

Professor Jane Levitt designed this Writing Intensive LEH 301 course, "Health Disparities in the United States," with Writing Fellow Tina Harris. Please note the various types of writing assigned throughout the semester.

LEH 301.P03 Health Disparities in the United States (Writing Intensive)

Professor Jane Levitt

Writing Fellow: Tina Harris

Course Content and Description:

This course is designed to investigate and examine one aspect of American society – the health status of the population -- and to use that exploration to give insight into a broader picture of American life. The health of the population of the United States has improved dramatically since the early 1900s, yet noticeable disparities exist within the population. Using demographic and epidemiological data, students will examine changes in disease patterns, evaluate what determines the health status of Americans and explore where and why differences occur. Using the ecological model of public health focusing on the interaction of individual, community and societal factors, students will identify obstacles to change and evaluate interventions to promote the health of the population. Through collaborative group activities students will develop and use critical reading and writing skills to explore and further their understanding of American society.

Text: The Nation's Health. Seventh Edition. Philip R. Lee and Carroll L. Estes.
(Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 2003)

Course Objectives:

1. Be able to read and understand intellectually challenging and complicated information.
2. Be able to express and write your thoughts on assigned readings clearly and coherently.
3. Be able to access and analyze empirical data and draw conclusions.
4. Be able to assess and think critically about what you read and what you write.
5. Be able to formulate your own ideas about the world you live in.

Student Learning Activities:

1. Close reading of texts.
2. Weekly writing assignments and research papers.
3. In-class group exercises analyzing data.
4. Researching information on selected topics.

Course Requirements, Evaluation Methods and Grading:

Class attendance and participation	15%
Written homework assignments*	15
Submitted group work	10
Mid-term and Final exams	30
Two short research papers*	30

*Two copies of all work must be handed in, on time, and neatly typed.

Academic Integrity: All work in this class must be your own. Any cheating on tests or plagiarism on papers--the use of someone else's words or ideas without acknowledging them as such--will result in a failing grade in the course.

- Jan. 31 Introductions; Course Overview; fill out cards
In class writing: Letter to class on who you are; second paragraph on the health issues that affect you and/or your family.
Class Exercise: Timeline: Trends in the health of the American population
Reflective Writing: How well did your group work for you?
Handout: Letter introducing purpose of a writing intensive course
- Feb. 7 Disease Patterns Over Time
Readings: "Trends in Mortality in the Twentieth Century", Rothstein, pp 11-30; Healthy People 2010 Goals, pp. 57-61
Writing: (1) From your reading, write one page on what are the key factors that affect our health. (2) Write one page responding to the writing issue letter.
Class Exercise: Put on the board key factors from the homework.
Distribute p. 69 Determinants of Health. Compare. How much control do we have over the factors that affect our health? Which are "mutable" which are "immutable"? (Ask half the groups to focus on the perspective of "much control" and half on "not much")
Reflective Writing: What it feels like to argue a position: if you agree with the position, or, if not? (questioning your own assumptions) and What are the stresses in your life and how much control do you have over them?
- Feb. 14 The unequal burden of disease: what do we mean by "health disparities"?
Readings: pp. 63 to top of p.64; "McKeown and the Idea that Social Conditions are Fundamental Causes of Disease", Link and Phelan, pp. 73-78; "The Influence of Income on Health: Views of an Epidemiologist", Marmot, pp. 79-92; handout on U.S. population.
Writing: Write a two page conversation between McKeown and Link/Phelan describing their differences in what contributes to making people healthy. Add another page on Marmot's contribution in terms of income and race.
Class Exercise: Discuss concepts of threshold and gradient p. 75 and the complexity of race and income. Distribute Hunts Point/Mott Haven and the Upper East Side community profiles: compare demographic data and socio-economic status (SES) information.
Reflective Writing: Observational exercise: drawing a map of the classroom – what do you notice?
Return 2/7 factor paper; rewrite one paragraph on factors affecting our health 2/28

- Feb. 21 President's Day – College closed
- Feb. 28 Determinants of health status: socio-economic factors
 Readings: "Socioeconomic Status and Health: The Potential Role of Environmental Risk Exposure", Evans and Kantrowitz, pp. 93-119; income handout
 Writing: (1) Access your community health profile from the DOHMH web-site. After reading it, walk around your neighborhood and write one page describing the demographics and risk factors you notice that would affect people's health status; (2) Write one paragraph on what you think the term "environmental justice" means?
 Class Exercise: Using the community profiles of Hunts Point/Mott Haven and the Upper East Side, compare the health status of the populations
 Reflective Writing: What would you focus on to change in your community in order to make it a healthier place to live?
- Mar. 7 Developing a research topic. Class meets in the library.
 Readings: "Racial/Ethnic Variations in Women's Health: The Social Embeddedness of Health", Williams, pp. 516-536; women's health handout
 Writing: A. Describe the health disparities women experience and do they differ by income and/or race? B. Why do you think this exists? (Analyze)
 In class: Begin your five page research paper by identifying a health condition you are interested in finding out more about. Focus on one population (e.g. by gender or race/ethnicity) and a socio-economic factor (e.g. income, education, occupation, geography). With the help of the librarian you will use the library time to explore resources for your topic. You will also have a chance to meet in pairs to review your research question. *For homework, you will need to choose one article to read and write a summary – one paragraph giving the main ideas in the article.*
- Mar. 14 Developing a thesis statement.
 Reading: article from library
 Writing: (1) One paragraph summary of article chosen from last week's class in the library. (2) In one sentence, identify your research question.
 Class Exercise: clarifying the research question and writing a thesis statement – students work in pairs, share three foci and your research question. Then meet in group and turn that question into a thesis statement. Then asking each other questions; identify supporting ideas – result: outline for paper

During group time, Tina and Jane work with individuals either in group or alone.

Reflective Writing: For you, what is the most difficult part of writing a paper?

Paper sequence: First draft due Mar. 30-given back April 4 and final draft due April 11

- Mar. 21 Individual Rights and the Public's Health
In class: Typhoid Mary film/ group discussion and writing exercise: observations, thoughts and feelings; questions raised
Tina and Jane review progress with individuals.
- March 28 No Class
- March 30 First draft of paper due
Mid-term handed out – due April 4
Measuring a Community's Health and Developing Appropriate Interventions
Guest speaker on community health project; discussion: what worked, what didn't
- Apr. 4 Mid-term due
Return first draft of paper
Health Status and Access: the national level
Reading: "Who Gets Health Care? Fogel and Lee, pp. 347-357; "The US Health Care System: On a Road to Nowhere? Jonathan Oberlander , pp.358-368.
In class: data on international health expenditures and infant mortality and life expectancy rates - what questions does this raise: work first individually, then in groups to identify key questions
- April 11 Paper due with first draft
Guest speaker on Media: Interpretation and Analysis
In class: analysis of media and health pamphlets: issue, targeted audience, images
- Apr. 18 U.S. Health Policy
Reading: "Health Policy: The Politics of Health," pp. 175-181; "Health Care and Health Care Policy in a Changing World," Donald A. Barr, Philip R. Lee and A.E. Benjamin, pp. 199-212.
Writing: Write two pages on why health care reform is so difficult to achieve in the U.S. Include the key historical and structural factors that contribute.
Class exercise: In your group, identify a health issue and a targeted policy you would like to see implemented. What obstacles do you think you would face in trying to make this policy a reality? If your

group was going to visit your local Congressman to lobby for your proposed policy, what and how would you present your arguments?

- Apr. 25 Spring Recess
- May 2 Overcoming Obstacles to Change
Begin second three-page paper: an analysis using class readings and question/inquiry process
Reading: “Broadening Participation in Community Problem Solving: A - Multidisciplinary Model to Support Collaborative Practice and Research”, Rox D. Lasker and Elisa S. Weiss, pp. 242-280.
Writing: Write one page on the significance of the “proximal outcomes” (p.250).
Class exercise: What are some of the challenges to working with community groups? How would you think the community might feel about “outsiders” coming in?
- May 9 Analysis and Evaluation of Barriers to Change
Reading: “Keeping Quality on the policy Agenda”, Elizabeth A. McGlynn and Robert H. Brook, pp. 455-463.
Writing: Write one page on why is it difficult in the United States to change our health care policy and improve the health of our population?
- May 16 Where have we come from and where are we going: connecting health and the American experience.
Second paper due; Final exam distributed
Writing: Letter Evaluating the Writing Intensive Course
Date to submit final exam to be announced.