An/Soc 303: Medical Sociology (Fall 2006)

Thomas G. McGowan, Ph. D.  Office: C107; #843-3932
Associate Professor of Sociology  Office hrs: T, TR 1-2pm; W 10am-noon, and by appt.

Course Statement

Health was once defined as the absence of disease. However, the definition of health has been reconfigured to mean physical, psychological and socio-cultural wellness. This means that health encompasses the body, the mind, and the social and cultural world in which one lives. Health is therefore an ontological condition that pertains to the quality and sustainability of one’s existence. This is the context out of which the field of medical sociology has emerged.

Medical sociology is the theoretical, empirical and applied study of the social dimensions of health, illness, disease and the provision and consumption of health care. Topics that will be covered in this course include epidemiology, social demography of health, the relationship between social stress and health, health and illness behavior, the sick role, the physician-patient relationship, the organization of health care and medical practice, and the moral and ethical aspects of health care practice and policy.

In this course we will also study the work of Dr. Paul Farmer. Farmer views poor health as a human rights issue directly related to economic inequality and political oppression. He challenges us to approach professional practice as a moral issue requiring great dedication, commitment and courage. Our goal is to draw out the implications of Farmer’s work for the practice of medical sociology in Memphis and beyond. It is possible that your intentions regarding your professional development may be shaken to the core by Farmer’s work and your experiences in this course. For this reason you should reflect on how willing you are to be problematized by experiences which may result in self change.

Preparatory Writing Assignments

In preparation for every class meeting you will prepare a one page written response to the question(s) assigned for that date. Your preparation and written work should involve 2 – 3 hours of research, reflection and/or secondary research in addition to the time spent reading the assigned chapter or article for that date. Your written response to the question(s) should be single spaced (12 point Times New Roman font) and edited so as not to exceed one page in length. Papers are to be handed in at the conclusion of each class meeting.

Community Based Research and/or Term Project

There is a 40 hour community based, field work requirement that will be discussed in detail during our initial seminar meeting and documented subsequently.
**Exams**

There will be two exams in this course - a midterm exam and a final exam. Both will be essay and short answer exams that will be taken under exam conditions. They are worth a total of 45% of your final grade.

**Evaluation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in class discussions</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparatory writing assignments</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community related research (40 hrs.)</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Attendance**

This course will combine class discussion of course readings with ongoing fieldwork. Class attendance is mandatory, and three unexcused absences will qualify you for an automatic “F.”

**Required Texts**


Thursday 8/24  Course overview

Tuesday 8/29  **A medical sociological imagination**
Discuss Part I of *Mountains Beyond Mountains.*
Preparation assignment: *Explore C. Wright Mills' concept of the sociological imagination. In what sense does Farmer's work exemplify the sociological imagination?*

Thursday 8/31  **Medical sociology and the clinical gaze**
Discuss chapter 1 in Cockerham
Preparation question: *Research Foucault's concept of the clinical gaze and his notion that science and bio-medicine are forms of social control. In what sense are Foucault's ideas post-modern? How might medical sociology address Foucault's critical concerns?*
Tuesday 9/5  
**Health, disease and structural violence**  
Discuss Introduction and chapter 1 in Farmer’s *Pathologies of Power*.  
Preparation question: *What is “structural violence” and in what sense is its analysis sociological?*

Thursday 9/7  
**Epidemiology**  
Discuss chapter 2 in Cockerham  
Preparation assignment: *Prepare a summary report of the global, national and regional HIV/AIDS prevalence and mortality using epi data available through the Internet.*

Tuesday 9/12  
**Social demography of health**  
Discuss chapter 3 in Cockerham  
Preparation assignment: *Prepare a summary report of the general effects of race/ethnicity, class, gender and age on the distribution*

Thursday 9/14  
**Structural violence and local HIV/AIDS epi patterns**  
Preparation assignment: *Review the HIV/AIDS epi profile provided by the Tennessee Department of Health. Prepare a one page summary of key observations and questions regarding incidence, prevalence and social demographic patterns.*  
*Guest Speaker: Community HIV Network MAYAH Coordinator Tiffany Ford*

Tuesday 9/19  
**HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care Needs in Memphis**  
Preparation assignment: *Review the 2006 SW TN HIV/AIDS Needs Assessment (McGowan) and prepare a one page summary of key observations and questions regarding the report.*

Thursday 9/21  
**Illness behavior, medical compliance and pragmatic solidarity**  
Preparation question: *What sociological variables affect the illness behavior and medical compliance of people in need of care? How does Farmer’s work inform your thinking about this question?*

Tuesday 9/26  
**Cultural competence and the biomedical paradigm**  
Discuss chapter 6 in *Pathologies of Power*  
Preparation assignment: *Research the meaning of “cultural competence” and models for practice. How does cultural competence relate to Farmer’s critique of typical medical practice in our society?*
Thursday 9/28  **Tuskegee and the ethics of biomedicine and positivism**  
Discuss chapter 8 in *Pathologies of Power.*  
Preparation questions: *What did the Tuskegee experiment involve and what was its purpose? Were the rights of the human subjects involved in the experiment protected? What do you think the impact of Tuskegee has been on African-American attitudes towards health care and scientific research? What is Farmer’s main point regarding ethics and practice in developing countries?*

Tuesday 10/3  **Crime, health and punishment**  
Discuss chapter 7 in *Pathologies of Power* and the two studies of  
Preparation assignment: Prepare a one page summary of key observations and questions regarding the jail research reported by McGowan and relate your commentary to Farmer’s work on TB in Russian prisons.

Thursday 10/5  **The social construction of American physicians**  
Discuss chapter 9 in Cockerham  
Preparation assignment: Using the Internet as a research tool, answer the following questions: Find three medical schools in the U. S. that make cultural competence a required component of their curriculum. How is cultural competence taught? Is cultural competence integrated into the practical training of the student and if so how?

Tuesday 10/10  **Doctor-Patient Interaction**  
Discuss chapter 10 in Cockerham  
Preparation assignment: Using the Internet as a research tool, locate two journal articles published in the last five years that pertain to Dr. – patient interaction and the problems and issues associated with it. Report on the findings of the articles and relate them to the Cockerham reading.

Thursday 10/12  **Health, human rights, paradigms and practice**  
Discuss chapter 9 in *Pathologies of Power*  
Preparation assignment: Review documentation of the proceedings of the recent World AIDS conference in Toronto. To what extent were the issues addressed similar to those raised by Farmer concerning health and social justice raised?

Tuesday 10/17  Fall Break

Thursday 10/19  **COPC Health Fair in Hollywood/Springdale**
Tuesday 10/24  In class midterm exam (essay and short answer)

Thursday 10/26  Seminar meets to discuss film *And the Band Played On*

Tuesday 10/31  Social stress and the significance of meaning
Discuss chapter 4 in Cockerham
*Based on your readings, in what sense is the interpretation of meaning a key variable related to the health and behavior of people and the practice of medical care by practitioners?*

Thursday 11/2  The sick role
Discuss chapter 7 in Cockerham and handout (Mead)
Preparation question: *How does the concept of “role” help to explain how problem of meaning is dealt with in our society? How is power related to the labeling and performance of roles?*

Tuesday 11/7  Infant mortality and TennCare cuts in Memphis
Preparation assignment: Research articles on infant mortality and the TennCare cuts in Memphis. Write a commentary on your findings drawing from the concepts you have learned in this seminar.

Thursday 11/9  Health care and social policy in the U. S. and abroad
Discuss chapter 14 in Cockerham
Health care on the island of Cuba
*Compare the application process and tuition costs associated with going to medical school in the U.S. and Cuba? How do these differences impact the way medicine is organized and practiced in these different societies?*

Tuesday 11/14  Health care and social policies outside of the U. S.
Discuss chapters 15 and 16 in Cockerham
Preparation question: *What lessons might we learn from different health care systems around the world. What opportunities and barriers exist in this country that weigh on the possibility of changing our national health care system?*

Thursday 11/16  Poverty and health care prioritization
Discuss Part V in *Mountains Beyond Mountains*
Preparation question: *What are the inter-relationships among poverty, health and social justice? What is meant by a “preferential option for the poor” and how does it relate to American national policies? How does religion relate to these considerations?*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday 11/21</td>
<td><strong>The emergence of the hospital as a social institution</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discuss chapter 12 in Cockerham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Preparation question: Keeping the work of Foucault in mind, what</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>general cultural and societal trends are reflected in the historical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>development of hospitals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday 11/23</td>
<td>Thanksgiving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday 11/28</td>
<td><strong>Healing options and the changing role of physicians</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discuss chapters 8 and 11 in Cockerham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Preparation assignment: Facilitate an intentional discussion of your</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>work in this seminar with family members over Thanksgiving break and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>report on your experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday 11/30</td>
<td>Campus presentation of community research for World AIDS Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday 12/5</td>
<td>In class review for take home essay exam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>