The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being
~ Constitution of the World Health Organization

General Information

Course number and title, number of credits
SOCI 309 Health and Illness, 3 credits

PLAN FOR REMOTE DELIVERY FALL 2020

The course has been redesigned for remote delivery in Fall 2020 with a strong emphasis on asynchronous learning activities to facilitate accessibility for all learners. Low bandwidth options have been provided throughout to improve equitable access.

As illustrated below, in each typical week, you will complete self-paced asynchronous learning activities with associated assessments due before midnight on Wednesdays: watch a pre-recorded video segment or listen to a podcast and answer associated discussion questions posted on myCourses, and read textbook or other reading materials and contribute to Perusall.

A synchronous learning session will also be offered on Thursdays 14:35-15:55 (scheduled class time) to encourage interaction between the instructor, TAs and students, and promote a sense of belonging in this community of learning. In this weekly session, the instructor will broadcast through a zoom link available on myCourses a pre-recorded lecture (powerpoint slides will be made available ahead of the lecture, but not the pre-recorded lecture) and respond to questions in real time, either audio-visually or through the chat function on zoom. We will occasionally use breakout rooms to allow for peer-to-peer learning and interaction. These synchronous sessions are strongly recommended but not mandatory, and no grade will be attached with participation. The recording of the sessions and text of the Q&A in chat will be available for asynchronous viewing, for revision or for those who were not able to attend synchronously.

Workflow for a typical week (Starting on Sept. 15):

legend: circle=active learning activities; squares=assessments

Asynchronous activities to be completed before midnight on Wednesdays:
- Relate: Watch or listen to audiovisual content
- Learn: Read textbook or other readings
- Answer discussion questions
- Contribute to perusall

Synchronous activity:
Thursday class time
- Integrate: Attend synchronous lectures, participate in Q&A

Accessibility option: watch the recording

Weekly quizzes

Asynchronous activity: the following week on Tuesday, from 8AM to 8PM ET
Finally, you will also engage in a **semester-long project** that will allow you to learn, relate with one another’s research interests and integrate what you learned to share it with others. Through a sequence of related assessments building on each other, you will develop a research poster that you will evaluate through a peer-to-peer process and refine in response to the feedback received.

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**Instructor**
Dr. Amélie Quesnel-Vallée, Canada Research Chair in Policies and Health Inequalities, Professor in the Department of Sociology and the Department of Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Occupational Health. Office hours: **By signup** on [https://calendly.com/amelie-quesnelvallee/soci309officehours](https://calendly.com/amelie-quesnelvallee/soci309officehours)

**Teaching assistants**
If your last name begins with the letters A-K: Kaitlin Conway
If your last name begins with the letters K-Z: Sami MacKenzie

**Communication policy**
Email should be used only as a last resort. We have set up multiple means of communication – please use them first! With 160 of you in the class, you will really help us help you to the best of our ability by abiding by these guidelines: it may not seem like much from your standpoint, but if each of you writes only one puny little email per week that takes even just 5 minutes to read and reply to, that will cumulate in a workload of 800 minutes, or 13 hours for us to answer each and every one of you! Moreover, we know from experience that if one of you has a question, there are likely to be others in the same situation, so we all win by tackling this all together.

1. **Discussion boards**
We have set up discussion boards on [myCourses](https://mycourses) to crowdsource the most asked questions and answers, organized by general topics.
Please consult those first if you have a question. **IF** your question has not already been asked, please post your question there and we will answer within 48 hours. We encourage you to answer other students’ questions if you know the answer (we will monitor Q&A for accuracy and courtesy).
2. Office hours
For questions that require confidentiality, we have set up office hours through Calendly, with varied time slots on multiple days of the week to accommodate multiple time zones.
Office hours with Professor Quesnel-Vallée: https://calendly.com/amelie-quesnelvallee/soci309officehours
Office hours with Kaitlin Conway:
Office hours with Sami MacKenzie:

"As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities, 514-398-6009."

"In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change."
Course content

Why is the elimination of social inequalities in health a top policy priority? How are these inequalities generated and what can/should we do about them?

Throughout this semester, we will tackle these and other difficult questions, through an in-depth look into the field of research on social inequalities in health. As such, this course is not just an introduction to the field of medical sociology (see SOCI 225 for one such excellent course), but rather an advanced undergraduate course that will challenge you to critically evaluate evidence in this field of research to develop your own opinion regarding social inequalities in health.

This course has no prerequisites, and is thus aimed at advanced undergraduates from sociology, but also from political science, biology, economics, psychology and all those generally interested in the health and illness of human populations.

Please see Figure 1 for an illustration of the concepts we will cover in this course, and the interrelation between them. Reading this figure from the bottom up, we will follow the scale on the right-hand side to start at the individual (micro) level with definitions of health and socioeconomic status, to then show how these individual differences come to be translated into health inequalities on the one hand and social stratification, or social inequality, on the other hand.

That level of analysis will highlight the fact that in any society with biologically-relevant variations in its population – in age for instance – will exhibit health inequalities. Similarly, all human societies have experienced varying levels of social stratification. Social inequalities in health arise out of the intersection of those two spheres, namely when health inequalities are no longer just biologically or randomly patterned but rather follow a social hierarchy.

Finally, at the global (macro) level, we will see how different countries vary in their level of social inequalities in health, and the role that public policies do or can play in this relationship. The word “measurement” is highlighted on the left-hand side of the figure because it raises crucial issues at all those levels of analysis.

Learning outcomes

This course will enable participants to:
  - Describe how research progressed from an individualistic model of disease causation to the consideration of social factors.
  - List the different ways in which socioeconomic position and health can be measured and discuss their respective merits.
- Explain what social inequalities in health are and where they stem from.
- Contrast definitions of inequality and inequity and use examples to illustrate differences.
- Distinguish between relative and absolute inequality.

- Compare the interrelations between health and social status at the individual level, and social inequalities in health at the macro (societal and global) levels.
- Discriminate between inequalities in health that cannot be modified and social inequalities in health that are avoidable.
- Analyze and criticize debates about policies in their potential impact on health inequalities.

- Develop an informed opinion and be ready to support it in debates on topics such as:
  - What should be the role of private insurance in the Canadian health care system?
  - Should we invest in education and/or the health care system to reduce social inequalities in health?
  - What are governments’ responsibilities regarding social inequalities in health?

Course requirements

You are expected to read the assigned material before class and be prepared to discuss it. See weekly outline for the schedule of reading for book chapters and articles.

Required readings:


All other assigned readings are available electronically (see the hyperlinks in this syllabus or texts on MyCourses).

Troubleshooting for electronic links: all the hyperlinks in this course outline have been tested on the McGill network and on a PC, using Chrome. If you are unable to access a reading, you should try the following: 1. Make sure you are on the McGill network, and/or logged in to the Library website; 2. If on a Mac, try switching browsers.

Here is the link to the course reserves: https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/courseReserves/course/id/14829928
Weekly outline of lectures and required readings
Please note that the specific schedule of readings may change during the semester, as per class announcements and updates to the course outline provided on myCourses. You are responsible for keeping up to date on that information at least weekly.

Week of Aug 31. Getting to know each other.

Sept. 3: Synchronous zoom session
Overview of the course: what are social inequalities in health, and why study them?
Expectations for the semester.

Part I. Setting up the problem: History, concepts and methods

Week of Sept. 7. What is health, and how do we measure it?
Readings:
1. Davidson. Introduction.

Sept. 10: Synchronous zoom session

Week of Sept. 14. What is inequality, and how do we measure it?
Reminders: Add/Drop deadline. First discussion posts due by Wednesday September 16 at midnight.
Audiovisual (Asynchronous)
“In Sickness and in Wealth”. Episode 1 of the Unnatural Causes DVD. Click here for the transcript of the episode.
Readings:
1. Dominic Frisby. 2018. Wealth inequality is soaring – here are the 10 reasons why it’s happening. The Guardian.
2. OECD. 2011. Divided We Stand: Why Inequality Keeps Rising (4-page summary; opens best in Explorer)

Sept. 17: Synchronous zoom session

Week of Sept. 21. What is inequality, and how do we measure it?
Reminders: First quiz on Tuesday September 22.
Audiovisual (Asynchronous)
To read: https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/may/01/cholera-and-coronavirus-why-we-must-not-repeat-the-same-mistakes
Readings:
Population health: from John Snow to the World Health Organization Commission on Social Determinants of Health
1. Davidson. Chapter 1.

Sept. 24: Synchronous zoom session

Week of Sept. 28. From individualistic models of disease causation to population health

Audiovisual (Asynchronous)
Dr Laurie Santos. The Happiness Lab. Episode 7: How to Kick Bad Habits (and Start Good Ones)
https://www.happinesslab.fm/season-2-episodes/episode-7-how-to-kick-bad-habits-and-start-good-ones

Readings:
1. Davidson. Chapter 3.

Sept. 31: Synchronous zoom session

Week of Oct. 5. How the social gets “under the skin” and thinking about causation

Audiovisual (Asynchronous)
Start watching at 28:30 (though I recommend other presentations as well if you have time!)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=drASWeO5spU&feature=emb_logo

Readings:

Oct. 8: Synchronous zoom session

Part II. An in-depth look at some of the social determinants of health

Week of Oct. 12. Behavioral and cultural explanations, or how victims came to be blamed

Audiovisual (Asynchronous)
“Bad sugar”. Episode 4 of the Unnatural Causes DVD. Click here for the transcript of the episode.
Readings:
1. Davidson. Chapter 11.
5. Extreme Negative Anti-Smoking Ads Can Backfire, Experts Find

Oct. 15: Synchronous zoom session

Week of Oct. 19. The life course approach: No matter how hard you try, you can’t get away from your past.

Audiovisual (Asynchronous)
“When the bough breaks”. Episode 2 of the Unnatural Causes DVD. Click here for the transcript of the episode.

Readings:
1. Davidson. Chapter 5.

Oct. 22: Synchronous zoom session

Week of Oct. 26. Work and health, with attention to the psycho-social model: “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas 1928).

Audiovisual (Asynchronous)
“Not just a paycheck”. Episode 7 of the Unnatural Causes DVD. Click here for the transcript of the episode.

Readings:

Oct. 29: Synchronous zoom session

Week of Nov 2. Social Networks: It’s not just what you know, it’s who you know

Audiovisual (Asynchronous)
“Becoming American”. Episode 3 of the Unnatural Causes DVD. Click here for the transcript of the episode.

Readings:

Nov 5: Synchronous zoom session

Week of Nov 9. Health and place: Income inequality and other contextual factors

Audiovisual (Asynchronous)
“Place matters”. Episode 5 of the Unnatural Causes DVD. Click here for the transcript of the episode.

Readings:
1. Davidson. Chapter 4.

Nov 12: Synchronous zoom session

Part III. What can we do about it? Thinking about policy

Week of Nov 16. A primer on the Canadian health system and private health insurance

Audiovisual (Asynchronous)

Readings:

Nov 19: Synchronous zoom session

Week of Nov 23. Policy: So what can we do about it all?

Audiovisual (Asynchronous)

Readings:


Nov 26: Synchronous zoom session

Week of Nov 31. Wrapping up.

Reminders: POSTER DUE

Dec 1 (Synchronous session) Ask me anything session!

If you’re wondering how I became interested in this area of research, what was my path to becoming a professor, what are the careers one can pursue in this area of research, what it’s like to be a professor and to do research that engages with decision-makers… I’ll be there and field your questions in a synchronous meeting session, the more the merrier!
Assignments and evaluation

At a glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due date</th>
<th>Total % of course grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion board</td>
<td>Weekly posts (1 point each) from September 16 to November 25 (10 highest grades over the 11 weeks)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading interaction</td>
<td>Weekly posts (1 point each) from September 16 to November 25 (10 highest grades over the 11 weeks)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly quizzes</td>
<td>Weekly (5 points ea) from September 22 to November 24 (8 highest grades over 10 weeks) – on Tuesdays</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research poster</td>
<td>Annotated Bibliography Oct 2 before midnight ET</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Draft poster Oct. 23 before midnight ET</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peer feedback Nov. 6 before midnight ET</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Response to feedback Nov. 20 before midnight ET</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Final poster Dec. 1 before midnight ET</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Policy on late assignments
We will not accept emails with your assignments, no matter what the excuse is (i.e. slow computer, network slowdown, etc). You are responsible for starting the assignment ahead of time to ensure that you do not run against technological failure. The only exception to this rule is if McGill IT has a documented system failure. Out of fairness for fellow classmates, all other assignments are considered to be late if handed in after the designated periods.

You are responsible for checking that you are submitting the right version and that it can be opened. Your electronic submission will be graded as is (even if the file is corrupt, empty, or if an earlier version of the text was mistakenly submitted).

Late assignments will incur a penalty of 20% of the assignment’s grade. Each additional 24-hour delay (including over the week-end) will incur another 20%. In other words, an assignment handed in 5 days late will be worth 0%.

More information on assignments will be posted on myCourses and shared throughout the semester.
**Students’ rights and responsibilities**

Attendance and participation in class discussions.
You are responsible for all announcements made in class and on myCourses. You should also check for new announcements, changes to the course outline or material on myCourses at least weekly.

Policy Concerning the Rights of Students with Disabilities
"As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities, 514-398-6009."

Remise des travaux en français
"Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue)." (approved by Senate on 21 January 2009)
“In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.” (approved by Senate on 21 January 2009 - see also the section in this document on Assignments and evaluation.)

Review of a mark
You have the right to ask for a regrading if you feel that your work was not accurately graded. However, in order to request a regrade, you must write a one page paper indicating the reasons why your work should be regraded and hand it in to the professor within a week of receiving the grade.
In addition, during the regrading process, the work is analyzed much more critically. The first time around, we tend to give students the benefit of the doubt. Please also note that will regrade the whole material (not just an individual question), and that we have the right to lower your grade in this process.
You may prefer to meet with us and talk about how you may have improved your work and your learning.

Policy for the Accommodation of Religious Holy Days
“1 Students are not to be penalized if they cannot write examinations or be otherwise evaluated on their religious holy days where such activities conflict with their religious observances. (…)  
2 Students who because of religious commitment cannot meet academic obligations, other than final examinations, on certain holy days are responsible for informing their instructor, with two weeks’ notice of each conflict. (…)  
3 When the requested accommodation concerns a final examination, students are responsible for advising their faculty office as soon as possible and not later than the deadline for reporting conflicts. Additional documentation confirming their religious affiliation may be requested.” (Approved by Senate - November 20, 1996 - Minute 92)

Statement on academic integrity at McGill
"McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information)." (approved by Senate on 29 January 2003)
« L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/). »
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