**Society and Health (SOC 457): A General Capstone Course**

**General Course Information**
Instructor: Marta Elliott, PhD  
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E-mail: melliott@unr.edu  
Office hours: XXX  
Course location: XXX  
Course meeting times: XXX

**Course Description**

This course provides a thorough introduction to the study of the how our physical health is shaped by the social contexts in which we live. It focuses on how our relative positions in the social structure and the social environment, i.e., socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, gender and neighborhood context, are associated with our health behaviors and our physical health, and the social-psychological processes through which our position in society affects our health via such factors as personality, stress, social support, and religious coping. In taking this class, students will learn about the myriad ways in which our health, which is so critical to our overall quality of life, is affected by the world in which we live. Students can expect to learn a great deal of useful material that will be relevant to any type of career in health care or scholarly pursuit of health-related research or simply understanding themselves and others better.

**Pre-requisites**
Prerequisites for Capstone courses are junior or senior standing and completion of all General Education courses that build Core Objectives 1-3 and satisfy Core Objectives 4-8. Other course-specific prerequisites may be applied, so long as they do not, in effect, exclude all other majors.

**Silver Core Curriculum**
This course satisfies Silver Core Objective 13: “Students will be able to integrate and synthesize core knowledge, enabling them to analyze open-ended problems or complex issues.”

It also develops CO1 (effective composition & communication) and CO3 (critical analysis & use of information), and integrates prior knowledge from CO10 (Diversity and Equity).

**Student Learning Outcomes**

Upon completion of this course:
SLO 1: Outline inequalities in the distribution of physical health and illnesses in U.S. society according to social class, race, ethnicity, and gender (CO1, 3, & CO10)

SLO 2: Describe, apply, compare, and contrast theoretical explanations of social inequalities in the distribution of physical health illnesses (CO3 & CO13)

SLO 3: Describe and apply stress process theory to explain how exposure to stressors and access to resources is rooted in society’s social structure, and how it in turn affects physical health and illness (CO1, CO3, CO10, & CO13)

SLO 4: Describe and explain, using a variety of theoretical explanations, how institutional life such as at work, in religious settings, and in neighborhoods, is related to physical health and illness (CO 1, CO3, & CO13)

SLO 5: Discuss and illustrate the concept of medicalization using examples of socially constructed physical illness and analyze the social forces driving this phenomenon (CO 1, CO3, & CO13)

How are Silver Core Objectives Developed (CO1 & 3), Integrated (CO10) and Satisfied (CO13) in Meeting the SLOs and how is this Assessed?

Teaching Techniques and Student Experiences

Students will develop CO 1 and CO3, integrate CO 10, and satisfy CO13, as well as accomplish the SLOs described above via the following (for much greater detail, see descriptions of each component further down in the syllabus):

- Listening to in-class lectures
- Reading assigned articles
- Participating in class discussion and in-class activities
- Completing the assessment tools:
  - Quizzes
  - Student presentations
  - Written assignments
  - Essay exam

Student Evaluation:

Students will be evaluated on the basis of weekly quizzes, written assignments; attendance and class participation; in-class presentations, and a final exam. Final course grades will be based on the following distribution:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Quizzes</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Assignments</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class attendance/participation</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Points</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-class presentations</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1000</td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra Credit</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>up to 5%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grand total</strong></td>
<td>1050</td>
<td><strong>105%</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The following scale will be used to determine letter grades, which include plusses and minuses:

A  93 – 100%  C  73 – 76.9%
A-  90 – 92.9% C-  70 – 72.9%
B+  87 – 89.9% D+  67 – 69.9%
B   83 – 86.9% D   63 – 66.9%
B-  80 – 82.9% D-  60 – 62.9%
C+  77 – 79.9% F   below 60%

**Weekly quizzes:** Each week students will complete a standardized quiz designed to assess their comprehension of that week’s class materials including lecture and assigned readings. These quizzes develop CO3 by requiring students to critically analyze each question and use the information taught in class and in the readings to select the correct answer. The questions often address issues of physical health inequalities, thereby encouraging students to integrate prior knowledge from CO10. Over the course of the semester, the quiz questions draw upon the students’ growing body of knowledge of the sociology of physical health and illness, requiring them to integrate and synthesize what they have learned regarding a variety of open-ended problems and complex issues, thereby satisfying CO13.

**Written assignments:** Three essays (5-7 pages each) will be due throughout the term. Each essay offers students the opportunity to develop CO1 by writing clearly and persuasively and to develop CO3 by critically analyzing course material as well as additional scholarly publications students discover through their own research. Paper 1 requires students to pick an example of a physical health inequality and write about it, thereby offering them the opportunity to integrate prior knowledge from CO10. Papers 2 and 3 require students to integrate and synthesize material across multiple weeks of the semester. Each paper requires the student to tackle a complex issue and address one or more open-ended problems, thereby satisfying CO13 (see individual paper instructions at the end of the syllabus).

**Attendance and Class Participation:** The attendance and class participation component of student evaluation is based on regular attendance, preparation, and participation in regular class sessions and discussion groups. In-class discussion offers students the opportunity to develop CO1 via having a civil but lively debate on controversial issues. In-class activities group student together to work on tasks that help develop CO3, such as by working together to develop a public policy solution to a health crisis that disproportionately affects the poor. The first third of the semester focuses on social inequalities in physical illness and in-class discussion and
activities based around said inequalities will allow students the opportunity to integrate prior knowledge from CO10. Over the course of the semester, in-class discussion and activities will draw upon the students’ growing body of knowledge of the sociology of health and illness, as well as approaches to the subject from other disciplines (e.g., psychology, epidemiology and public health), requiring them to integrate and synthesize what they have learned as they tackle complex issues and open-ended problems, thereby satisfying CO13.

**In-Class Student Presentations:** Students will be assigned to small groups based on their ranking of top three presentation topics chosen from a list of contemporary social issues related to the sociology health and illness. Each group will give an in-class presentation on their assigned topic. This assignment develops CO1 by requiring each student to play a part in making an oral presentation to the class, and develops CO3 by requiring students to critically analyze information on their assigned topic and present that information in a stimulating and educating fashion. Topics that involve social inequalities in physical health and illness will allow students the opportunity to integrate prior knowledge from CO10. All topics will give students the chance to integrate and synthesize knowledge learned from their research on the topic itself with all they have learned thus far in this particular course and the courses that preceded it, thereby satisfying CO13. Potential topics include vaccinations for children, obesity, assisted suicide, health insurance reform, and government regulation of tobacco use.

**Final Exams:** The final exam will evaluate students’ ability to synthesize material presented in the lectures, discussions, and required reading. It will consist primarily of short essay questions. The short essays will assess how well students have developed CO1 and CO3 via the quality of their writing and their ability to use the information taught in the course to critically analyze the questions posed to them. A significant portion of the exam will focus on physical health inequalities, requiring the students to integrate prior knowledge from CO10. The essay questions will probe students about complex issues and open-ended problems, requiring them to integrate and synthesize what they have learned in this particular course, thus satisfying CO13.

Make-up exams will be given only under very **severe circumstances** and only if the instructor is notified of a valid excuse **PRIOR** to the scheduled exam when at all possible. The format of the make-up exam will be at the discretion of the instructor and will be given at the instructor’s convenience.

**Extra Credit:** Students may earn up to 50 points for extra credit which could bring the final grade up by 5% or half a grade. See WebCampus for further details.

**Course Readings:** Two books are required for this course, which are on sale at the Joe Crowley Student Union bookstore and may also be purchased independently through vendors such as amazon.com:

• *The Medicalization of Society*, by Peter Conrad. Published in 2007 by the Johns Hopkins University Press.

*Additional assigned readings will be found on WebCampus in PDF format*
**Statement on Academic Dishonesty:** "Cheating, plagiarism or otherwise obtaining grades under false pretenses constitute academic dishonesty according to the code of this university. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and penalties can include canceling a student's enrollment without a grade, giving an F for the course or for the assignment. For more details, see the University of Nevada, Reno General Catalog."

**Statement of Disability Services:** "Any student with a disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with the Disability Resource Center (Thompson Building, Suite 101) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations."

**Statement on Audio and Video Recording:** "Surreptitious or covert video-taping of class or unauthorized audio recording of class is prohibited by law and by Board of Regents policy. This class may be videotaped or audio recorded only with the written permission of the instructor. In order to accommodate students with disabilities, some students may be given permission to record class lectures and discussions. Therefore, students should understand that their comments during class may be recorded."

**Statement for Academic Success Services:** "Your student fees cover usage of the Math Center (775) 784-4422, Tutoring Center (775) 784-6801, and University Writing Center (775) 784-6030. These centers support your classroom learning; it is your responsibility to take advantage of their services. Keep in mind that seeking help outside of class is the sign of a responsible and successful student."

**Classroom etiquette:** In this classroom it is your responsibility and mine to show respect for one another. This means that we will not talk when someone else is talking. We will also refrain from entering the classroom after class has begun or leaving before class is over because doing so is disruptive to other students and to the instructor. **Cell phones** must be turned off or in silent mode and may not be used during class. And we will follow all other common sense forms of etiquette toward one another that should go without being said.
### Course Schedule and Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Quiz</th>
<th>Paper due dates</th>
<th>Student presentations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Overview of Medical Sociology</td>
<td>Text ch 1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part I: Social Inequalities in Physical Health and Illness</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Social Epidemiology</td>
<td>Text ch 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Socioeconomic Status, Social Class, and Health</td>
<td>Text ch 3; Syme and Berkman 2013</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Race, Ethnicity and Health</td>
<td>Text ch 4; Williams and Mohammed 2009</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Paper 1 due</td>
<td>Group 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Gender and Health</td>
<td>Text ch 4; Rieker et al 2010</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Group 2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Part II: Stressors, Resources, and Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Stress and Physical Health</td>
<td>Text ch 5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Group 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Social Relationships and Health</td>
<td>Berkman et al., 2000; Cohen 2004</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Group 4</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Part III: Social Institutions and Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Employment, Unemployment and Health</td>
<td>Bambra 2010; Theorell &amp; Tores 2000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Paper 2 due</td>
<td>Group 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Religion and Health</td>
<td>Chatters 2010; Miller &amp; Thorensen 2003</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>Group 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Neighborhoods and Health</td>
<td>Diex-Roux and Mair 2010; Macintyre and Ellaway 2003</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>Group 7</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Part IV: The Social Construction of Health and Illness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Part V: Health Behaviors and Illness Behaviors</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The Sick Role</td>
<td>Text ch 8</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>Group 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Health Behaviors</td>
<td>Text ch 6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>Group 11</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Illness Behaviors</td>
<td>Text ch 7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>Group 12</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>In-Class Review for Final Exam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>Final exam will occur on X/XX from XX to XX in the classroom</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Instructions for All Papers

The following instructions apply to each of your three papers:

Format

• Include a title page with a title, your name, the name/number of the class, and the instructor’s name.
• Insert a running head in the header after the title page with your “Paper 1/2/3” on the left and your name on the right.
• Save and submit your papers as word documents with either .doc or .docx file extensions so that the instructor can grade the paper using track changing in Word.
• Write 5-7 pages of text (not including the title page or references page), double-spaced, using Times New Roman 12 point font, with page numbers, for each paper.

Overall Style

• Be sure to write an introductory paragraph that provides an overview of what the paper is going to be about.
• Be sure to write a concluding paragraph that summarizes the main points that you made in your paper.
• Develop the body of your paper in a logical, analytic fashion; it will help you to create an outline before you start to write your paper.
• Be sure to organize your paper into discrete paragraphs; no paragraph should be much longer than one-half of a page.
• Look out for run-on sentences and sentence fragments.
• Write a rough draft of your paper; take a break, and revise your paper at least once.
• Edit your paper closely so that you do not submit papers containing spelling or grammatical errors.

Inclusion of Scholarly Sources

• Include a minimum of THREE scholarly sources in each paper; your best bet is to read articles published in scholarly journals related to your topic, which you can find via Google Scholar. Note that if you use Google Scholar via the UNR Libraries website, it will provide direct links to .pdf versions of many articles. You may also set up the preferences on your home computer to link “Google Scholar” to the UNR libraries so as to allow you direct access when you log in with your netid. Search Google Scholar with key words related to your chosen research topic.
• Cite your sources in the text whenever you refer to something that you read, AND include a REFERENCES page at the end of your paper.
• Follow either the APA style guide (6th edition) or the ASA style (4th edition) for your in-text citations and your references page.
• Please know that your assignment will be analyzed by SafeAssign, which detects identical assignments submitted by multiple students or material that is plagiarized from other sources. Any student caught plagiarizing will fail the course.
Undergraduate Paper 1: Social Inequality and Health (due week 4)

**Important:** In writing this paper, be sure to consult the general instructions for undergraduate papers in the syllabus, as I do not repeat all of that information here.

**Instructions for paper 1:** In weeks 2-4, we covered three of the main axes of social inequality in the U.S. in terms of how they relate to people’s physical health – socioeconomic status (SES), gender, and race. Pick one of these three (SES, gender, or race) and write a paper about how it relates to a specific aspect of physical health. For example, you might write about gender differences in rates of autoimmune disorders or socioeconomic differences in survival from breast cancer. Be sure you pick a topic that is interesting enough to you to motivate you to read in depth about it before writing your paper.

This is a research paper, meaning that you must conduct a review of the published literature on this topic to inform the content of your paper. **It is critical** that you follow standard conventions for citing the literature you have read and are drawing upon, both within the text of the paper and on the reference list. See the syllabus for details. **Papers that do not cite at least three scholarly sources in the correct fashion will not be given credit for the assignment.**

As you search the literature, you may find far more than you can possibly read, which might mean it would be a good idea to narrow your topic. In contrast, you may find very little, which could mean you should broaden or even change your topic. If you find yourself getting stuck settling on an appropriate topic or on finding at least three scholarly sources (published research, NOT websites), please contact me via the Web Campus message function for advice.

Below are some prompts to help you structure your paper. You don’t have to address these questions per se. The point of including them is to help trigger a critical thought process as you read the literature on your chosen topic.

1. What evidence exists to substantiate the example of a social pattern of physical illness that you have chosen to write about?

2. Is there any conflicting evidence that challenges that pattern?

3. What theoretical explanations have you found that explain this social pattern?

4. Do any explanations you have found seem to contradict what you have learned elsewhere, or contradict something else you have read? If so, how would you reconcile those contradictions?

5. Can you identify any weaknesses in the arguments you have read, or the methodologies used to substantiate those weaknesses? If so, describe them, and explain how you would go about fixing them.

6. What is not yet known about the social pattern you have chosen to study, and how do you think scholars should go about filling in the blanks of what is not known?
Undergraduate Paper 2: Stress and Health (due week 8)

**Important:** In writing this paper, be sure to consult the general instructions for undergraduate papers in the syllabus, as I do not repeat all of that information here.

**Instructions for paper 2:** The challenge in paper #2 is to apply the stress process model in explaining a particular health outcome. Recall the four parts of the stress process model: social-structural position, exposure to stressors, access to resources (and how that affects vulnerability to stressors), and physical health. Your task is to pick a social-structural position to focus on (e.g., SES, race, gender, age, or other position in the social structure), to choose a particular type of stressor to focus on, to pick a particular type of resource to focus on, and to choose a particular health outcome. Then explain why these four components are inter-related according to the stress process.

The research portion of this paper involves finding evidence in the scholarly literature to support the particular model you develop. For example, if you want to study the influence of gender on heart disease via exposure to financial strain and access to social support, you need to find published research that supports your model.

Remember, **it is critical** that you follow standard conventions for citing the literature you have read and are drawing upon, both within the text of the paper and on the reference list. See the syllabus for details. **Papers that do not cite at least three scholarly sources in the correct fashion will not be given credit for the assignment.**
Undergraduate Paper 3: Social Institutions and Health (due week 11)

**Important**: In writing this paper, be sure to consult the general instructions for undergraduate papers in the syllabus, as I do not repeat all of that information here.

Focus your final paper on one of the following topics: (1) employment and health; (2) unemployment and health; (3) religion and health; or (4) neighborhoods and health. Be sure you pick a topic that is interesting to you. Your job in this paper is to conduct further research on that topic and present your findings. Because each topic is so broad, you will likely need to narrow your focus. For instance, if you write about employment and health, you may want to write about a particular type of job, or if you focus on religion, you may want to pick a major denomination of Christianity (e.g., Evangelicals) or a specific world religion (e.g., Buddhism).

As was the case with the first two papers, you are likely to find a great deal of published material on the specific topic you choose, and you may need to narrow your topic in order to focus your research. If you get stuck trying to choose a topic or narrow your focus, please contact the instructor via WebCampus email for help.

Here are some prompts to help you in your search for material to write about:

- Begin with a brief overview of your topic, including how the social institution you are writing about is related to physical health and illness.
- Does the research indicate a general pattern or is it more complicated?
- What theoretical explanations have you found that explain the physical health consequences of work, unemployment, religion or neighborhood conditions?
- Do any explanations you have found seem to contradict what you have learned elsewhere, or contradict something else you have read? If so, how would you reconcile those contradictions?
- Can you identify any weaknesses in the arguments you have read, or the methodologies used to substantiate those weaknesses? If so, describe them, and explain how you would go about fixing them.
- What is not yet known about this social institution that you have chosen to study, and how do you think scholars should go about filling in the blanks of what is not known?