

**UA – 414 - Sociology of Medicine  
Spring 2016**

Prof. Sarah Cowan  
sarahkcowan@nyu.edu  
Office Hrs: Th. 11:10-12:15.  
Sign up at: <https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/hdaiy>  
Puck Bldg (295 Lafayette at Houston), Rm. 4111

TA: Shelly Ronen  
sronen@nyu.edu  
Office Hrs: Tu 12:00-1:30  
Show up or email for appt  
Puck Bldg, Rm. 4170

Writing Tutors:  
Ellen Burton -- [ewb257@nyu.edu](mailto:ewb257@nyu.edu)  
Molly Potter -- [mmp497@nyu.edu](mailto:mmp497@nyu.edu)  
Yianni Tsesmelis -- [yt761@nyu.edu](mailto:yt761@nyu.edu)

Writing Tutor Mentor:  
Dr. Noelle Molé Liston -- [nm76@nyu.edu](mailto:nm76@nyu.edu)

---

When you walk into the doctor's office, health feels like a personal problem. You have a few worrisome symptoms – a cough and some difficulty breathing. Your doctor asks you about how you've been eating, whether you smoke, whether you've been exercising, and what you know about your family history. You admit that you've been skipping the gym. And it's true that you have been more stressed than usual at work. You walk away with orders to stop smoking and fill a prescription to calm your cough.

Doctors are interested in the immediate causes of illness that can be remedied with medical treatments. They focus on why you suffered this illness at this time. The cause of your poor health could lie deep in your past - for example, you lived in a polluted city as a child – but in their offices, doctors attempt to address the immediate symptoms rather than to consider their social causes.

Sociologists take a decidedly different approach to the study of health. First, they focus on understanding the social causes of disease within a population rather than the immediate causes of an individual's illness. Second, sociologists consider how social contexts shape individual health behaviors. Finally, while doctors generally focus on how our current day-to-day lives affect illness because those are the contexts they can influence, sociologists think about how the contexts we inhabit throughout our lives affect our health.

Supra-individual social structures clearly affect our health outcomes, but what about the role of health care? Sociologists also have something to say about how social forces affect everything from doctor-patient interaction to whether or not you choose to get a flu shot to how many medical mistakes occur in the operating room.

In this course, we will investigate how health and society are linked. In doing so, you will learn how to think like a social scientist about issues of health and to conduct your own social science research project on a health-related topic of your choosing. We will explore topics that include:

- How and why social status affects (and is affected by) health status both within and across generations.
- How naming and diagnosing disease depends on both social and medical factors.
- How doctor-patient interaction shapes the delivery of health care.
- How the rise of “evidence-based medicine” has changed medical practice.
- How medical mistakes happen, and what can be done to minimize them.

### **Course Requirements and Grading:**

<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Reading Responses	17.5
Paper 1	10
Paper 2	30
Paper 3 & Presentation	30
Writing Process	5
Participation	7.5

### **Three papers & a presentation (70%):**

Detailed descriptions of each paper assignment will be available under the NYU Classes “Assignments” tab, and your papers will be turned in there as well. Papers are due via NYU Classes at 9:00am on the dates noted in the “Course at a Glance.” In this class, we conduct grading blindly, so please upload your paper without your name in the document and with your N number as your document title.

Paper 1: *Conceiving your research project*: This exercise will help you begin to think about what you would like your research project to be about. The goal is to identify your interest and hone in on a part of your interest you could attack in a semester’s project. This project will be short in terms of what you hand in but will take up a lot of time in preparation and thinking. You should spend at least five hours on this assignment.

Paper 2: *First half of your research study*: This 7-page paper will include an introduction, literature review, and description of your data and methods.

Paper 3 & Presentation: *Complete research study*: This 14-page paper will include all sections of the paper: the revised Paper 2 (introduction, literature review and data and methods sections - 7 pages), and the results and discussion sections (7 pages). You will also give a four minute presentation in class on your

research which will include your results. This four minute presentation will be done in the week that your first draft of your final paper is due.

Note: We have the fantastic opportunity to work with the Undergraduate Writing Tutors Program this semester (more on that below.) Therefore papers two and three will be handed in in draft form in advance of the final papers (see the Course at a Glance below.) When you had in your final paper, also submit your draft with the tutor's comments.

### **Writing & Revision Process (5%):**

We are fortunate to have help from the Undergraduate Writing Tutors Program. Writing tutors are curious, well-trained peers who provide feedback on drafts of writing assignments. Their role is to encourage and challenge students to strengthen their writing and clarify their ideas. They are trained to support the aims of the class, learning about the expectations for writing in the class and listening and responding carefully to individual student writers. While writing tutors are not TAs and will not assess papers, they will focus writing conferences on questions that generate clearer writing and stronger thinking about the content. The writing tutors' main goals are to help students develop their writing and thinking in response to particular assignments and to become a better writers over the long term.

Writing tutors take a semester-long practicum to learn to think more deeply about writing and to develop practices for working with peers on writing during individualized conferences. Tutors audit several classes or recitations and read some course materials in the classes where they tutor. Their primary aim is, however, to work with students through a practice-based approach to writing and revising. That is, they will ask questions and work to prompt students to reread, rethink, revise, and craft new writing during conferences.

Students are required to participate in the program for each designated paper assignment, submitting of a draft of their paper on time for written feedback and attending a scheduled, 30-minute long, one-on-one conference. Writing tutors should receive complete drafts from students, not outlines or rough notes. Incomplete drafts to tutors and missed conferences will reduce the 5% writing process grade as a consequence. We strongly advise you to have the same tutor for both papers (assuming it went well.)

This is a terrific opportunity for you to improve your writing, get extensive feedback on your work and altogether be more successful in the class.

### **Reading responses on the course “blog” (300 words) & comments on your peers’ responses (17.5%: each reading response is worth 1.5 points, for a total of 15%; each comment is worth .5 points, for a total of 2.5%.):**

The “blog” (in Forums on NYU Classes) provides us with the opportunity to process what we have read, read our peers' work, and generate questions for discussion in

advance of class. These reading responses should incorporate all of the readings for the week, but we are not looking for summaries of the readings. We want you to make an argument, to critically analyze what you have read, and to identify common themes or tensions across the readings.

In most weeks, you will write a reading response, and for the first few weeks, you also will be responsible for commenting on at least 1 of your peers' posts. See the "Course at a Glance" table for the schedule and of course, you can comment more often if you'd like. The comments will be the jumping off point for class discussion.

Reading responses are due each week on Monday by 11:59pm. Comments are due on Wednesday by 11:59pm. Complete the readings for the entire week before your reading response submission.

You are allowed to skip one reading response. I know that some weeks are just too hectic or something comes up. You therefore get one pass. In order to use your pass, you must email the TA prior to the reading response is due.

**Lecture and section participation (7.5%):**

Participation includes not only attendance at section and lecture, but active engagement with the material and with your peers. You will not get credit for merely speaking but you additionally must be thoughtful and reflective, responding to your peers but also leaving space for others to speak.

**Mid-term evaluation:**

At mid-term there will be a two-part evaluation.

- (1) During lecture you will evaluate the class and the teaching so far for both Prof. Cowan and Ms. Ronen. We do not only want feedback at the end of the semester when we can not implement any changes. This will be anonymous feedback.
- (2) The TA will provide you with in-person mid-term evaluation. This will focus on your reading responses and participation so you can know how you are faring.

**Laptops and other digital devices:**

A large and growing body of research has documented the many ways in which multitasking – which is inevitable in the presence of digital devices - can interfere with learning, engagement, comprehension, and performance. After an interruption, it takes an average of 25 minutes to return to the original task, and multiple studies have found declines in learning and performance in the presence of multitasking.

For these reasons, we ask that you do not use laptops or other digital devices during lecture or section. To ensure that you don't miss anything on the slides by virtue of writing rather than typing, I will post them to NYU Classes at the end of every week. If you require accommodation, please come to my office hours to discuss your needs.

**Policy on lateness:**

Recognizing that we all have busy lives and balance multiple commitments, you will be allowed one **48-hour no-question-asked extension** on one of your papers (but not on the final one). This is an extension on the draft you hand in as your final draft. You cannot be late for the drafts for the writing tutors.

Late blog posts, comments, or papers will not be accepted. Please see note above regarding a pass for one week’s reading response. Beyond this allowance, late assignments will receive a lower grade. **No further extensions will be granted**, except in the case of serious illness or a family emergency. If you are ill, you should go to see your physician and provide a note to support any extension request. If there is a family emergency, please discuss this with your recitation leader. If a religious observance conflicts with an assignment, we will follow the NYU guidelines found here: <http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/university-calendar-policy-on-religious-holidays.html>

**Office hours:**

To help minimize the time you spend waiting, I have set up an appointment system that you can access via : <https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/hdaiy>

**\*\*\*You don’t need to make an appointment to come to office hours\*\*\***. You are welcome to just show up, and I will first see those who have scheduled appointments.

**Books to Purchase (all other readings will be posted on NYU Classes or available online through the library):**

- 1) Tracey Kidder. *Mountains Beyond Mountains*.
- 2) Steven Johnson. *The Ghost Map: The Story of London’s Most Terrifying Epidemic – and How It Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World*.

**Course at a Glance**

<u>Week</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Deadlines</u>
1-2	1/26, 1/28, 2/2, 2/4	How are Health and Health Care Distributed? How Should They Be? Guests on 1/28: Writing Mentor and Tutors Guest on 2/4: Writing Mentor Dr. Liston on the research process	RR due M 2/1; C by 2/3
3	2/9, 2/11	Approaching Health as a Social Scientist: The Social Scientific Study of Health Guest: Ms. Keely Quinn, HealthLeads	RR due M 2/8; C by 2/10 <i>Paper 1 Due 2/12</i>

4	2/16, 2/18	The Organization of Medical Care in the US and the Challenge of Health Care Reform Guest on 2/16: Writing Mentor Dr. Liston on literature reviews	RR due M 2/15
5	2/23, 2/25	Socioeconomic Status, Race, Stress, and the Intergenerational Transmission of Health	RR due M 2/22
6	3/1, 3/3	The Effect of Social Contexts on Health Behaviors: The Case of Obesity	RR due M 2/28; <i>Paper 2 First Draft Due 3/4 9:00AM</i>
7	3/8, 3/10	Social Influence & the Rise of the Pharmaceutical Industry	RR due M 3/7
8	3/22, 3/24	Doctor-Patient Interaction: Death, Dying, and End-of-Life Care	RR due M 3/21; <i>Paper 2 Final Draft Due 3/22 9:00AM</i>
9	3/29, 3/31	The Social Dimensions of the Diagnosis of Illness: Medicalization and Stimulant Use among College Students	RR due M 3/28
10	4/5, 4/7	Sex and Sexuality	RR due M 4/4
11	4/12, 4/14	The Social Dimensions of Medical Knowledge: The Vaccine Debate	RR due M 4/11
12	4/19, 4/21	4 minute presentations, including results	RR due M 4/18 <i>Paper 3 First Draft Due 4/22 9:00AM</i>
13	4/26, 4/28	Changes in Modern Medicine: Evidence-Based Medicine and the Case of Screening	RR due M 4/25
14	5/3	Wrap-Up & Celebration	<i>Paper 3 Due, T 5/3 9:00AM</i> (No RR or C)

RR=Reading Response; C=Comment on reading response due by 11:59pm. Papers – first and final drafts – are due by 9:00am.

**Weeks 1-2: January 26, 28, Feb 2<sup>nd</sup>, Feb 4<sup>th</sup>**

**How are health and health care distributed? How should they be? *Is health different than other goods? Is health a human right? Is it an individual or collective responsibility? Is health care a scarce resource that should be rationed to maximize the health of the population, or something to which everyone should have access?***

Hiatt, Howard. 1975. "Protecting the Medical Commons: Who is Responsible?" *New England Journal of Medicine* 293(5): 235-241.

Kidder, Tracey. 2009. *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer,*

*A Man Who Would Cure the World.*

Singer, Peter. 2009. "Why We Must Ration Health Care." *New York Times*, 19 July.

### **Week 3: Feb 9, Feb 11th**

**Approaching Health as a Social Scientist: The Social Scientific Study of Health and Medicine.** *What is distinctive about the way that social scientists approach health? In this week, we consider the birth of modern epidemiological studies through the case of the London cholera epidemic. You will learn the analytic tools you need to be sophisticated consumers of both social science research and health information presented in the media.*

Johnson, Steven. 2007. *The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic – and How It Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World.* (Skip the Epilogue)

### **Week 4: Feb 16 & Feb 18**

**The Organization of Medical Care in the United States and the Challenge of Health Care Reform.** *Why is America so different than the rest of the world when it comes to health care access? What are the major problems facing American health care, and how might the Affordable Care Act address them?*

Rosenthal, Elizabeth. 2013. "The 2.7 Trillion Dollar Medical Bill." *New York Times*.

Starr, Paul. 2011. *Remedy and Reaction: The Peculiar American Struggle Over Health Care Reform.* Pp. 1-72, 239-266.

### **Week 5: Feb 23 & Feb 25**

**Socioeconomic Status, Race, Stress, and the Intergenerational Transmission of Health.** *Why are people of lower socioeconomic status more likely to get and stay sick? What role do health care vs. non-health care factors play in affecting socioeconomic and racial differences in health? Can events that happen in utero and during early childhood have long-term effects on health? If so, through what pathways do these effects operate, and what are the implications for efforts to improve population health?*

Chandra, Amitabh. 2009. "Who You Are and Where You Live." *Medical Care*.

Link, Bruce G., Richard M. Carpiano, and Margaret M. Weden. 2013. "Can Honorific Awards Give Us Clues about the Connection between Socioeconomic Status and Mortality?" *American Sociological Review*.

Sapolsky, Robert M. 2004. *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers.* (Chapter 1 (p. 1-18); Chapter 6 (p. 92-119))

Shonkoff, Jack P., W. Thomas Boyce, and Bruce McEwan. 2009. "Neuroscience, Molecular Biology, and the Childhood Roots of Health Disparities: Building a New Framework for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention." *Journal of the American Medical Association* 301 (21): 2252-2259.

### **Week 6: Mar 1 & Mar 3**

**The Effects of Social Contexts on Health Behaviors: The Case of Obesity.** *What factors explain the rise of obesity in the last few decades? How have state efforts to address obesity fared, and what is the appropriate role of the state in managing individuals' eating and exercise choices? More broadly, what role should public health versus health care interventions play in our efforts to improve health?*

Moss, Michael. "The Extraordinary Science of Addictive Junk Food." *The New York Times Magazine*. Feb 20, 2013.

Brownell, Kelly D., Rogan Kersh, David S. Ludwig, Robert C. Post, Rebecca M. Puhl, Marlene B. Schwartz, and Walter C. Willett. 2010. "Personal Responsibility and Obesity: A Constructive Approach to a Controversial Issue." *Health Affairs* 29: 379-387.

Abigail Saguy, *What's Wrong with Fat?*. Introduction (p. 1-27) & Chapter 4 (p. 107-131). Available online through the NYU library.

### **Week 7: Mar 8 & Mar 10**

**The Rise of the Pharmaceutical Industry.** *Has the pharmaceutical industry contributed to increasing medicalization and changes in the treatment of disease?*

Relman, Arnold and Marcia Angell. 2002. "America's other drug problem: how the drug industry distorts medicine and politics." *The New Republic*.

Angell, Marcia. 2009. "Drug Companies & Doctors: A Story of Corruption" *The New York Review of Books*.

Chen, Pauline. 2012. "Are Doctors Too Wary of Drug Companies?" *New York Times*.

Carroll, Aaron E. 2014. "\$2.6 Billion to Develop a Drug? New Estimate Makes Questionable Assumptions" *New York Times*.

Watch John Oliver clip on class website

### **Week 8: Mar 22 & Mar 24**



**Doctor-Patient Interaction: Death, Dying, and End-of-Life Care.** *How do social factors affect interaction and treatment at the end of life?*

Butler K. 2010. What Broke My Father's Heart: How Putting in a Pacemaker Wrecked My Family's Life. *New York Times Magazine*, June 18, p. 39-43.

Christakis, Nicholas. 1999. *Death Foretold: Prophecy and Prognosis in Medical Care*. Pp. 1-134.

**Week 9: Mar 29 & Mar 31**

**The Social Dimensions of the Diagnosis of Illness: Medicalization and Stimulant Use among College Students.** *How do personal problems become medical problems? What are the costs and benefits of medicalization, and how do they differ when we take the perspective of the individual versus society?*

Conrad, Peter. 2005. *Medicalization of Society* – Chapters 1 and 8. Available online through the NYU library.

Cohen, Roger. 2013. "The Competition Drug." *New York Times*.

Greely, Henry, Philip Campbell, Barbara Sahakian, John Harris, Ronald C. Kessler, Michael Gazzaniga, and Martha J. Farah. 2008. "Towards Responsible Use of Cognitive Enhancing Drugs by the Healthy." *Nature*: 702-705.

Schwarz, Alan. 2013. "Drowned in a Stream of Prescriptions." *New York Times*.

**Week 10: April 5<sup>th</sup> & April 7<sup>th</sup>**

**Sex & Sexuality**

Paik, Anthony, Sanchagrin, K. J. and Heimer, K. (2016), Broken Promises: Abstinence Pledging and Sexual and Reproductive Health. *Journal of Marriage and Family*. doi: 10.1111/jomf.12279

Schalet, Amy T. 2011. "Beyond Abstinence and Risk: A New Paradigm for Adolescent Sexual Health." *Women's Health Issues* 21 (3S); S5-S7.

Rich, Adrienne. 1980. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Signs* 5(4):631-60

Lynda Birke, "Unusual Fingers: Scientific Studies of Sexual Orientation," in *Handbook of Lesbian & Gay Studies*, D. Richardson & S. Seidman, eds.

**Week 11: April 12<sup>th</sup> & April 14<sup>th</sup>**

**The Social Dimensions of Medical Knowledge: The Vaccine Debate.** *Why have higher fractions of families opted out of childhood vaccines or advocated for an alternative vaccine schedule? What are the individual and collective considerations surrounding these decisions? And why are US rates of HPV vaccination so much lower than other industrialized countries?*

Charo, R. Alta. 2007. "Politics, Parents, and Prophylaxis: Mandating HPV Vaccination in the United States." *New England Journal of Medicine* 356 (19): 1905-8.

Reich, Jennifer. 2010. "Parenting and Prevention: Views of HPV Vaccines among Parents Challenging Childhood Immunizations" in Wailoo, Keith. and Livingston, Julie. and Epstein, Steven. and Aronowitz, Robert. *Three Shots at Prevention: The HPV Vaccine and the Politics of Medicine's Simple Solutions*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. P. 165-181.

Available in electronic version from the NYU library.

Offit, Paul. 2014. "Let's Not Talk About Sex." *New York Times*, August 20.

### **Week 12: April 19 & April 21**

**Changes in Modern Medicine: Evidence-Based Medicine and Preventative and Predictive Health Screening.** *Is more screening always a good thing? For whom? More generally, how has "evidence-based" medicine transformed medical practice?*

Aronowitz, Robert. 2009. "Addicted to Mammograms." *New York Times* 20 November.

Jolie, Angelina. 2013. "My Medical Choice." *New York Times*. 14 May.

Timmermans, Stefan, and Mara Buchbinder. 2010. "Patients-in-Waiting Living between Sickness and Health in the Genomics Era." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 51, no. 4: 408-423.

Keating NL, Pace LE. New Guidelines for Breast Cancer Screening in US Women. *JAMA*. 2015;314(15):1569-1571.

Welch, H. Gilbert, Lisa M. Schwartz, and Steven Woloshin. *Over-diagnosed: Making People Sick in the Pursuit of Health*. Introduction, Chapter 6.

### **Week 14: May 3: Conclusion, Wrap Up & Celebration.**