

Medical Sociology: The Peculiar Practices and Politics of U.S. Health Care

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Classroom: McGannon Hall 262	Course Number: SOC 249
Meeting Day/Time: TR 2:15-3:30pm	Website: blackboard.slu.edu

Course Description

The U.S. Healthcare system is exceptional in many ways. Compared to other Western industrialized nations, the U.S. system has historically lacked universal healthcare, has paid more and received less care, and has the highest proportion of its population uninsured. Certain aspects of care have been highly politicized in the U.S. as medicine has become a battleground of ongoing culture wars. This class critically examines the U.S. healthcare system by focusing on health policies, practices, and outcomes from a social constructionist standpoint. We will consider how illness and diagnosis has been socially constructed, the negotiation of professional power and inter-professional dynamics in organizational settings, the processes of healthcare delivery, how certain forms of care have become politicized, challenges accessing care for individuals with stigmatized conditions, and how social movement organizations have attempted to make change through collective action. In doing so, we will consider how medical sociology intersects with an array of sociological subfields and the implications of contemporary approaches to healthcare for persistent social inequalities.

Course Objectives

- Establish a strong working knowledge of sociological theories of healthcare and medicine
- Learn to consume media critically by assessing the quality and positionality of sources
- Synthesize sociological theory with contemporary data across a variety of topics
- Improve writing skills by writing for both academic and public audiences
- Develop social networks and enhance group participation skills by working collaboratively with colleagues

Required Readings

Available at the SLU Bookstore:

Chambliss, D. 1996. *Beyond Caring: Hospitals, Nurses, and the Social Organization of Ethics*.
Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

All other readings are located on the **Blackboard** site for this course.

Course Requirements

- 1. Reading Notes (worth 100 points):** Reading notes are designed to help you synthesize the material for the week to get a sense of why it is important to understand this issue and how it fits in to the medical sociology literature. You will provide a brief summary of the reading (3-4 sentences), define two major terms, and critically evaluate two quotes from the article. Reading notes are due at the beginning of class and must be typed using the Reading Notes Template (available on the course website). **Be sure to correctly cite the work you are reading!** (You do not need a references page, just be sure to correctly use in-text citations). You are responsible for **one set of reading notes for ten classes of your choosing** that summarize and discuss the reading assigned that day. Reading notes must be turned in at the beginning of class. No late reading notes will be accepted without official (doctor's note or equivalent) documentation to explain your absence.
- 2. Article Capture and Summary (worth 100 points):** One of the main objectives of this class is to become critical consumers of media while developing research skills that will be useful throughout our academic careers and beyond. Another main objective is to become experts at linking sociological theory to contemporary events. To those ends, we will devote significant effort to collectively constructing a database of articles on five key topics that we will use to complete assignments throughout the semester and that you will retain access to after completing this course. Each week, you will be responsible for posting one article to the course website that conforms to the requirements listed in the assignment (see assignment posted on the website for more details). Your grade on this assignment will be based on peer and professor evaluations of the quality of the article you have posted and the quality of the article summary you include. **Come to class prepared to discuss the article you chose.**
- 3. Peer Evaluations (worth 100 points):** Not only are you responsible for assessing the quality of articles you select, but you are responsible for assessing the quality of articles your peers have selected. You will conduct your assessments by reading the articles and summaries your peers have posted and filling out a brief online evaluation for each one.
- 4. Op-Ed (worth 200 points):** We are discussing contemporary topics in healthcare that are part of ongoing debates about the appropriate course of action. This assignment is your opportunity to share your perspectives on key topics with a broader audience. Using materials from the OpEd Project, you will write an op-ed on a healthcare topic covered in this class by drawing on the database we have constructed. Your op-ed will be peer reviewed and you will be required to revise the piece according to the feedback you have received. If you choose, you may submit your op-ed to a newspaper for consideration, but this is not required.
- 5. Application Paper: Healthcare Rationing (2-3 pages) (worth 100 points):** Healthcare rationing is highly contested as it involves using financial concerns to shape healthcare provision. However, the sharply rising costs of healthcare have caused some scholars to argue that rationing is a necessary and acceptable component of care. Your task is to write a persuasive paper on rationing that draws from course readings on "gatekeeping" and at least **three** additional academic sources (this means books published by academic presses and articles published by scholarly journals, **NOT Wikipedia, blogs, or non-peer-reviewed journals**). In this paper, you will provide two perspectives on rationing drawn from the academic literature, explain the key

arguments of each, and then persuasively argue why one approach is better. You will support your position with evidence and a clear, logical argument. Be sure to provide a strong thesis and back up your theoretical arguments with specific empirical evidence. Also, keep in mind that no position is perfect, so explain how you would adjust the author's position to better match your own. You will receive a handout describing this assignment in detail. **Come to class prepared to discuss your position as you work with a group for an in-class debate. Before class, be sure to post the references you used in this paper to the class database.**

6. **In-Class Debate (worth 100 points):** Now that you have established your position on rationing, it is time to duke it out with your classmates (not literally) to show just how persuasive you can be. Drawing on your application paper, you will work with a team of fellow debaters to convince the class that your approach to rationing is the right one. Will you back up your arguments with examples from the database? OF COURSE! (For more details, see course handout on the debate).
7. **Final Paper (worth 200 points):** Whew! You have finished the semester and have learned more than you thought possible about medical sociology and about your topic. You have written an op-ed and you have defended your position on rationing in a rousing debate. Now it is time to synthesize the theory you have learned and the data you have gathered into a coherent, persuasive, academic paper. The paper should be 5-7 pages in length and construct a clear, coherent argument about a topic we have covered in class. You will use articles from our database to support your arguments (properly referenced, of course). Details for the paper will be posted on the website a couple of weeks before the paper is due.
8. **Attendance/Participation (worth 100 points):** This class involves building knowledge over time through reading, lecture, and discussion. You cannot participate in this process if you are not present. **I take attendance each day** and award participation points based on making thoughtful contributions and asking compelling questions. **BE ON TIME! If you enter class after I have taken attendance, you will not receive attendance points for that day.** If you have extenuating circumstances that will make it difficult for you to get to class on time, let me know and I will do my best to accommodate you (but be prepared to offer proof).
9. **Extra Credit (10 points):** You may earn extra credit points for completing one additional set of reading notes. These should follow the same format as reading notes in general. **Note: No partial credit will be given.**

Grade Breakdown – 1000 Points Possible

A	=	94% to 100%	=	940-1000
A-	=	90% to 93%	=	900-930
B+	=	87% to 89%	=	870-890
B	=	84% to 86%	=	840-860
B-	=	80% to 83%	=	800-830
C+	=	77% to 79%	=	770-790

C	=	74% to 76%	=	740-760
C-	=	70% to 73%	=	700-730
D+	=	67% to 69%	=	670-690
D	=	64% to 66%	=	640-660
D-	=	60% to 63%	=	600-630
F	=	59% or less	=	590 or less

Class Policies - Important Things to Know For This Class

Be Prepared! This course works better when everyone is engaged, and you can engage best when you have done the reading and arrive prepared to discuss it. A large proportion of your grade comes from in-class work (attendance/participation) so it is essential that you attend each class and come prepared to discuss the material. I will **not** give incompletes in this course. Joining the class late is **never** an excuse for missing assignments. You **will** lose points for any assignment(s) you missed during your absence. Pay attention to deadlines.

Etiquette – What is Expected of You in This Course - As with all classes, your behavior should be professional and academic. This means getting to class on time, **turning off cell phones, computers, tablets, ending chat sessions** and being prepared to work. If you are waiting for an emergency call, let me know before class starts and I am happy to accommodate you.

Where to Get Extra Help – If you have a disability that requires accommodation, contact the [SLU Disability Services office](#) to discuss the help they have to offer you. For those in need of counseling contact the [SLU Student Health and Counseling Center](#). For those needing tutoring or help with paper writing contact the [SLU Student Success Center](#). For international students, the [SLU Office of International Services](#) is available to offer an array of resources.

Blackboard/Emails – Please visit the course Blackboard site frequently to check for updates. All handouts are posted on Blackboard. Also, check your emails frequently, I send out important information via email. If you have not activated your SLU account or you do not clean out your email disk space frequently, you will not get these emails. Please let me know if you have an alternate email account that you want me to use. **If you have something you would like to discuss, meet with me before or after class or set up an appointment with me at another time. E-mailing is often not the best or most efficient way for me to help you.** I attempt to respond to e-mails within 24 hours, but do not respond in the evenings or on weekends, so be sure to leave yourself plenty of time to prepare for your assignments in case questions arise (and they inevitably do).

Academic honesty – Engaging in academic dishonesty is a serious offense and will result in you failing this course. In addition, I will notify your home department and the College of Arts and Sciences. Academic dishonesty includes a variety of actions listed [here](#). Plagiarism is defined as

using anyone's words (from books, periodicals, newspapers, journal articles, any an all internet sources) or having someone else write papers or buying papers from a professional writer or friend. Simply put, if you use anyone else's words/ideas you must properly cite properly in both the text and bibliography. If there is any doubt that something should be cited then you need to cite! Do not risk your grade and the *humiliating* process of having to explain your actions. Simply do your own work and get help with the course material if you need it. To avoid these pitfalls, you should familiarize yourself with SLU's policy on [Academic Honesty](#).

Course Evaluations

All course evaluations will be conducted online towards the end of the quarter. Your feedback is important for improving the course next time around, so please be sure to fill out the evaluation form.

Daily Assignments

Week 1	INTRODUCTION TO MEDICAL SOCIOLOGY	
Tuesday		Icebreaker Course Overview
Thursday	In-Class Activities	Exercise: Exploring the social construction of medicine Discussion of potential topics
	DUE	Three topics of interest – submit using survey on Blackboard by midnight Friday, August 30
Week 2	SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF ILLNESS: DIFFERENTIATING "SICKNESS" FROM "BADNESS"	
Tuesday	Required Reading	Barker, Kristin K. 2010. "The Social Construction of Illness." <i>Handbook of medical sociology</i> :147.
	DUE	Reading Notes
Thursday	In-Class Activities	Collective evaluation of information gathered
	DUE	Links to articles as specified in assignment posted on blackboard by midnight Wednesday, September 4
Week 3	SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF DIAGNOSIS: DECIDING WHO IS SICK	
Tuesday	Required Reading	Brown, Phil. 1995. "Naming and framing: The social construction of diagnosis and illness." <i>Journal of Health and Social Behavior</i> : 34-52.

	DUE	Peer evaluations by midnight Monday, September 9 Reading Notes
Thursday	In-Class Activities	Guest Speaker: Miriam Joseph, Ph.D, MLS
	DUE	Links to articles as specified in assignment posted on blackboard by midnight Wednesday, September 11
Week 4	THE "SICK ROLE"	
Tuesday	Required Reading	Parsons, Talcott. 1975. "The sick role and the role of the physician reconsidered." <i>The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly. Health and Society</i> :257-278.
	DUE	Peer evaluations by midnight Monday, September 16 Reading Notes
Thursday	In-Class Activities	Group discussion and presentations
	DUE	Links to articles as specified in assignment posted on blackboard by midnight Wednesday, September 18
Week 5	PROFESSIONAL POWER	
Tuesday	Required Reading	Freidson, Eliot. 1984. "The Changing Nature of Professional Control." <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i> 10:1-20.
	DUE	Peer evaluations by midnight Monday, September 23 Reading Notes
Thursday	In-Class Activities	Group discussion and presentations
	DUE	Links to articles as specified in assignment posted on blackboard by midnight Wednesday, September 25
Week 6	PROFESSIONALS IN ORGANIZATIONS: NEGOTIATED ORDER	
Tuesday	Required Reading	Strauss, Anselm, L Schatzman, D. Ehrlich, Rue Bucher, and M Sabshin. 1963. "The hospital and its negotiated order." In <i>The Hospital in Modern Society</i> , edited by Eliot Freidson. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe.
	DUE	Peer evaluations by midnight Monday, September 30 Reading Notes
Thursday	In-Class Activities	Group discussion and presentations

	DUE	Links to articles as specified in assignment posted on blackboard by midnight Wednesday, October 2
Week 7	PROFESSIONS IN ORGANIZATIONS: SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF ETHICS (PART 1)	
Tuesday	Required Reading	Chambliss, Daniel F. 1996. <i>Beyond caring: Hospitals, nurses, and the social organization of ethics</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Introduction, Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 3
	DUE	Peer evaluations by midnight Monday, October 7 Reading Notes
Thursday	In-Class Activities	Group discussion and presentations
	DUE	Links to articles as specified in assignment posted on blackboard by midnight Wednesday, October 9
Week 8	PROFESSIONS IN ORGANIZATIONS: SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF ETHICS (PART 2)	
Tuesday	Required Reading	Chambliss, Daniel F. 1996. <i>Beyond caring: Hospitals, nurses, and the social organization of ethics</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 4, Chapter 5, Chapter 6, Conclusion
	DUE	Peer evaluations by midnight Monday, October 14 Reading Notes
Thursday	In-Class Activities	Group discussion and presentations
	DUE	Links to articles as specified in assignment posted on blackboard by midnight Wednesday, October 16
Week 9	MEDICALIZATION AND SOCIAL CONTROL	
Tuesday	NO CLASS	ENJOY YOUR FALL BREAK!
Thursday	Required Reading	Conrad, Peter. 1992. "Medicalization and Social Control." <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i> no. 18:209-232.
	DUE	Reading Notes
	In-Class Activities	Lecture and discussion – no group work this week; no articles due
Week 10	EXPRESS YOURSELF! LEARNING HOW TO WRITE AN OP-ED	
Tuesday	Required Reading	Op-Ed Project Website: http://www.theopedproject.org/ FOCUS ON: Questions for op-ed writers Tips for op-ed writers

		Basic op-ed structure Ledes and news hooks How to pitch FAQ's
	DUE	Op-ed topic and basic outline
Thursday	In-Class Activities	Peer review of op-eds
	DUE	Op-ed first draft
Week 11	CONTEXTUALIZING BIOETHICS: THE VIEW FROM HERE	
Tuesday	Required Reading	Zussman, Robert. 2000. "The contributions of sociology to medical ethics." <i>Hastings Center Report</i> no. 30 (1):7-11.
	DUE	Peer evaluations by midnight Monday, November 4 Reading Notes
Thursday	In-Class Activities	Group discussion and presentations
	DUE	Links to articles as specified in assignment posted on blackboard by midnight Wednesday, November 6
	DUE	Op-ed final draft
Week 12	RATIONING HEALTHCARE: A MODEST PROPOSAL?	
Tuesday	Required Reading	Macklin, Ruth. 1993. "Physicians as Fiscal Gatekeepers: Rationing at the Bedside." In <i>Enemies of patients</i> . New York: Oxford University Press. Ubel, Peter A. 2001. "Physicians, thou shalt ration: The necessary role of bedside rationing in controlling healthcare costs." <i>Healthcare Papers</i> no. 2 (2):10-21.
	DUE	Peer evaluations by midnight Monday, November 11
Thursday	In-Class Activities	In-Class Debate: Pros, Cons, and alternatives to rationing
	DUE	Application paper
Week 13	DEVIANCE AND STIGMA	
Tuesday	Required Reading	Scambler, Graham. 2009. "Health-related stigma." <i>Sociology of Health & Illness</i> no. 31 (3):441-455.

	DUE	Reading Notes
Thursday	In-Class Activities	Group discussion and presentations
	DUE	Links to articles as specified in assignment posted on blackboard by midnight Wednesday, November 20
Week 14	EFFECTING CHANGE: HEALTH SOCIAL MOVEMENTS	
Tuesday	Required Reading	Brown et al. 2004. "Embodied health movements: new approaches to social movements in health." <i>Sociology of Health & Illness</i> 26 (1):50-80.
	DUE	Peer evaluations by midnight Monday, November 25 Reading Notes
Thursday	NO CLASS	ENJOY YOUR THANKSGIVING!!
Week 15	WRAP UP	
Tuesday	In-Class Activities	Informal paper presentations
Thursday	In-Class Activities	Wrap-up Course Evaluation
	DUE	Final Paper (DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS)
Exam Period	NO EXAM FOR THIS CLASS. GOOD LUCK ON YOUR EXAMS AND ENJOY YOUR BREAK!!	