time will be spent discussing assigned readings and/or participating in relevant group activities. It is very important that you complete the reading and discussion starter assignments before coming to class so that we can make the best use of our class time.

- **Discussion Starters:** For every class meeting you are required to turn in at the beginning of class a “discussion starter” on a 4”X6” index card, one for each assigned reading. On the front of the card you should concisely summarize the main points of the reading. On the back you should write a discussion question related to the readings that will stimulate critical and thoughtful conversation. Each discussion starter will be evaluated on a scale of 0-5, based on the accuracy of the summary and the quality of the discussion question. Further instructions and the rubric for grading the discussion starters will be distributed in a separate handout. **Because the discussion starters**
are intended to guide our in-class discussion and activities, late discussion starters will not be accepted. If you know you will be absent from class due to athletic team travel, a religious holiday, or some other reason, you may turn in your index cards before the class you will miss, for up to 3 total points.

- In-class activities often will be used to help you interpret and apply course materials. The activities may take a variety of forms including small group discussions, concept mapping, summarizing and presenting on readings, etc. Some of these activities will be graded, will typically be worth about 5-10 participation points, and will frequently be unannounced. If you miss a class during which a graded activity occurs, you will receive 0 points for the activity. In the case of excused absences with appropriate documentation, make-up assignments may be arranged at the instructor’s discretion.

- In the case of inclement weather, an online discussion board may be posted on Canvas in place of the in-class meeting so as to keep our discussions on schedule to the extent possible. Participation in discussion boards is mandatory and will be graded (a rubric for evaluating discussion board posts will be available in Canvas).

Your final participation grade will be the percentage of possible points that you earn on discussion starters, in-class activities, and any discussion boards.

**Group Project**

There are a multitude of interesting and important issues related to the sociology of health. Some we will touch on only briefly and some we may not address at all. The group project provides you with an opportunity to work in a group of three to four students to explore one of these issues and share what you have learned with other students in the class. Your group will identify a relevant issue, gather information from reliable and valid sources, and will create a visual, interactive display that you will share with the class during the last week of the semester. The project will require careful thought and research, but will also require creativity. Consequently, we will be taking advantage of the resources in Xavier’s Maker Space on the first floor of the Library. Some class time will be used to familiarize you with the space and resources but most likely you will need to spend additional time in the Maker Space outside of class to work on and produce your display. Detailed instructions will be provided within the first few weeks of class.

**Exams**

Three cumulative exams will assess your understanding of and ability to apply and critically analyze sociological concepts, theories, and research findings. Exams will cover all class readings, assignments, class discussions, lectures, and other course materials such as films. The exams will include multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions.

If you know you are going to be absent on an exam day due to team travel, religious holidays, or similar situations, you must make arrangements to take the exam prior to the absence. In the case of an unanticipated, excused absence (documentation will be necessary), you will be allowed to make up the exam within 24 hours of your return to class. Questions on early or late exams will be different from those on the exam given on the scheduled day.
If you need extended test-taking time or other accommodations due to a documented disability, you are expected to take the exam in the Learning Assistance Center (LAC) on the day the exam is scheduled, and as close as possible to the class meeting time.

**Grades**

The point distribution for all course requirements is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation: Discussion starters, in-class activities, discussion boards</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam 1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam 2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Project</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total points available**

500

Your final grade will be based on the percentage of the total points that you accumulate, using the scale below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>63-66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Accommodations**

*Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a documented disability should contact the Learning Assistance Center (LAC) at 513-745-3280 on the 5th floor of the Conaton Learning Commons, Room 514, to coordinate reasonable accommodations.*

**Canvas**

Canvas is the primary means of communicating class news and information, and disseminating the syllabus, reading and assignment schedule, assignment instructions, resources, additional readings, grades, and other useful information. The course is arranged in a series of Modules and it is within the modules that you will find detailed information on readings, assignments, and due dates. You will also use Canvas to submit any graded in-class activities. You should check Canvas regularly. If you have
questions about due dates, instructions, exam format, policies on attendance or late assignments, or other routine class matters, you should first consult the materials on Canvas. If you do not find the answer to your question there, please consult with me.

**Contacting Me Outside of Class**

My contact information is at the top of the syllabus. During the indicated office hours, I will be available to answer questions, discuss course materials, continue in-class discussions, or chat with you about anything you find interesting. Feel free to drop in during my office hours – no appointment is necessary. If for any reason I will not be able to hold office hours as scheduled, I will let you know via Canvas as far in advance as possible and will identify alternate office hours.

If you find that my office hours are not convenient for you, I will be happy to make an appointment to meet with you at an alternative time. You are more than welcome to drop by my office at any time, but I can’t guarantee that I will be there.

I make every attempt to respond to email within 24 hours. Please note, however, that I am highly unlikely to check my email during the evenings or on weekends and so it may take longer to respond to email received during those times.

**Schedule of Class Activities**

The course is divided into six modules. A detailed schedule of class meetings, topics, readings, assignments, and due dates for the first module can be found in Canvas. Subsequent modules will be opened about one week in advance. The modules contain all the information you need about what you are expected to complete prior to each class meeting, so I strongly recommend that you look at the information in the Module frequently.

An overview of the six modules is found below:

**Module 1 – Sociology and Health**
Tuesday, January 10 – Tuesday, January 24

**Module 2 – Inequality and Health: Class, Gender, Race/Ethnicity**
Thursday, January 26 – Tuesday, February 14

**Module 3 – Expanding Understandings of Health: Mental Health, Sexualities, Bodies**
Thursday, February 16 – Thursday, March 9

**Module 4 – Health and the Life Course: Aging, Sport, Exercise**
Tuesday, March 14 – Thursday, March 23

**Module 5 – Larger Contexts of Health: Care Settings, Policy**
Tuesday, March 28 – Thursday, April 6

**Module 6 – Expanding Horizons: Death, Dying, Health Technologies**
Tuesday, April 11 – Thursday, May 4
Discussion starters are due at the beginning of every class. Exams and group projects are scheduled for the dates below:

Tuesday, February 14      Exam 1
Thursday, March 23       Exam 2
Thursday, April 27       Group Projects
Thursday, May 4          Final Exam (8:30 a.m. – 10:20 a.m.)