
SOC 200: Understanding My Neighbor: Society, Culture, and Health (3 credits)

Westmont College

Instructor

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Hours: After class or by appointment via Zoom

“Every single session I have in my clinic I see the downstream effects of social factors. I think about my patient with diabetes whose blood glucose levels I haven’t been able to get under control because he can’t take the insulin I prescribe because he lives in a homeless shelter and has no place to refrigerate it. Or the person with advanced liver disease related to alcohol use exacerbated by his sporadic employment. When you trace back to the causes of the causes of illness, in so many cases you see how our social fabric itself is in need of mending.”

- Dave A. Chokshi, chief population health officer for NYC Health + Hospitals

Course Description

This course introduces students to the sociological study of health in society. Students will explore a variety of topics related to sociology and health, including the social factors that influence health, modern health in developed and developing countries, the meaning and experience of living in poor health, and health care in the United States. In addition to key social factors like race, class, gender, and sexuality, we will examine the role of religion and spirituality in health, including health benefits and the so-called “dark side of religion,” where religion and spirituality can be associated with negative outcomes. Throughout the course students will learn to adopt a sociological lens in cultivating a deeper understanding of the social world. This is a Liberal Arts course that supports and prepares nursing students to provide informed, patient-centered care in a variety of healthcare settings. SOC200 has a frontloaded two-week intensive following by a short period of independent research.

Learning Outcomes

Program Learning Outcomes

- Exhibit Christian character and servant leadership while caring for a diverse population in communities across state, national, and global settings.
- Evidence-based best practices, critical thinking, and clinical reasoning, inform clinical judgement for the provision of patient-centered, safe, quality care.
- Create patient education plans that are culturally specific to the patient and that incorporate the family support system.

- Communicate effectively with the inter-professional team to ensure a holistic approach to patient-centered care.
- Continue inquisitive learning by using the Electronic Medical Record and Informatics to meet quality metrics in a variety of healthcare and geographic settings.
- Advocate for healthcare policies for the underserved, vulnerable populations to ensure equity with access to care for prevention, remedial, supportive, and rehabilitative nursing care regionally, nationally, and globally.

JRD GE Learning Outcomes

This course fulfills the Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity on Biblical and Theological Grounds (JRD) GE. JRD engages students in the task of understanding historical and structural patterns that have created and sustained a variety of injustices in our society, particularly the injustice of structured racism. Students will be encouraged to develop a biblical and theological framework enabling them to imagine and embody possible individual and communal responses. The JRD GE holds the following student learning outcomes:

- Students will analyze issues of justice and injustice involving race and racism in the United States in biblically and theologically grounded ways.
- Students will identify Christian responsibilities to pursue justice and reconciliation in diverse relationships, practices, and structures according to the character of God's loving reign expressed in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Commented [b1]: New material

Additional Course Learning Outcomes

- Develop an understanding of foundational concepts, perspectives, and theories in the field of sociology as they relate to the fields of nursing and public health.
 - Essentials: I, III, V, VI, VII, VIII
 - QSEN: Patient-centered care, teamwork and collaboration, Quality improvement, evidence-based practice
 - IPEC: Competencies 1, 2, 3, 4
- Display reflective and critical thinking skills regarding health in contemporary society.
 - Essentials: I, III, VI, VII, VIII, IX
 - QSEN: Patient-centered care, teamwork and collaboration, quality improvement, evidence-based practice, informatics, safety
 - IPEC: Competencies 1, 2, 3, 4
- Demonstrate acquisition of sociological insight by applying course topics to a health inequity research project.
 - Essentials: I, III, VI, VII, VIII, IX
 - QSEN: Patient-centered care, safety, Evidence-based practice, quality improvement
 - IPEC: Competencies 1 and 2

Required Resources

- Squires, Veronica & Breanna Lathrop. *How Neighborhoods Make Us Sick: Restoring Health and Wellness to Our Communities*. InterVarsity Press.
- Additional readings supplied on Canvas

Commented [b2]: Pre-existing content that fully engages the spirit of JRD

Course Assessments

Attendance and Participation

Participation and attendance are two different things, and both will count significantly toward your final grade. A participating student is one who is actively engaged in the collective learning process; an attending student shows up. Please do both. For full credit you must *volunteer* thoughts during class discussion from time to time (but I will still call on people regularly – we’re all learning together and I want to hear from you).

Reading Journal

You will provide a written response to all assigned daily readings (about 500-700 words total for all readings). These are due prior to class and no late work is permitted. Suggested prompts for response include (but are not limited to) the following:

- What is your overall evaluation?
- How can the piece be summarized in 3 or 4 sentences?
- What is so obvious it almost doesn’t need saying?
- What is so hidden it needs illumination?
- What remains unclear or confusing?
- What is motivating the writer?
- What theoretical or practical insight is the writer driving home?
- Where does the argument work?
- Where does the argument falter?
- How does this piece tie into your existing knowledge?
- What holes in your knowledge does the piece reveal?
- What connections can you make with other readings, courses, etc.?
- What kind of theoretical or practical implications are raised?
- How are cultural, social, political, and structural factors are involved?
- How does this piece align or misalign with your own history, perspective, values, etc.?
- What does your gut tell you about the subject matter? Your brain?
- How this does this reading engage your faith and/or your understanding of the Bible?

Commented [b3]: Students have the opportunity to engage their faith in reading responses throughout the course, including but not limited to two class sessions focused on religion and race/ethnicity

NB: Try to be concise with your writing so you don’t waste a lot of words on fluff. The journals should show clear evidence of having read all the pieces. This could mean naming core arguments, raising important questions, interacting with other readings, etc.

Commented [b4]: New material

Book Response

A response of 1,000 words will be produced for *How Neighborhoods Make Us Sick*. This can be similar to the journal responses but will be structured in a more formal manner.

Commented [b5]: This book response is a prime opportunity to wrestle with questions related to structural inequality and faith. The authors narrate their own faith commitments in relation to their service in public health, and in my experience over 4 semesters of this course, this book has proven to be a powerful resource for this type of reflection.

Discussion Leadership

You will compose a response for all reading assignments, but in addition you will be responsible to further prepare for one of the day's readings. We will assign these on the first day. Be ready with five to six solid questions that will help to introduce the reading(s) as well as unearth its treasures. I will still play a role in leading discussion, but we will work together. Please email me your questions and discussion points in advance of class.

Examination

One exam will provide an opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge and application of all materials covered in class lectures, readings, discussion, films, etc. It will take the form of an open note essay to be done in class.

Commented [b6]: The exam is an in-class essay that asks students to, among other things, identify ways in which race and religion/spirituality affect health outcomes.

Research Paper

A research project (1,800 words) will be developed focusing on a subject of your choosing (for example, intersection of health with disability, childhood trauma, environment, education, etc.). More details will be shared in class, but it will include seeking out academic articles on the topic as well as researching local, national, and global agencies/entities which address the problem you identify.

Grading

Participation/Attendance	20%	A = 93-100%	C+ = 77-79%
Reading Journals:	20%	A- = 90-92%	C = 73-76%
Book Response:	10%	B+ = 87-89%	C- = 70-72%
Discussion Leadership	10%	B = 83-86%	D = 60-69%
Examination:	20%	B- = 80-82%	F = below 60%
Research Paper:	20%		

Policies

Class Preparation

This course will combine lecture and discussion, but will lean toward the latter. That means that in order to fully engage in class, you must thoroughly read assigned articles, chapters, etc. Each time we meet, bring paper, a writing utensil, and your reading materials. A laptop is not necessary but may be used from time to time (see policy on electronic technology).

Classroom Behavior

Some topics of discussion we will engage in are highly contentious (e.g., race). In order to have productive and meaningful conversations, it is essential that all class members ask themselves (and one another) what it means to engage in conversation marked by love and mutual respect...even when different viewpoints are taken. I ask that all students attempt, when appropriate, to set aside their own interpretive lens and activate their "sociological imagination" in order to see things from a different perspective. Ultimately, just as God reconciles us to himself through Christ, we ought to be reconciled with one another. That doesn't mean we always come to the same conclusion, but

it does involve a legitimate attempt to listen and see from another angle. Jesus set this example when he “became like us” (Hebrews 4:15).

Commented [b7]: Added material

Make-up Work

Please make every effort to get assigned work in on time. Reading journals are not accepted late. Other projects will be penalized one letter grade per weekday.

Academic Integrity & Artificial Intelligence Tools

Westmont College holds all students responsible for maintaining academic integrity. Plagiarism, lying, unauthorized use of AI assistance, & cheating are all examples of academic integrity violations. In the event of any violation, I reserve the right to assign whatever grade for the course I deem appropriate, including F, without regard to the student’s accumulated points. Violations of academic integrity will be handled in accordance with the College’s policies. It is the student’s responsibility to be familiar with the policies of the College regarding academic integrity and to avoid violating these policies. You will likely find this website helpful:

<http://www.westmont.edu/offices/provost/Plagiarism/PlagiarismStudentInformation.html>.

Regarding AI-generated text, it is unacceptable to submit this in the place of original academic work. By and large, AI circumvents the intellectual labor which produces independent and thoughtful citizens. A student should seek permission from me *prior* to an assignment submission if considering using an AI tool for editing or another assignment-related task.

Electronic Technology

Laptops, phones, and tablets are helpful tools...in some contexts. Research shows, however, that they actually decrease engagement in learning and comprehension (Mueller and Oppenheimer 2014). For this reason, and because they can prove distracting (internet, email, etc.), I typically do not permit them in class. There will be times, however, where it will appropriate to use them (for example, if you need them to access a reading for discussion).

Accommodations

Students with a documented disability in need of learning accommodation should contact the Office of Disability Services. Please visit <http://www.westmont.edu/offices/disability/> or write Seth Miller, Director of Disability Services (semiller@westmont.edu) for further assistance.

Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading
August 28	Introduction, Social Capital	Gladwell, "Roseto Mystery" Johnson, <i>Forest and Trees</i> Intro, Ch 1 Putnam, <i>Bowling Alone</i> Ch 1, 20
August 29	Social Construction, Stigma, Phenomenology	Turner, "Social Construction" Carel, "Phenomenology" Link & Phelan, "Conceptualizing Stigma"
August 30	Culture, Social Definitions	Johnson, <i>Forest and Trees</i> Ch 2 Turner, "Disease and Culture" VanderWeele, "Positive Epidemiology" Keyes, "Promoting Flourishing"
August 31	Education, Income, Status	Mirowsky & Ross, <i>Education, Status & Health</i> , Ch 3 Bradshaw et al. "Subjective Social Status"
September 1	Race/Ethnicity	Desmond & Emirbayer, "What is Racial Domination?" Barr, <i>Health Disparities</i> , Ch 9
September 4	Labor Day – no class	
September 5	Gender, Sexuality	Manandahr et al. "Gender, Health and 2030 Agenda" Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, "Gender System & Interaction" Lim et al. "LGBT Health"
September 6	Religion and Spirituality	Stark, <i>The Rise of Christianity</i> , Ch 4 Edmondson & Brennan, <i>Faithful Anti-Racism</i> , Ch 1,2 Bash, "Spirituality: The Emperor's New Clothes?" Idler, <i>Religion as a Social Force in Health</i>
September 7	Life Course, Global Health	Boyce, <i>The Orchid and the Dandelion</i> , Ch 2 (Ch 1 optional) Marmot, <i>The Health Gap</i> , Ch 7 Farmer, <i>Global Health</i> , Ch 2, 3
September 8	Exam	
September 11	Paper topic due	
September 15	Citations & outline due	
September 24	Paper due	
September 29	Project presentations (11 a.m.-1 p.m.)	
October 6	Final class (11a.m.-1 p.m.)	Squires & Lathrop, <i>How Neighborhoods Make Us Sick</i>

Note: All reading (journal, book) responses are due the day they are discussed in class.

Commented [b8]: The first two class periods include foundational framing material highlighting the individual/institutional dialectic. This is essential for engaging in conversation on the connection between structure and in/justice.

Commented [b9]: Includes important material on how religion/spirituality relate to human flourishing.

Commented [b10]: Full class period devoted to race and ethnicity as social determinants of health. Understanding how race/racism create structured barriers to optimal health is the primary goal, via lecture, video, and readings (for example, in addition to these readings we watch a TedTalk by David Williams, a leading Black sociologist of health as he discusses racial injustice and human well-being).

Commented [b12]: This chapter focuses on pagan/Christian relations in the early church as a vehicle for church growth, with clear application to how racial/ethnic groups interact with one another today. There is a normative bent towards Christians laying themselves down for the good of the "other."

Commented [b13]: These two chapters are being ADDED to address a concrete biblical/theological approach to race and racism. These chapters (Titled "Faithful Anti-Racists Have Wisdom" and "Faithful Anti-Racists Apply the Bible") make explicit arguments about biblical and theological approaches to race.

Commented [b11]: The full class session on religion is intended to help students think about the ways religion relates to health - mostly for good, but some for ill. Conversation in class steers toward how we see religion (both collective and personal) playing out in the public sphere, as it relates to health.

Commented [b14]: Though not a theological study, this reading raises the necessary reflection question: "Why does religion affect health in such a profound way?"

Commented [b15]: Chapter 3 examines the colonial legacy of race/racism as it relates to global health.

Commented [b16]: Class discussion of this book allows a very good opportunity to engage in dialogue about our own social position and engagement in justice-related activities (specifically focused on public health).