



# SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF HEALTH AND ILLNESS

This course examines the social dimensions of health and illness from multiple disciplinary perspectives, including demography, sociology, economics, history, political science, policy studies, and anthropology. We will study how the social environment shapes patterns of health and disease, producing health inequalities. We will pay particular attention to how the social environment “gets under the skin”, affecting biological processes that contribute to health and illness.

**TUESDAYS/THURSDAYS, 9:35-10:50AM  
CALHOUN HALL  
ROOM 337**

**PROFESSOR LAUREN GAYDOSH  
LAUREN.M.GAYDOSH@VANDERBILT.EDU**

**OFFICE HOURS: TUESDAYS, 11AM-12PM  
AND BY APPOINTMENT  
CALHOUN HALL 321**

**TA: LORO PI  
QIANHUI.PI@VANDERBILT.EDU**

# CLASS SESSION OVERVIEW

Week 1. August 23	Introduction
Week 2. August 28 and 30	How the social world gets under the skin
Week 3. September 4 and 6	Fundamental cause and life course theories
Week 4. September 11 and 13	Social relationships
Week 5. September 18 and 20	Family: childhood and adult
Week 6. September 25 and 27	Socioeconomic status: overview and education
Week 7. October 2 and 4	Socioeconomic status: income and inequality
Week 8. October 9 and 11	Neighborhoods and environments
Week 9. October 16	Data exercise
Week 10. October 23 and 25	Gender
Week 11. October 30 and November 1	Sexual Orientation
Week 12. November 6 and 8	Race
Week 13. November 13 and 15	Nativity, migration
Week 14. November 27 and 29	Reducing health disparities
Week 15. December 4 and 6	Student presentations

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Define important concepts in the social determinants of health, such as fundamental cause theory, biological embedding, socioeconomic status, life course models, and stress.
2. Identify how health is influenced by social factors.
3. Understand the biological mechanisms that connect the social environment to health outcomes.
4. Apply these conceptual frameworks to the study of health.
5. Evaluate evidence linking social dimensions to health.
6. Develop and demonstrate expertise in an area of the social dimensions of health and illness.
7. Produce a data visualization and digital media product.

# ASSIGNMENTS


## 1. Lead class discussion

Find a relevant infographic, figure, or news article that relates to the week's topic. Lead a class discussion highlighting the biological and social mechanisms.

 **10%**  
 **IN CLASS WEEKS 4-14**

## 2. Short memo

Prepare a 1 page memo describing your proposed topic, including the health and social dimensions, and why it is important.

 **10%**  
 **DUE SEP. 9 BY 11:59PM**

## 3. Conceptual diagram and description

Create a conceptual diagram detailing the pathways between your health and social topics. Figures should be self-contained and self-explanatory, but accompanied by a 1 paragraph description.

 **10%**  
 **DUE SEP. 30 BY 11:59PM**

## 4. Data exercise

Identify a data source and apply your conceptual diagram to analyze the data for evidence.

 **10%**  
 **DUE OCT. 26 BY 11:59PM**

## 5. Organizational profile

Select an organization, program, or policy maker that works in an area related to your topic. Conduct a local or virtual site visit, observing, asking questions, and finding out about the organization/individual and its activities. This should take 1-3 hours. Then write a reflection on what you learned from your experience, describing the goals of the organization, challenges, how it fits with the concepts learned in this course, and how the experience challenged and/or confirmed your understanding of the topic.

 **20%**  
 **DUE NOV. 16 BY 11:59PM**

## 6. Final project and presentation

Synthesize and present what you learned on your topic through the other four course assignments. The project should include a brief overview of the topic, a conceptual diagram, findings from your data exercise, lessons from your practicum, and a policy recommendation or conclusion. You will present your project to the class in our final week.

 **30%**  
 **IN CLASS DEC. 4 AND 6**

## 7. Peer review

Write short reviews of each project presented on the last day of class (in which you did not present).

 **10%**  
 **DUE DEC. 10 BY 11:59PM**

# INFORMATION

## READINGS

There are no textbooks for this class that must be purchased. All required readings and multimedia will be available on Brightspace. The readings listed under a class date should be completed before coming to class.

## HONOR CODE

All students are bound by Vanderbilt's Honor Code as outlined in the Student Handbook (<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/studenthandbook/the-honor-system#honorcode>).

## GRADING

For each assignment, I will provide a guidance sheet with some tips on preparation and a rubric that clearly identifies grading. We will discuss this in class several weeks before the assignment is due, as this gives you a chance to ask questions and me a chance to address any doubts you may have.

## GRADING SCALE

A : 100-93	A- : 92-90	
B+ : 89-87	B : 86-83	B- : 82-80
C+ : 79-77	C : 76-73	C- : 72-70
D+ : 69-67	D : 66-63	D- : 62-60
F : <60		

## EMAIL POLICY

In general, I will respond to e-mails within 24-48 hours during weekdays.

## ADOBE CREATIVE SUITE

All students have access to the Adobe Creative Cloud for use in your digital projects.

## MANDATORY REPORTING

University faculty are required to report incidents of sexual assault, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, and child abuse, as well as any suspected discrimination to the University's Title IX Coordinator (615-343-9004), as required by University policy and state and federal law.

## ACCOMMODATIONS

Please let me know if you need course accommodations due to a disability, mental health issue, family or personal emergency. Please also let me know if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or need special arrangements in the event of an evacuation.