SW 301: Health Inequalities and Social Action
School for New Learning

Cross-listed with GEO 395 /
MLS490/SUD 490/MSW450

Spring 2018
Tuesdays 5:45- 9 pm
Location: Loop Campus, Room: Daley 1455

Faculty
Judith Singleton, PhD, College of Science and Health
Akilah Martin, PhD, School for New Learning
Maria J. Ferrera, PhD, LCSW, Dept. of Social Work

Course Dates: March 27, 2018 – June 5, 2018

Course Description
Health Inequalities and Social Action will focus on “the environment” and the topic of life expectancy and the inequality of life expectancy in Chicago. Life expectancy (the average time one is expected to live from the time of birth) in the United States is based on geography. Where you live influences the length of your life. We will explore various perspectives of life expectancy in our city. These “ways of seeing” and epistemologies (creation of knowledge) include: ethnographic, epidemiological, environmental science and geospatial analysis. This course will demonstrate how the natural and social sciences come together to pose meaningful questions about health disparities associated with life expectancy to take social action. Questions include: How do we create an environment where all Chicago residents enjoy a better quality of life? How do we create a world of abundance for all? How do we make our institutions more effective and accountable to the needs of the people they serve?

Undergraduate Learning Outcomes
• To understand how ethnography, epidemiology, environmental and geospatial science methods can contribute to creating strategies of social action in addressing health disparities in our nation and in the city of Chicago.
To understand the connections between environmental science, epidemiology, ethnography and geospatial methods and how these methods and disciplines intersect and impact urban communities.

To understand how collaborative interdisciplinary research is a form of social action and activism.

To be introduced to the field of soil science through readings, field trips, lab assignments, discussions and on-line resources. Students will learn the complexities of soil and their role in soil quality. Topics will include: soil formation, soil survey and mapping; soil physical and chemical processes; soil biology and human interactions with soil.

To be able to interpret both qualitative and quantitative data, evaluate environmental reports, explain concepts related to soil, water, epidemiology, ethnography and geospatial methods.

Formulate a plan for social change.

Engage and problem solve international environmental issues as well as identify and create recommendations for environmental remediation and restoration.

Students are expected to either complete a final project or produce a final paper at the end of the course. Topics should be discussed with and approved by the Instructors very early in the quarter, no later than the third week.

**SNL Competencies**

**S4** – Can describe and explain connections among diverse aspects of nature.

1. Describes one or more natural systems.

2. Explains how parts of the system are interconnected.

Students demonstrate how such connections are found elsewhere in nature. Students demonstrate competency by articulating how exchange occurs among seemingly disparate parts of nature and how interconnection among systems is basic to nature and results in an integrated whole. “Connections” is the most important word in this competency. All seemingly distinct parts of nature, including humans, are integrally connected to all other parts.

**H4** – Can analyze power relations among racial, social, cultural, or economic groups in the United States.

1. Describes the unequal power relations between at least two racial, social, cultural, or economic groups in the U.S.
2. Discusses the historical, sociological, or economic dynamics under which these groups came to be in conflict.

Students demonstrate this competency by analyzing the historical, sociological or economic dynamics that lead to inequalities in power among groups in the United States. To the extent possible, we hope that students will relate this to their experiences as well as their responsibilities as a citizen. In many ways this competency is about democracy in action; for example, how groups have negotiated and attained power and voice in a complex and diverse society. Since, however, inequalities persist in this country, it is important to understand the ways in which some groups have been systematically denied economic, social, and political justice.

H1H - Can describe and analyze the challenges faced by communities in urban, suburban, or rural areas.

1. Articulates the characteristics of an urban, suburban, or rural geographic area.

2. Identifies one or more communities that embody the attributes of an urban, suburban, or rural geographic area.

3. Provides an in-depth description and analysis of one or more challenges for the selected area(s).

Students demonstrate competency by describing the elements of a geographic area that define it as being urban, suburban, or rural. Analysis may concentrate on either change over time within one location, or, compare and contrast of several locations and their challenges (such as adequacy of housing and transportation, development of an adequate tax base, migration or emigration of population, planning for land use). Students should consider experiences they have had in their own community as the basis for approaching this competence.

Graduate Learning Outcomes
1. Develop critical thinking skills and analyses. Engage theories and approaches of resilience, empowerment, and capacity building within critical assessment, development of intervention strategies, and planning with individuals, families, and communities.

2. Advance social justice-oriented research that is participatory and inclusive of the community and organizational constituencies.

3. Assess and analyze communities and organizations as they respond to changes in their environments.

4. Obtain richer understanding of evidence-based practice strategies or interventions that have been proven to show improved wellbeing for communities and organization, and where
possible, incorporate evaluative measures of health and wellbeing that integrate improvements in social, economic, political, community-level, and environmental realms.

All readings will be provided through the course D2L Site.

**Learning Deliverables (graded evidences of learning)**

All Assignments will be accessible through the course D2L site.

**Assessment of Student Learning**

All assignments will be assessed using rubrics embedded in D2L for each assignment.

**Grading Criteria & Scale**

- Attendance and Class Participation – 15%
- Critical reflection Essays – 30%
- Final Project Poster Presentation – 40%
- Engagement (i.e. discussion board, assignments, etc.) – 15%

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**Course Schedule**

**Week One:**


**Week Two:**

Life Expectancy and Mortality: National Statistics Opioid “Crisis”


Kolata, Gina. 2015. Death Rates Rising for Middle-Aged White


**Week Three:**  
**What Is Ethnography? Concepts include:** Positivism, ontological, epistemological, emic, etic, holism and objectivity. What is culture?

**Required Readings:**  
*Critical Ethnography:* Chapter One  
“What is Ethnography?: Methodological, Ontological and Epistemological Attributes.” Tony L. Whitehead

**Insider/Outsider Assignment**  
**Assignment: Critical Reflection Assignment**

**Week Four:**  
**Methods, Theory & Writing Ethnography About Health Disparities in Chicago**

**Required Reading:**  
*Critical Ethnography:* Chapters Two and Three  

“Embodiment and Breast Cancer Among African American Women.”  


**Recommended Reading**


**Week Five:** Life Expectancy and Mortality in Chicago An Epidemiological Approach.
Guest Lecturers Nik Prachand and Emily Laflamme
Chicago Department of Public Health
[https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db125.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db125.pdf)


*Book: Living Downstream* by Sandra Steingraber.

**Week Six:** The relationship between soil, life expectancy and mortality
Dr. Akilah Martin


**In-Class Assignment: Series of Soil Tests**

**Week Seven:** Making Environmental Connections Multimedia: Dirt! The Movie by Gene Rosow and Bill Benenson
Urban Soil Primer by USDA-NRCS (In Class)
**Assignment: Critical Reflection Essay**
Week Eight:  

Place and Health: What Can Geography and GIS Tell Us about Health Disparities as it Relates to Life Expectancy?  

Guest Lecturer: Dr. Euan Hague  

Readings: Irwin, Neil and Bui, Quoctrung. 2016.  


To-Do: Final Project Check-in  

Week Nine:  

Social Action!  

Guest Speakers: The Rent Control Campaign  

Jawanza Malone, Executive Director, Kenwood Oakland Community Organization  

Byron Sigcho Lopez, Executive Director, Pilsen Alliance  

Required Readings  


Recommended Readings  


Week Ten: Conclusion of Course: Bringing it all Together

Final Projects/ Papers Due

Course Policies
This course includes and adheres to the college and university policies described in the links below:
Academic Integrity Policy (UGRAD)
Academic Integrity Policy (GRAD)
Incomplete Policy
Course Withdrawal Timelines and Grade/Fee Consequences
Accommodations Based on the Impact of a Disability
Protection of Human Research Participants
APA citation format (GRAD)
University Attendance Policy

Other Resources for Students
University Center for Writing-based Learning
SNL Writing Guide
Dean of Students Office

Instructor Brief Bio

Dr. Akilah Martin earned her doctorate from Purdue University investigating environmental quality as it relates to urban environmental modelling, social identity, and environmental science education. She is an environmental scientist rooted in the practice of enhancing soil, water, and overall environmental quality that will lead to a more sustainable future. Issues of social responsibility and sustainability specifically in the field of soil and water quality are at the center of her scholarship and teaching. Many of her research projects involve collaboration between community partners and students in a continued effort to bridge the gap between university research and community involvement. She considers herself to be a civically engaged scholar in that she crafts impactful learning experiences that in turn offer opportunities to create a more just and equitable society.
**Dr. Judith Singleton** is a cultural and medical anthropologist with a deep commitment to exploring, examining and writing about inequality specifically on race, class, gender, geography and sexuality with an emphasis on social determinants of health and social justice. She has taught courses on Urban Health and Society, Incarceration and Health and the Inequality of Life Expectancy in Chicago as well as courses on race and racism. She is currently conducting a collaborative research project with Drs. Ferrera and Martin on the inequality of life expectancy in Chicago. With a focus on social determinants of health, we explore the factors influencing variance in life expectancy in two specific Chicago neighborhoods: Pilsen and Washington Park. Her articles have been published in several journals based on research about sexual violence in South Africa and HIV and AIDS in Chicago. She has a Master’s Degree in International Relations from Yale University and a Ph.D. in Anthropology from Northwestern University.

**Dr. Maria J. Ferrera** is an Assistant Professor in DePaul's Department of Social Work. She received her PhD and MA from the University of Chicago- School of Social Service Administration (SSA). She received her BS from Loyola University in Chicago, has served for over 20 years as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in the areas of child welfare and medical social work, and continues to do work in the Filipino American and other immigrant communities. Her areas of practice and research involve: decolonization methods; the influence of colonization on ethnic identity development; community-based, socially just practices and mixed methods research with ethnic minority youth; health disparities and the impact of healthcare law on new and undocumented immigrants in Chicago.

CAC Approved 12.16.16