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 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 consider how rising health care costs and population aging will affect the organization and financing of health and social services. We consider issues of “global health,” the changing role of patients and the process of health care reform in the light of the experience several nations which have developed systems of universal health care coverage. We study alternative approaches to health care organization and financing. We then 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. We review the recent US legislative reforms and the controversy surrounding them.

Required books:

There are three 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). The three books are available at NYU’s Bookstore.

In addition to these books, there are other required readings which will be posted on Blackboard, which you may access through the internet at NYU home.

**Course format, requirements and grading:**

This class will meet twice a week for almost one and a half hours on each occasion for an introductory lecture and class discussion. It will be important to attend class having completed all of the assigned readings. Specific readings will be assigned to individual members of class and sessions will be available throughout the course for individual presentation and discussion. The class will divide into sections for group preparation of an oral presentation on an agreed topic at the end of the class period. There will be a final take home examination (essay questions) based on the assigned readings. Arrangements for these events will be discussed in class.

The individual oral presentations based on readings will count for 20% of the final grade; the group presentations for 20%, the final exam for 50%; and the remaining 10% will be based on the quality of class participation. Class participation includes oral team presentation, as well as participation in the more formal discussion and debate that takes place during the lecture portion of the class.
Course Outline and Required Readings

I. INTRODUCTION 4 September

1. Health and Society: Overview 6 and 11 September

*Blackboard:*  


II. DIVERGENT PERSPECTIVES FOR THINKING ABOUT HEALTH AND SOCIETY

2. Clinical Perspectives 13 September


*Blackboard:*  
Campo, R. Just the facts *NEJM*, September 16, 2004; 351:12.

3. Epidemiologic and Public Health Perspectives 18, 20 and 25 September

*Blackboard:*  


Social determinants of health: The solid facts. The World Health Organization. (optional)

4. Socio-Cultural Perspectives 27 September and 2 October

Payer, L. *Medicine and Culture*

*Blackboard:*

Mackenbach et. al. Socioeconomic inequalities in health in 22 European countries, NEJM 2008. 358 (23).

Berkman, L. and Epstein, A. Beyond health care -- Socioeconomic status and health, NEJM 2008. 358 (23).

5. Economic Perspectives 4 and 9 October

*Blackboard:*


6. Health Services Research Perspectives: Urban Health 11 October

*Blackboard:*


Frumkin, H. Urban sprawl and public health. *Public Health Reports*.


III. ORAL PRESENTATIONS OF READINGS BY STUDENTS 18 and 23 October

IV. HEALTH CARE, HEALTH SYSTEMS AND HEALTH 25 and 30 October, and 1 November

*Blackboard:*

7. Global Health


8. Comparative Analysis and Performance of Health Care Systems 6 November

*Blackboard*:


9 The U.S. Health Care System in International Perspective 8 and 13 November

*Blackboard*:


10. The rise, fall and significance of managed care 15 November

*Blackboard*:


11. The Doctor-Patient Relationship and the Role of Primary Care 20 November

Groopman, J. *How Doctors Think*? Epilogue and Afterword.
Nuland, S. *How We Die: Reflections on Life’s Final Chapter.*

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

**12. Information Systems to Improve Quality and Patient Safety**  
*22 November*

*Blackboard:*


**13. Forces of Change: Aging and Chronic Illness**  
*27 November*

*Blackboard:*

Shoven, J. New Age Thinking: The aging of the world’s population won’t be the crisis we fear. *Foreign Policy*. Jan/Feb 2008.


**14. Health Care Reform in the U.S.**  
*29 November and 4 December*

*Blackboard:*


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**V ORAL PRESENTATIONS BY STUDENT GROUPS 6, 11 and 13 December**