

Medical Sociology (SYA 7933)
Spring, 2026
Dr. Chuck Peek

Course and instructor information: This course meets on Thursdays from 8:30am – 11:30am (periods 2-4) in Keene-Flint Hall, Room 115. Here is my contact information:

Office: 3229 Turlington Hall

Office hours: Mondays 9:00am – 10:30am EST (in-person), Thursdays 1:00 – 2:30pm EST (online),
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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 studied 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?” “In what direction will the field of medical sociology move in the future?” “What role can/ought medical sociologists play in the formation of policies and interventions?”

Readings: There is no required textbook for this course. Readings consist of journal articles, book chapters, and other potentially relevant sources (e.g., reports published by the Census Bureau, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or the Kaiser Family Foundation). All readings will be available online or through the course Canvas website.

Course Technology: This course requires the use of a laptop or desktop computer with a high-speed internet connection. A web camera and a microphone are also recommended. To access online material, you will need to be logged on to a computer in the UF domain or connect to UF via a proxy login or VPN connection (highly recommended).

Attendance Policy: You are expected to attend every class. If you are unable to attend, please notify me via email before class. Each student is permitted one absence. Subsequent absences will result in the loss of a half letter grade (5 percentage points) for each absence.

University Policy on Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Students requesting accommodation for disabilities must first register with the Dean of Students Office (disability.ufl.edu). The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation. You must submit this documentation prior to submitting assignments or taking the quizzes or exams. Accommodations are not retroactive, therefore, students should contact the office as soon as possible in the term for which they are seeking accommodations.

Evaluation Policy: Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluer.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Assignments: Assignments for the course include a *research project* and *course participation*. All assignments are available through Canvas.

Participation: Course participation will be worth 40% of the course grade. Each member of the class will sign up for two dates to serve as a discussant. The discussants' tasks include contributing one relevant article to the assigned readings, composing a list of discussion topics or questions, and helping to facilitate discussion during class. Please plan to send the questions and the article to me on the Thursday before class so that I can distribute them.

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 four phases and will count for 60% of your course grade.

- (1) Research Proposal (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. The proposal is due on Friday, September 29.

- (2) Progress report (worth 10%). Prepare a brief (2-3 pages) summary of the progress you have accomplished on your project (e.g., preliminary findings) and an assessment of the tasks remaining. The progress report is due on Friday, October 27.
- (3) Research Presentation (worth 20%). Prepare an oral presentation using Powerpoint slides (30 minutes) based on your research project. The presentation should include sufficient background on important debates, theories, and empirical findings to orient those who may not be familiar with your topic. You should also discuss your objectives, methods, and findings. Finally, be prepared to field questions from your colleagues. Presentation will take place during class meetings on November 28 and December 5.
- (4) Research Paper (worth 20%). Prepare a paper (approximately 25 pages) based on your project. The research paper is due on Wednesday, December 13.

Professional Conduct: Sociology deals with a number of controversial and contested issues and medical sociology is no different. As we engage in discussion and critically evaluate relevant debates and issues, diverse views are inevitable and, in fact, valuable. Accordingly, I expect each member of this class to treat colleagues professionally and respectfully, even if you disagree with the views or positions they hold.

Schedule of Topics*

January 15 – Introduction and Organizational Meeting

January 22 – Background to the Sociological Study of Health and Illness

Required readings:

Crimmins, E, Y Zhang, and Y Saito. 2016. "Trends Over 4 Decades in Disability-Free Life Expectancy in the United States." *American Journal of Public Health* 106(7): 1287-1293.

Lesthaeghe, R. 2014. "The second demographic transition: A concise overview of its development." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111(51): 18112-18115.

McKinlay, J, and S McKinlay. 1977. "The Questionable Contribution of Medical Measures to the Decline of Mortality in the United States in the Twentieth Century." *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly* 55:405-428.

Omran AR. 1971. "The epidemiologic transition: a theory of the epidemiology of population change." *Milbank Quarterly*, 83(4):731-57.

Recommended readings:

McFalls, JA. 2003. "Population: A lively introduction." *Population Bulletin* 58(4): 1-44.

January 29 – Fundamental Cause

Required Readings:

READ FIRST: Link, B and J Phelan. 1995. "Social Conditions As Fundamental Causes of Disease." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 35: 80-94.

Adler NE and J Stewart. (2010.) "Health disparities across the lifespan: Meaning, methods, and mechanisms." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1186: 5-23.

Braveman, P, C Cubbin, S Egerter, D Williams, and E Pamuk. 2010. "Socioeconomic Disparities in Health in the United States: What the Patterns Tell Us." *American Journal of Public Health* 100 (Supplement 1): S186-S196.

Clouston, SAP and BG Link. 2021. "A Retrospective on Fundamental Cause Theory: State of the Literature and Goals for the Future." *Annual Review of Sociology* 2021 47:1, 131-156.

February 5 – Race, Ethnicity, and Health

Required Readings:

Phelan, JC and B Link. 2015. "Is racism a fundamental cause of inequalities in health." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 41:311-330.

Williams, DR. 2012. "Miles to go before we sleep: racial inequities in health." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 53(3), 279-295.

Williams, DR and M Sternthal. 2010. "Understanding racial-ethnic disparities in health: Sociological contributions." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 51: S15-S27

February 12 – Gender, Sexuality, and Health

Required Readings:

Mayer KH, Bradford JB, Makadon HJ, et al. 2008. "Sexual and gender minority health: What we know and what needs to be done." *American Journal of Public Health*, 98: 989-995.

Alvidrez, J, D Castille, M Laude-Sharp, A Rosario, and D Tabor. 2019. "The National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Framework." *American Journal of Public Health*, 109: S16_S20.

Short, SE, and M. Zacher. (2022.) "Women's Health: Population Patterns and Social Determinants." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 48(1), 277-298.

Recommend Readings:

Read, J and B Gorman. 2010. "Gender and Health Inequality." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 36:371–86

Meyer, I. 2001. "Why lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender public health?" *American Journal of Public Health*, 91(6):856-859.

February 19 – Stress, Stigma, and Health

Required Readings:

Pearlin, LI. 1989. "The Sociological Study of Stress." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 30(3), 241–256.

Pescosolido, BA and JK Martin. 2015. The Stigma Complex. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 41(1): 87-116.

Thoits, P. 2010. "Stress and Health: Major Findings and Policy Implications." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 51: S41-S53.

February 26 – "Deaths of Despair" and Declining Life Expectancy

Required Readings:

Life Expectancy in the U.S. Dropped for the Second Year in a Row in 2021
(https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2022/20220831.htm)

Case, A and A Deaton. 2015. "Rising Morbidity and Mortality in Midlife among White Non-Hispanic Americans in the 21st Century." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 112(49): 15078-83.

Geronimus, AT, J Bound, TA Waidmann, JM Rodriguez, and B Timpe. 2019. "Weathering, Drugs, and Whack-a-Mole: Fundamental and Proximate Causes of Widening Educational Inequity in U.S. Life Expectancy by Sex and Race, 1990–2015." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 60(2), 222–239.

Gutin, I, and RA Hummer. (2021.) "Social Inequality and the Future of US Life Expectancy." *Annual Review of Sociology* 47(1): 501-520

March 5 – What Have We Learned From COVID-19?

Required Readings:

Lupton, D. 2020. Special section on 'Sociology and the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic', *Health Sociology Review*, 29:2, 111-112.

Maani, N, and S Galea. 2020. "COVID-19 and Underinvestment in the Public Health Infrastructure of the United States." *Milbank Quarterly* 98(2): 250-259.

Matthewman, S, and K Huppatz. 2020. "A sociology of Covid-19." *Journal of Sociology*, 56(4), 675–683.

Miller, S, LR Wherry, and B Mazumder. 2021. "Estimated Mortality Increases During The COVID-19 Pandemic By Socioeconomic Status, Race, And Ethnicity." *Health Affairs*, 40(8):

March 12 – Biosocial Perspectives on Health

Required Readings:

Goosby, BJ, JE Cheadle, and C Mitchell. 2018. "Stress-Related Biosocial Mechanisms of Discrimination and African American Health Inequities." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 44(1): 319-340.

Harris, MK and KM Schorpp. 2018. "Integrating Biomarkers in Social Stratification and Health Research." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 44(1), 361-386.

Roberts, DE and O Rollins. 2020. "Why Sociology Matters to Race and Biosocial Science." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 46(1), 195-214.

March 19 – Spring Break

March 26 – Medicalization

Required Readings:

Clarke, AE, JK Shim, L Mamo, JR Fosket, and JR Fishman. 2003. "Biomedicalization: Technoscientific Transformations of Health, Illness, and U.S. Biomedicine." *American Sociological Review*, 68(2), 161–194.

Conrad, P. 1992. "Medicalization and Social Control." *Annual Review of Sociology* 18: 209-32.

Conrad P. 2005. "The shifting engines of medicalization." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 46(1):3-14.

April 2 – Healthcare in the U.S.

Required Readings:

Fennell, ML and CM Adams. 2011. "U.S. Health-Care Organizations: Complexity, Turbulence, and Multilevel Change." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 37(1): 205-219.

Obama, Barack. 2016. "United States Health Care Reform: Progress to Date and Next Steps." *JAMA* 316(5):525-532.

Quadagno, J. 2004. "Why the United States Has No National Health Insurance: Stakeholder Mobilization against the Welfare State, 1945-1996." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 45: 25-44.

Recommended Readings:

Light, D. 2004. "Ironies of Success: A New History of the American Health Care 'System'". *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 45: 1-24.

April 9 – Student Presentations

April 16 – Student Presentations

* Course topics and readings may change according to the pace of the class, hurricanes, or other unexpected events.