

ASB: “The Class”

Co-Facilitators: Jama Joy Bernard & Greg Cvetanovich

11 October 2006

Health Care Inequities in America

Class Description:

In this student-led seminar, we hope to give a broad perspective on a multitude of issues relating to health care access in America today. The class will emphasize the social component of health and examine health care disparities in light of social, cultural, economic, ethnic and political factors. The facilitators hope to provide a broad understanding of health issues for students who may have limited knowledge or experience. The class will also emphasize how individuals and communities are impacted by such health care disparities, focusing on the more “human side” of public health, looking beyond solely statistical data. Using both analytical studies and personal narratives, the coursework will examine the impact of various health issues and outcomes on a quantitative and qualitative level. The class will conclude with future projections and how the health access disparities can be improved in America, considering economic, political and socio-cultural factors.

The class will meet once a week at a location on campus, and will last 2-3 hours. Class leaders will facilitate discussion and utilize relevant films, when appropriate. The co-facilitators will also recruit guest speakers to lecture and answer questions on their area of expertise. The guest speakers will most likely be NU professors or local professionals in the field.

The facilitators also hope to include a volunteer experience component to the class, which would expose students to ongoing work and challenges of local organizations that address health disparities in Chicago.

The class will culminate in a spring break trip to an undetermined location, most likely New York City or Boston. The students and co-facilitators will volunteer at one or multiple locations for one week and will gain first-hand experience of the issues studied in ASB: “The Class” during the past 10 weeks.

Evaluation:

Students will be expected to keep up to date about public health issues in accredited media outlets, specifically the New York Times, Chicago Tribune and Washington Post, among other reliable sources. Students will choose a health care disparity topic of their choosing and will write a 4-6 page paper, including a detailed bibliography. Each student will present his or her project for the last class. Presentations should last approximately 10 minutes and students are encouraged to utilize PowerPoint.

Tentative Class Schedule:

Week 1: Introduction- The US Healthcare System and the Social Component of Health

The first class will provide a basic overview of the US healthcare system, including the general concepts of insurance, Medicare, Medicaid, and the public/private divide, among other topics. The class will also include how the US system compares to the health care systems of other countries with similar GDP, the concept of “universal healthcare” and possible reasons why it doesn’t exist in America. The co-facilitators will emphasize the social component of health and pose various questions that the class will address in the following 9 weeks.

WEEK 1 READING:

- Conrad, Peter. *The Sociology of Health & Illness: Critical Perspectives*. Seventh Edition. 2005. Worth Publishers: New York, New York.
 - o (Medical Measure and the Decline of Mortality- Mckinlay & McKinlay pg 7-19)
 - o (Social Class, Susceptibility and Sickness- Syme & Berkman- pg 24-30)
 - o (Excess Mortality in Harlem- McCord and Freeman- pg 30-37)
 - o (Health Inequalities: Relative or Absolute Material Standards? Wilkinson- pg 98-103)
 - o (The US Health Care System- Fry et al- pgs 234-243)
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Week 2: Community Health and Prevention, Promotion and Treatment

This class will focus on community-based healthcare options and the merits and challenges of such an approach. We will also examine the tension between prevention/promotion and treatment, and the social and economic outcomes, for individuals and the health care system more broadly. We will focus specifically on such topics as child immunizations, mammograms, “lifestyle” counseling and advice, pap smears, colonoscopies, and other issues related to primary care and annual or semi-annual “check-ups.”

WEEK 2 READING:

Conrad, Peter. *The Sociology of Health & Illness: Critical Perspectives*. Seventh Edition. 2005. Worth Publishers: New York, New York.

- Politicizing Health Care- McKnight- 469-472
 - A Case for refocusing upstream: the political economy of illness- McKinlay- 551- 564
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Week 3: Barriers to Health: External Factors

This week will examine the barriers many Americans encounter in accessing healthcare. We will focus specifically on barriers that exist outside of the clinic, hospital, etc. Such issues as lack of secured housing, transportation, money, and job flexibility, among other factors, contribute to health care disparities.

WEEK 3 READINGS:

- Abraham, Laurie. *Mama Might Be Better Off Dead: The Failure of Health Care in Urban America*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press; 1993. (first 3rd of book)
 - Farmer, Paul 2005 *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (Chp 1-2)
 - Gladwell, Malcolm. *The Moral Hazard Myth- the bad idea behind our failed healthcare system*. 29 August 2005. *The New Yorker*.
http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/050829fa_fact
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Week 4: Chronic Illness and “Lifestyle” Health Issues

This class will examine numerous chronic health problems in America, including various cancers, diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and other health problems that may be linked to obesity. We will examine the problematic notion of holding the patient completely responsible for his or her “lifestyle” and health needs, and we will consider various forces that inhibit one’s ability to live a “healthy lifestyle.” These forces, usually exacerbated by poverty, include lack of fresh produce and unrefined foods with acceptable levels of sugar and fats, and the rigorous marketing of the corporate food industry, and the government responsibility for its regulation.

WEEK 5 READINGS:

- Abraham, Laurie. *Mama Might Be Better Off Dead: The Failure of Health Care in Urban America*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press; 1993. (second 3rd of book)
 - “Bad Blood: Diabetes in New York City” *Special Series- New York Times*. January-February 2006.
 - Dressler, William and James Bindon. *The Health Consequences of Cultural Consonance: Cultural Dimensions of Lifestyle, Social Support, and Arterial Blood Pressure in an African American Community*. *American Anthropologist* 102 (2): 244-260.
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Week 5: Barriers to Health: Doctor-Patient Relations

We will focus on the barriers to optimal health care access that exist *inside* the hospital or doctor’s office. These factors include, but are not limited to, language and cultural barriers, the problematic notion of “noncompliance” and other misunderstandings often stemming from problematic doctor-patient relationships.

WEEK 4 READINGS:

- Abraham, Laurie. *Mama Might Be Better Off Dead: The Failure of Health Care in Urban America*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press; 1993. (last 3rd of book)
- Conrad, Peter. *The Sociology of Health & Illness: Critical Perspectives*. Seventh Edition. 2005. Worth Publishers: New York, New York.
 - o (Social Death as Self-Fulfilling Prophecy- Timmermans- pgs 331-347)
- Hippocratic Oath. See related materials:
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/doctors/oath_today.html

- Davenport, Beverly A. (2002). Witnessing and the Medical Gaze: How Medical Students Learn to See at a Free Clinic for the Homeless. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 14(3):310-327.
- Buckley, M. What Medical Students Learn from Horses: Improving Doctor-Patient Communication. *Alternative and Complementary Therapies* 8(2):102-109.

FILM #1: Community Voices, 2001, 69 mins

FILM #2: Worlds Apart, 2003, 49 mins, 306.46101 W927 vhs, View one vignette

Week 6: HIV/AIDS and Other Sexual Health Issues

We will focus this week on sexual health issues in America, with specific attention to HIV/AIDS and the numerous health disparities it reveals and intensifies. We will also discuss topics related to family planning, teenage pregnancy, and access to contraception and abortion services.

WEEK 6 READING:

- Conrad, Peter. *The Sociology of Health & Illness: Critical Perspectives*. Seventh Edition. 2005. Worth Publishers: New York, New York.
 - o (AIDS and Stigma- Herek- pgs 121-129)
 - o (AIDS and its impact on medical work: the culture and politics of the shop floor- Bosk & Frader- pgs 253- 265)
 - o Chesney, Margaret 2003 Adherence to HAART Regimens. *AIDS Patient Care and STDs* 17, 4:169-177.
 - Hill, Z. et al 2003 Patterns of Adherence to Antiretrovirals: Why Adherence Has No Simple Measure. *AIDS Patient Care and STDs* 17, 10:519-525
 - Smith, K. et al 2003 Optimizing Care for African-American HIV-Positive Patients. *AIDS Patient Care and STDs* 17, 10:519-
 - Bamberger, J. D., J. Unick, P. Klein, M. Fraser, M. Chesney and M. H. Katz 2000 Helping the Urban Poor Stay with Antiretroviral HIV Drug Therapy. *American Journal of Public Health* 90(5):699-701.
 - Roberts, K. J. and T. Mann 2000 Barriers to Antiretroviral Medication Adherence in HIV-Infected Women. *AIDS Care* 12(4):377-86.
 - Johnston-Roberts, K. et al- 2003 Adherence To Antiretroviral Medications In HIV/AIDS Care: A Narrative Exploration Of One Woman's Foray Into Intentional Nonadherence. *Health Care for Women International* 24, 6:552-564.
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Week 7: "Mental Illness"

This class will address the varied possibilities of mental illness, what it means to be "mentally ill" and how such individuals can or cannot access proper treatment. We will specifically look at

depression and other mental disorders that are not always clearly diagnosable and treatable, and problems relating to overmedication and a lack of psychiatric counseling services. We will also discuss the larger context in which substance abuse, in the forms of alcohol, various drugs and prescription drugs, exists.

WEEK 7 READINGS:

- Belle and Doucet. Poverty, Inequality and Discrimination as sources of depression among US Women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly* Volume 27 Page 101 - June 2003. Volume 27 Issue 2
 - E. Jane Costello, PhD; Scott N. Compton, PhD; Gordon Keeler, MS; Adrian Angold, MRCPsych. Relationships Between Poverty and Psychopathology: A Natural Experiment *JAMA*. 2003;290:2023-2029.
 - Harman et al. Disparities in the Adequacy of Depression Treatment in the United States. *Psychiatric Services*. 55:1379-1385, December 2004. American Psychiatric Association.
 - Lorent et al. Socioeconomic Inequalities in Depression: A Meta-Analysis. *American Journal of Epidemiology* 2003; 157:98-112.
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Week 8: Geriatric Care

We will look at the enormous demographic of elderly persons that is emerging in the coming decades, and how Medicare, government spending, and the privatization of insurance is involved in that process. We will also address health issues specifically relevant to the elderly, such as Alzheimer's Disease, certain cancers, and other health issues. What is the future of care for elderly persons? We will also look at how other countries or cultures care for their elderly citizens and what we might learn from them.

WEEK 8 READINGS:

- Conrad, Peter. *The Sociology of Health & Illness: Critical Perspectives*. Seventh Edition. 2005. Worth Publishers: New York, New York.
 - o (Dying Alone: The Social Production of Urban Isolation- Klinenberg- 83-97)
 - Hahn, Robert A. *Sickness and Healing: An Anthropological Perspective*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press. (Read chapter 6: Biomedicine as a Cultural System, pp 131-172)
 - Kleinman, Arthur 1988 *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing, and the Human Condition*. New York, NY: Basic Books. pp 3-55.
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Week 9: Reform Possibilities and Other Future Concerns

What is the future of healthcare disparities in America? Based on previous coursework, we will suggest various options, beyond the popular notion of "universal healthcare." We will also consider what type of action and political climate is necessary to bring about such a change. What are the challenges? Students will also likely prepare an independent project, a topic of their own choosing, to present at the last class.

WEEK 9 READINGS:

- Conrad, Peter. *The Sociology of Health & Illness: Critical Perspectives*. Seventh Edition. 2005. Worth Publishers: New York, New York.
 - o A century of failure: health care reform in America- Rothman- 292-300
 - o Rationing Medical Progress- Callahan- 458-461
 - o The Trouble with Rationing- Relman- 462-464
 - o Comparative Models of “Health Care” Systems- Light- 500-51
 - Oberlander, Jonathan. *The Politics of Health Reform: Why do Bad Things Happen*. *Health Affairs*. 27 August 2003.
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Tentative Guest Lecturers (possible weeks):

Professor Kearsley Stewart, PhD, Department of Anthropology (week 5, week 6)

Professor William Leonard, PhD, Director of Department of Anthropology and founder of Global Health Program at NU (week 2)

Heidi Nelson, Lecturer- SESP, teaches “Social Policy and the US Health Care System” (week 9)

Various leaders and health professionals from health care advocacy and provider groups in the Chicago area (TBA)