Course Description:

Understanding health disparities involves a critical analysis of historical, political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental conditions that have produced an inequitable health status for racial and ethnic minorities in the United States. While we also recognize that disparities exist along socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation and other factors, this class will focus on disparities in racial and ethnic minority communities. Issues of gender, SES and other factors will be examined as they intersect race and ethnicity, and further influence disparities in health. Minority health and health disparities have gained considerable attention from the recent publication of Healthy People 2010 Report, which lists as its two goals: 1) improve the quality of life for all citizens, and 2) eliminate health disparities. The purpose of this class is to introduce basic issues that underlie health disparities. We will gain a better understanding of the relationships of social and environmental phenomena and the health of minority communities. This course will include current literature and foster discussions that will examine health disparities, explore social and environmental determinants of those disparities, critically review measurement issues, and determine public health’s response to these disparities. Students should seek to critically reflect on their personal and professional roles in eliminating health disparities. By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Understand minority health and health disparities from an historical, political, economic, social and environmental perspective;
- Explore the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation and other social factors that may exacerbate disparities;
- Examine challenges in the measurement of minority health and health disparities;
- Understand the role of cultural competence in health promotion, and disease prevention; and
- Identify barriers to health care that contribute to disparities.
Teaching Philosophy

In the classroom, we will explore and apply concepts that help us to understand the context of minority health and health disparities. Active participation through critical reflection in the classroom is essential to learning for us all. I see the class as a partnership between teacher and students in which we each bring experience and perspectives that can enrich our interaction. I encourage each of you to create an atmosphere in which all students can speak freely. With an atmosphere of respect and trust, I believe we can flourish as a learning community.

Effective teaching of any class requires an ongoing assessment of the class activities, readings, and assignments. There is a formal course evaluation conducted by the departmental registrar at the end of the semester. However, I believe feedback from students while the class experience is fresh is valuable for my planning. Therefore, please feel free to provide comments on the class activities, readings, or classroom atmosphere via an appointment or email message. Please consider these questions in your comments: What did you like about the class; what would you change; what did you learn and what concerns/issues do you have. Please remember it is equally helpful to hear positive reactions as well as constructive criticism.

Faculty Availability

I will maintain office hours for those students who have questions, comments or concerns. If it is not possible for you to see me during office hours, please call ___ to set up an appointment.

Academic Integrity

The Provost Office maintains a website that provides details on the Code for Academic Integrity; please see http://www.pitt.edu/~provost/ai1.html. This code includes obligations for faculty and students, procedures for violations and other critical information. Please take time to read the code.

Disability

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, please contact me as soon as possible. Additionally, you should contact the Office of Disability Resources and Services, 216 Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890 or (412) 383-7355 (TTY) as early as possible in the semester. DRS will verify your disability and assist with determining reasonable accommodations for this course.

Course website

All readings and course material will be found on the Blackboard site for this class. The website for Blackboard is http://courseweb.pitt.edu. To login, you must have a Pitt account. Your login ID is the same as your login ID for your Pitt account. Your password is the last four digits of your social security number followed by the middle two numbers. To access the site for this class, double click on the course title, BCHS xxxx: Overview of Minority Health and Health Disparities. The site will contain all readings, power point presentations, assignments, and additional information. The power point presentations and required readings for each class will be found under the course documents in the main menu option. It will be imperative to print out power point presentations and readings before class, as copies will not be available in class.
Readings:

This class will use required readings assigned for specific weeks. Some are in the text listed below; others will be available online through our course website under “Course Documents.” You will find the semester broken into weeks, and the readings for that week are attached.

For many of the online documents, access is free and quite easy even from remote sites off campus. To access the Health Sciences Library system, go to http://www.hslib.pitt.edu. Double click on either PubMed or Ovid. If you are accessing the site from a remote site (outside of Pitt), your login will be the same as Pitt account login and your password will be the same as your Pitt account password.

While all public domain or online resources will be available throughout the semester online, there are a few readings that are book chapters or other resources for which we will only be able to maintain an electronic version for one week’s time. We will note those references and you are responsible for retrieving those readings during that week.

Required text:

Assignments:

Assignment 1: (20 points; 20 %): Journal Assignment
Throughout this course, we will identify and discuss the broad and specific contexts of minority health and health disparities. However, this journal assignment asks you to critically reflect on your own identity. Often when we understand our own race/ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation and how we interact with others, we can begin to unlock and “unpack” our own biases and prejudices. The next step is to challenge our frames of reference to better understand and confront the spectrum of perspectives of minority health and health disparities. In this journal assignment, you are being asked to address interests, ideas, and issues related to the course material, recurring problems or themes in the literature, responses to instructor-generated questions, responses to student-generated questions, and the important connections being made between the course material–your experiences–your work–your intellectual journey. As a participant-learner, you will begin to watch for practices and other relevant material to discuss and consider for personal and professional development. You are being asked to connect the course material with the real world, as you experience it. This is an exercise that should generate critical reflection and thinking about how we can better incorporate an eco-social perspective of health into our research and practice.

General questions to consider in your reflections:

- From your viewpoint (racial/ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, SES), what are your reactions to the root causes of disparities or even that the literature discusses broader root causes?
- How does your race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or SES impact your abilities to work with communities that differ from you?
What does it mean to be white, to be African American, to be Latino, etc in America today?
What do you bring to this experience that affects you?

You should have at least four journal entries during the semester.

Assignment 2: (15 points; 15%) Participation in Activities to Address Health Disparities

We are asking that you choose one activity from the list below in which to participate. Allow the course readings to guide your understanding of the significance the activity or process has for minority health and health disparities and to add to your level of analysis. Maintain a set of notes to allow you to critically reflect on your orientation within the context of the activity. You are not limited to these activities. However, if you have an activity in which you are interested, please have it approved by the instructor.

Potential activities:
- Attend one meeting of the Center for Minority Health’s Community Research Advisory Board (CRAB)
- Attend one activity of Center for Minority Health’s Healthy Black Family Project
- Attend one meeting of the Center for Minority Health’s Working Groups on the seven key disease areas for health disparities
- Attend the CMH journal club on the last Wednesday of the month
- Attend Birmingham Clinic on Saturday. Interpreters provided by medical students from SALUD (Students And Latinos United Against Disparities). Free clinic serves uninsured patients; 54 9th St., Southside, 10a.m.-1 p.m. (Contact Mary Herbert, herbertmi@ummc.edu)
- Attend SALUD Para Niños (SALUD for Children) – Children’s Hospital Ronald McDonald Caremobile that parks in front of the Birmingham Clinic on Saturdays. The mobile unit has an exam room. (Contact Dr. Diego Chaves-Gnecco, diego.chaves-gnecco@chp.edu)
- Attend a Hispanic Car Seat Check organized by Children’s Hospital, SALUD Para Niños and the Latino Catholic Community. Events are held in Allegheny and Washington Counties. (Contact Dr. Diego Chaves-Gnecco, diego.chaves-gnecco@chp.edu)

Prepare a brief 2-page paper for the activity that addresses the following questions:

1. What is the activity? Briefly describe its history.
2. Where is the activity located?
3. Who are the primary stakeholders? Who is the target audience?
4. What disparity or issue(s) in minority health is being addressed?
5. Reflect on your interaction and reaction to your participation in this activity. Did your race, class, religion or other factor have any impact on your interactions?

Assignment 3: (15 points, 15%) Book Critical Review/Reflection

You are asked to choose an alternate text to critically analyze and review. You may choose from the list provided or have another option approved by the instructor. The goal of this assignment
is to broaden your exposure to the minority health and health disparities literature and to take a comprehensive look at health disparities. Please write a 3-4 page review including your responses to the following questions:

1. Please provide a brief abstract of the book (one paragraph).
2. How do the central arguments of the book intersect with the literature on minority health and health disparities today?
3. How has the book advanced your understanding of the context in which minority health and health disparities occur?

Although the books below are suggested readings, they are by no means an exhaustive list of possible books.

- DuBois, W. *The Health and Physique of the Negro.*


**Assignment 4: (50 points; 50%)**

Develop a research paper and presentation that will describe a specific health disparity. This description should include: (1) history of the disparity; (2) who suffers from it? (3) How are race and class being measured; (3) what are the determinants or causal factors? (4) do gender, SES, sexual orientation or other factors intersect with race/ethnicity to affect this issue?; (5) where would be an appropriate place to intervene within a social-ecological model? (6) How much does this disparity account for larger health disparities? You should also discuss how you would intervene, giving consideration to the social ecological model and other lessons from the course.

**Presentation:**

You can use your creative genius to present your research from the paper above. You can use this paper to articulate an argument to a policy maker on the importance of addressing health disparities. You may do a traditional presentation on your research paper. Or, you may present of a recurring theme/issue found in your research that is part of the larger discussion of the health disparity you have chosen, for example you may focus on diabetes in an urban housing project, but part of eliminating the disparity in your view may be to organize a community organization. You may focus your attention for the presentation on how to organize a community organization around a central issue that will help eliminate your health disparity. Each student will be asked to complete in class a very short, feedback report for each presentation.

**Grade scale:**

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<thead>
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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>90-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>89-80</td>
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Below you will find the title, date, objectives, activities and readings for each class. Please note that these may be subject to change with appropriate notice to you.

Class 1: Overview of Health Disparities
*By the end of this class, each student will be able to:*
- Define health disparities;
- Identify the seven priority areas outlined in Healthy People 2010

**Class Activities:**
- Introductions
- Brief lecture and discussion
- Course expectations and organization including introduction to courseweb.
- Review of the syllabus

**Required readings:**

**Optional readings:**

Class 2: Health Disparities Overview and History of Minority Health
*By the end of this class, each student will be able to:*
- Understand the history of minority health;
- Describe lessons that are relevant to eliminating health disparities today.
Class Activities:
- Lecture/discussion
- Historical exercise or video

Required readings:

Optional readings:

Class 3: Part I: Government’s Role in Health Disparities
By the end of this class, each student will be able to:
- Understand the role of government in reducing and eliminating health disparities.
- Describe the implications of these initiatives for research and practice
- Explain the historical and current role of Offices of Minority Health and policy implications for health disparities.

Class Activities:
- Lecture/Discussion

Required readings:
• Healthy People 2010 Goals, pp.7-11.
• Heckler. Executive Report, Report from the Secretary’s Task Force on Black and Minority Health.

*Optional Readings:*

**Class 4: Who experiences health disparities?**
*By the end of this class, each student will be able to:*
• Articulate which minority health groups experience disparities;
• Understand barriers in minority health;
• Understand the effects of discrimination.

**Class Activities:**
• Lecture/discussion

**Required readings:**

*Optional readings:*

**Class 5: Social Epidemiology and its contribution to health disparities**
*By the end of this class, each student will be able to:*

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Understand Social Epidemiology as a theoretical frame of reference for minority health and health disparities;
• Articulate the key variables used by social epidemiologists to study health disparities;
• Describe the challenges of race and ethnicity as measurement categories;
• Understand the value of quantitative and qualitative methods in addressing health disparities.

Class Activities:
• Lecture/discussion

Required readings:

Optional readings:

Class 6: Root causes of disparities
By the end of this class, each student will be able to:
• Understand fundamental causes of health disparities from multiple perspectives;
• Describe the impact of the broader social and environmental factors on health disparities.

Class Activities:
• Lecture and discussion

Required readings:

Optional readings:

Class 7: The question of “Race and Ethnicity vs. Race or Ethnicity”: Issues of measurement
*By the end of this class, each student will be able to:*
• Understand the impact of racism on health disparities;
• Articulate the challenges of measuring race and ethnicity;
• Determine if race is a social construction useful in the elimination of health disparities.

Class Activities:
• Lecture and discussion

Required readings:

Optional readings:

Class 8: Socioeconomic Status: Issues of Measurement, and the Intersection between Class & Race

By the end of this class, each student will be able to:
• Understand the impact of SES on health disparities;
• How we measure (quantitative and qualitative) SES;
• Understand the relationship between race and SES.

Class Activities:
• Lecture and discussion

Required readings:

Optional readings:

Class 9: Distinguishing between health disparities and health care disparities

By the end of this class, each student will be able to:
• Describe the impact of race, class and ethnicity on patient-provider relationships;
• Understand the differences between health care access and utilization.

Class Activities:
• Lecture and discussion
• Group activity

Required readings:


**Optional readings:**


**Class 10: Geographic and Environmental Health Disparities**

*By the end of this class, each student will be able to:*

• Understand the impact of environment on health disparities;

• Delineate the challenges of measuring the impact of environmental factors on health disparities;

• Understand the intersection between social conditions and environmental conditions.
Class Activities:
- Lecture
- Video (or speaker by distance—Gary Grant and Steve Wing)

Required readings:

Optional Readings:

Class 11: Race and Genetics
*By the end of this class, each student will be able to:*
- Understand the continuing challenges around race and genetics;
- Examine the role of race and genetics on health disparities.

Class Activities:
- Lecture/discussion
- Demonstration by Genetic Counseling students

Required readings:
• Braun, M. (2002). Race, Ethnicity, and Health: Can Genetics Explain Disparities? 
  *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine, 45*(2), 159-174.
  the impact of messages about genes and race on lay attitudes. *Clinical Genetics, 66*, 402- 
  408.
• Schulz, A., Caldwell, C., & Foster, S. (2003). "What Are They Going to Do With the 
  Information?" Latino/Latina and African American Perspectives on the Human Genome 
  Project. *Health Education & Behavior, 30*(2), 151-169

Class 12: Cultural Competence: Social and Cultural Factors  
*By the end of this class, each student will be able to:*
  • Identify methods, models and approaches to achieve a culturally competent method of 
    working with minority communities.

*Class Activities:*
  • Lecture/discussion

*Required readings:*
  • Anderson, L. M., Scrimshaw, S. C., Fullilove, M. T., Fielding, J. E., & Normand, J. 
    Journal of Preventive Medicine, 24*(3S), 68-79.
  • Resnicow, K., Braithwaite, R., Ahluwalia, J., & DiIorio, C. (2001). Cultural Sensitivity in 
    Public Health. In R. Braithwaite & S. Taylor (Eds.), *Health Issues in the Black 

*Optional readings:*
    *Research and Perspectives on Healthcare, 81*(3), 14-20.
    Administrative Quarterly, 28*(3), 207-211.

Class 13: Cultural Competence: Social and Cultural Factors  
*By the end of this class, each student will be able to:*
  • Identify methods, models and approaches to achieve a culturally competent method of 
    working with minority communities.

*Class Activities:*
  • Small group exercises
  • discussion
Class 14: Class Presentations
*By the end of this class, each student will be able to:*  
- Present research on minority health and health disparities.

*Class Activities:*
- Group presentations

Class 15: Class Presentations Final Reflections, and Evaluation
*By the end of this class, each student will be able to:*  
- Present research on minority health and health disparities.

*Class Activities:*
- Group presentations
- Course evaluation