Course description:

This undergraduate class introduces students to the complex interplay of social factors that affect population health in any society. It focuses on the social determinants and distribution of health and disease across geographic areas, the organization and financing of health care systems, and the relationship of one to the other. The course is organized as follows:

In the first part, before the mid-term exercise, we consider divergent perspectives for thinking about health and society. We begin by comparing clinical and public health perspectives on health and illness, and reviewing alternative definitions of these concepts. Next, we review some contributions of social and economic theory, as well as empirical studies, to our understanding of health and society. For example, what factors explain inequalities in population health and access to health care? We will also consider how these perspectives have been shaped by the evolution of public health, medicine and the health care system over the past century.

In the second part, we draw on these perspectives to study the health care system in the United States, how it compares to that of other nations and how population aging, urbanization and globalization are raising new challenges for health and society worldwide. We begin by studying alternative approaches to health care financing and organization and analyzing the U.S. health care system in this context. Next, we consider how rising health care costs and population aging will affect the organization and financing of health and social services. Also, we consider issues of “global health,” the changing role of patients and the process of health care reform in the United States in light of the experience of other wealthy nations abroad, which have developed systems of universal health care coverage.

Required books:

There are four required books: a collection of essays on clinical approaches to disease (Groopman); a comparative perspective on the culture of medicine in the United States, Great Britain, France and Germany (Payer); a clinical study of how we die (Nuland) and a textbook on the pathologies of the American health system. In addition, special readings are posted on blackboard. The four books are available at NYU’s Bookstore located on Washington Place.

In addition to these books, there are other required readings posted on blackboard, which you may access through the internet at NYUhome.

**Course format, requirements and grading:**

This class will meet once a week for almost 3 hours. I shall lecture and organize formal discussion and debate for the first hour and fifteen minutes. Following this introduction to the week’s topic, we will break for ten minutes and then the class will divide into two sections. Section leaders will organize discussion of the assigned readings and grade student assignments. I shall attend each section on alternate weeks.

I expect students to attend class having completed all of the assigned readings. Section leaders will assign specific readings for oral presentations by students. In addition there are three written exercises: 1-2 page essays about the readings. The section leaders will grade these essays. In addition, there will be a mid-term exercise and a final examination (essay questions) based on the assigned readings. I will participate in grading these papers with your section leaders.

The three assignments for group leaders will count for 40% of the grade; the midterm for 20%; the final for 30%; and 10% for the quality of class participation.

**Course Outline and Required Readings**

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**I. INTRODUCTION**

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**1. Health and Society: Overview**

*Blackboard:*


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**II. DIVERGENT PERSPECTIVES FOR THINKING ABOUT HEALTH AND SOCIETY**

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**2. Clinical Perspectives**


*Blackboard:*


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**3. Epidemiologic and Public Health Perspectives**

*Blackboard:*

- Rodwin, V. and Croce-Galis, M., “Population Health in Utah and Nevada: An Update on Victor

- Chiasson, M. & Jonas, S., “Measuring Health Status.”
- Frumkin, H., “Urban sprawl and public health,” *Public Health Reports.*

### 4. Socio-Cultural Perspectives

- Payer, L. *Medicine and Culture*

**Blackboard:**
- Mackenbach et. al. Socioeconomic inequalities in health in 22 European countries, NEJM 2008. vol 358 (23)
- Berkman, L. and Epstein, A. Beyond health care -- Socioeconomic status and health, NEJM 2008. vol 358 (23)

### 5. Health Services Research Perspectives: Urban Health


### 6. Economic Perspectives

**Guest Lecturer: Prof. Howard Berliner**


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**III. HEALTH CARE, HEALTH SYSTEMS AND HEALTH**

### 7. The U.S. Health Care System in International Perspective

D. Smith, *The Forensic Case Files*, Ch. 1 and 5

Mid-Term Exam: In an essay of 5-7 pages (double spaced, 12 pt), please answer all discussion questions in Case #7, Ch. 5 of *The Forensic Case Files*, drawing on relevant readings from this class when relevant. Section leaders will provide further assistance on how to do this exercise.

8. The Rise, Fall and Significance of Managed Care in the U.S.  
D. Smith, *The Forensic Case Files*, Ch. 6  
*October 26*

**Blackboard:**  
- Mechanic, D. *The Rise and Fall of Managed Care*. *J. of Health and Social Behavior*. 2004 (45)

9. Comparative Analysis and Performance of Health Care Systems  
*November 2*  
**Blackboard:**  

10. Global Health  
D. Smith, *The Forensic Case Files*, Ch. 7, Case #12  
*November 9*

**Blackboard:**  

11. The Role and Impact of Patients on Health Care  
*November 16*  
- Nuland, Sherwin B. *How We Die: Reflections on Life’s Final Chapter*

**Blackboard:**  
- Pitts, V. Illness and the Internet: Writing and Reading Breast Cancer in Cyberspace

12. Forces of Change: Aging and Chronic Illness  
D. Smith, *The Forensic Case Files*, Ch. 7, Case 13  
*November 23*

**Blackboard:**  
- Hayflick, L. and Moody, H., “Has anyone ever died of old age?” International Longevity Center. –  
- Shoven, J., “New Age Thinking: The aging of the world’s population won’t be the crisis we fear.,” *Foreign Policy*, Jan/Feb 2008.
13. Patient Safety and Quality Assurance     November 30
D. Smith, *The Forensic Case Files*, Ch. 3, Case 4.

*Blackboard:*

14. Health Care Reform for the U.S.     December 7
D. Smith, *The Forensic Case Files*, Ch. 8

*Blackboard:*