Course and instructor information: This course meets on Wednesdays from 3:00pm - 6:00pm (periods 8-10) in Turlington Hall, Room 2350. Here is my contact information:

Office: 3229 Turlington Hall  
Office hours: Wednesdays 10:00am – 1:00pm, and by appointment  
Voice: 352.294.7185  
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Course Description: In general terms, medical sociology examines the connections between health, illness, and healthcare on the one hand, and social behavior and social organization on the other. Cockerham refers to medical sociology as “a subdiscipline of sociology that studies the social causes and consequences of health and illness.” Yet these rather broad and vague definitions belie a large and often fragmented set of research areas that are frequently lumped together under the medical sociology umbrella. Consequently, authors of medical sociology textbooks and syllabi often introduce this field with a broad description and then follow it with a list of topics frequently studies by medical sociologists. For example, the following description can be found on the ASA’s Medical Sociology Section webpage:

Medical sociology provides an analytical framework for understanding the social contexts of health, illness and health care. Central topics include the subjective experience of health and illness, political, economic and environmental circumstances fostering ill health; and societal forces constraining the medical care system and individuals’ responses to illness. This field draws on traditional sociological issues and contributes to them through reformulations of such basic concepts as social systems and institutions, professionalism, social movements and social change, and social interaction and negotiation. Drawing from pluralistic perspectives, the field is concerned with basic sociological research and its implications for public policy and practice.

In this class, we will undertake an exploration of the various foci and directions (past and present) of those working in medical sociology. Although we will not have sufficient time to conduct a comprehensive review of the numerous topics that this field entails, I am optimistic that we will be able to cover some of the important ones. In fact, I believe that one of the important tasks facing us is to think critically about this field and to come to our own decision about what we believe it does (and should) emphasize. I believe keeping the following questions in mind will aid us in this endeavor: “Is medical sociology one field or many?” “How does the approach of medical sociologists differ from that of medical professionals, public health professionals, and other social scientists?” “What role can/ought medical sociologists
play in the formation of policies and interventions?” (I expect this list will expand over the course of the semester.)

Readings: Readings will consist of journal articles, book chapters, and other relevant sources such as reports published by the Census Bureau, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Kaiser Family Foundation. All readings will be available online or through the course Canvas website.

Evaluation: Evaluation will be based on course participation a research project, described below.

Participation: Course participation will be worth 40% of the course grade and consists of two parts (each worth 20%).

1. Discussant. Each member of our class will sign up for two dates to serve as a discussant. The discussants’ tasks include contributing one relevant article to the assigned readings, compose a list of discussion topics or questions, and to facilitate discussion during class. Please plan to send the questions and the article to me on the Sunday before class so that I can distribute them.

2. Fundamental Concept Modules (FCMs). Each member of our class will work in groups of 2-3 to develop and present two FCMs. FCMs are concepts, trends, and relationships that are important components of the study of medical sociology. They are analogous to the illustrative or exemplary "boxes" that appear in many textbooks. I will develop a list of FCMs to supplement our selection of key topics. The group will be responsible for developing a 30 minute multi-media instructional presentation on the FCM of the week.

Research Project. You will have an opportunity to conduct research on a topic of your choice (although it must have some relevance to medical sociology). The project will be undertaken in three phases and will count for 60% of your course grade.

1. Research précis (worth 10%). Prepare a brief (3-4 pages) summary that identifies your research topic or question, specific aims, rationale, relevant literature(s), and research design. Please submit your proposal (via email) no later than October 1.

2. Progress report (worth 10%). Prepare a brief (3-4 pages) summary of the progress you have accomplished on your project (e.g., preliminary findings) and an assessment of the tasks remaining. Please submit your proposal (via email) no later than November 12.

3. Presentation (worth 20%). Give a 15 minute oral presentation on your research project during class. Please plan to use Powerpoint slides to accompany your talk. Presentations will take place during class on December 10.

4. Final paper (worth 20%). The final phase of the research project will consist of a research paper. This paper will be similar to a manuscript prepared for submission to a peer-reviewed journal and is due (via email) on Friday, December 18.
Tentative Schedule of Topics

August 27 – Organizational Meeting; Scope of the Field, part 1

September 3 – Scope of the Field, part 2

December 10 – Presentations

Research Papers are due (via email) on Friday, December 18.