

HEALTH, BIOMEDICINE, CULTURE, AND SOCIETY

Instructor: Santiago J. Molina, santiagojmolina@northwestern.edu

Lecture: Tuesday and Thursday 11:00am-12:20pm in Lutkin Hall

Office Hours: <https://calendly.com/santiagojmolina/>

Teaching Assistants

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I. SUMMARY AND GOALS

We are told constantly, “take care of yourself!” and we do our best to eat well, sleep well, and stay healthy. Our bodies are important to us. They are also important to the institutions we are a part of, including our families, our schools, our jobs, and our country. Each of these institutions is invested in keeping our bodies healthy and productive. However, the array of institutions interested in the value of our bodies often have additional incentives and indeed, some institutions work to deteriorate one’s health—factories, prisons, even universities! As such our health is surrounded by a hoard of controversies!

- Why do some people get better medical care than others?
- How should the healthcare system be organized?
- How do we balance the risks of new medical treatments with the benefits?
- What makes the stigma associated with disease and disability so hard to end?
- What happens when no diagnosis can be made?

This course offers conceptual tools and perspectives for addressing these controversies. To do so we will survey a variety of topics related to the intersections of health, biomedicine, culture, and society. We will analyze the cultural meanings associated with health and illness; the political debates surrounding health care, medical knowledge production, and medical decision-making; and the structure of the social institutions that comprise the health care industry. We will examine many problems with the current state of health and health care in the United States and consider potential solutions.

The course is divided into three parts:

- A. Society, Identity, and Health.** In this module we will learn the fundamentals of a sociological approach to health and illness. We will examine how pathology is constructed by both individuals and social systems through experience, framing, and the structural distribution of resources. We will pay particular attention at the blurry line

between disability and disease, opening up questions about the role of stigma in structuring our relationship to our bodies.

- B. The Politics of Care.** Here, we will learn about the strength of community as a source of well-being and safety. We will also examine key failures of healthcare provision that arise out of political negligence and racism.
- C. Medicine and Capitalism.** In this final module, we dissect the cultural and structural shaping of the economic conditions of modern medicine. We will pick apart the complex interweaving of the values of efficiency and productivity in medical practice and challenge the commodification of patient bodies and tissues.

II. ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

<p>a) Section Attendance and Participation. You are expected to come to class and discussion section having done the readings. Be prepared to actively discuss, compare, and critique the readings with your peers. Both active <i>listening</i> and <i>contributing</i> are required for participation. Your TA will explain how the section grade is determined.</p>	20%
<p>b) Take-home Essay I (4-5 pages). This will focus on the material in Part One of the course. The assignment will be distributed and discussed in class (and posted on Canvas) on October 3rd, and it is <u>due by 11:59 pm on Sunday, October 20th</u>. You must submit it electronically on Canvas. Your essay will be graded directly on Canvas, and a marked-up and graded version will be made available to you through Canvas around October 30th.</p>	20%
<p>c) 3 Quizzes. We will have three closed book quizzes corresponding to a different part of the course (October 17th, October 31st, and November 21st). These quizzes will be multiple choice and will assess your comprehension of the terms and concepts that have been covered in lectures and readings. To help you prepare, I will provide a list of possible terms and concepts one week in advance. Quizzes will be administered in lecture via Canvas.</p>	30%
<p>e) Take-home Essay II (7-9 pages). This will cover the entire course but emphasizing Parts Two and Three. The final will consist of two essays, each 4-5 pages in length. The essay questions will be posted November 12th, and the final will be <u>due no later than 11:59pm on Tuesday, December 10th</u>. (You are welcome to submit the final earlier.) You must submit it electronically on Canvas.</p>	30%

III. COURSE MECHANICS

Northwestern University Syllabus Standards. This course follows the [Northwestern University Syllabus Standards](#). Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with this information.

Academic Integrity. Much of your learning in this class will come from the contributions and ideas of your classmates through discussion; in this respect, collaboration and study groups are encouraged. However, remember to give credit where credit is due, and know that in your papers and tests it is *your own* ideas we need to hear about. Note that plagiarism is not limited to stealing an entire paper. Using quotes without properly citing them or using ideas without acknowledging their source also constitute plagiarism. Any form of cheating and plagiarism will lead to zero on the assignment and to disciplinary action.

Natural Language Models and Generative AI. The Sociology Department is committed to ensuring that students abide by Northwestern University policies on [Academic Integrity](#) while also embracing new technologies when appropriate to help students learn and achieve. ***For sociology classes, using generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools (e.g., ChatGPT or similar programs) for preliminary work or submitted assignments is prohibited unless explicitly stated in the guidelines for a specific assignment.*** If AI is used in keeping with an assignment's guidelines, how AI was used should be clearly acknowledged. Any form of cheating, including improper use of content generated by artificial intelligence, constitutes a violation of Northwestern's academic integrity policy. Turnitin, which is already in use at Northwestern, is expanding its system to include artificial intelligence detection. Northwestern's policy on academic integrity includes these two statements regarding the use of generative AI:

1. **Cheating:** Allowing another person or resource (including, but not limited to, generative artificial intelligence) to do one's work and submitting that work under one's own name without proper attribution
2. **Plagiarism:** Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the unauthorized use of generative artificial intelligence to create content that is submitted as one's own.

Cell Phone Policy. Cell phones should be turned off or in airplane mode. No checking messages or receiving calls during lecture or section, except in cases of extreme personal urgency. Please let me know at the beginning of section if you think this situation might apply to you.

Structure and Plan. This syllabus, schedule, and modalities of instruction (in-person, via Zoom, etc.) are subject to change in the event of unforeseen circumstances. Announcements of changes will be posted on Canvas and emailed to students. Students will be responsible for abiding by the changes.

Content Warning. The readings and discussion in this course deal with deep personal and historical social issues that may contain material that is startling, upsetting, and/or difficult to process. This includes medical violence, oppression, settler-colonialism, stereotypes, systemic racism, and white supremacy. Engaging with this content openly and directly requires honest, transparent, and just community agreements below. Please contact me, your TA, or come to office hours to talk about specific issues that might arise.

Community Agreements the Course.

1. Be respectful of others.
2. Do not interrupt another student while they are speaking. (Persistent interrupting can lead to percent loss in your participation grade)

3. We will be discussing controversial social issues in this class. In debate, listen to the other person's argument, and respond to their points. Try to understand where the other person is coming from, even if you fundamentally disagree with their position.
4. Do not make personal attacks or make fun of anyone's argument.
5. Do not dominate discussion; let others speak.
6. Our goal is to include everyone in discussion. So, if you reference an outside author, please take time to explain to the other students what the author's argument is, and how it's relevant to the current readings and discussion. If you do bring outside material you should know it well enough to explain it to us. This way, we can *teach* each other, rather than exclude each other. To make discussions as participatory as possible (and welcoming to students coming from multiple disciplines), I discourage "namedropping" and "-ism-dropping."
7. These same rules apply to me, and I intend to work by them. If I do interrupt someone or break these rules, call me out on it. Please. I hope to learn from our conversations just as much as you do.
8. Any other suggestions and feedback about how the seminar is run, in-seminar activities, preferences and questions are welcomed.

Disabled Students Program and Special Accommodations. Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU (accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; 847-467-5530) and provide professors with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential.

Email Policy. If you email me during the week, I will do my best to get back to you within 24 hours, except on weekends or administrative holidays.

Late Assignments Policy. Except under unusual circumstances, late assignments will be marked down. Late final papers may not even be accepted at all, if they arrive too late for me to grade them. If you know *ahead of time* that there is going to be a problem with the assignment dates, you should let me know ahead of time, but *no* retroactive excuses will be accepted. Please compare deadlines for assignments from this course with those of your other classes to anticipate significant conflict, for example if you have an exam the same day your midterm is due. I will arrange to accept late assignments in cases of medical or personal emergency. If you have a separate scheduling conflict with assignments from another class, important events, etc. you should request an extension as soon as possible [at least 7 days prior to assignment due date].

Social Media and Copyright. This syllabus and all PowerPoint presentations for this course are copyright 2024 by Santiago Molina. Please do not post any materials related to the course on the internet without the permission of the instructor. This includes sites such as "Course Hero." Students are also prohibited from selling (or being paid for taking) notes during this course to or by any person or commercial firm without the express written permission of Santiago Molina. As per NU policy, no audio or video recordings of class are permitted except if authorized by ANU accommodations.

Health, Wellbeing and Mental Health. This is just a class. Please prioritize your wellbeing. This means, at a very baseline, sleeping and eating are more important than keeping up with the class.

Students can find useful resources for safety and security, academic support, and mental and physical health and wellbeing at the NUhelp website (<https://www.northwestern.edu/nuhelp/>) and

on the NUhelp app (<https://www.northwestern.edu/nuhelp/get-help/nuhelp-app-features.html>). Please make use and explore the wealth of support available to you through <https://www.northwestern.edu/wellness/>.

The course will abide by Northwestern's current public health and safety guidelines as they change. If you show any COVID-19 symptoms please stay home, get tested, and be mindful of your community. Please email me and I will do my best to accommodate by providing slides and lecture notes. Masks are not required, but encouraged during class.

IV. SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

A. SOCIETY, IDENTITY, AND HEALTH

Week 1

Tuesday September 24th: Introduction to the class.

Please read through the syllabus up to the schedule of readings. No discussion sections this week.

Thursday September 26th: The Social Model of Pathology (21 pages)

Link, B. G., & Phelan, J. (1995). Social conditions as fundamental causes of disease. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 80-94.

Shakespeare, T. (2006). The social model of disability. *The disability studies reader*, 2, 197-204.

Week 2

Tuesday October 1st: Disability and the Normal Body (32 pages)

Wilson J. (2002) Ch.5 (Re)Writing the Genetic Body-Text Disability, Textuality, and the Human Genome Project, in Davis, L. ed. *The Disability Studies Reader*, Routledge: NY, 78-87.

Frederick, A. (2017). Risky Mothers and the Normalcy Project: Women with Disabilities Negotiate Scientific Motherhood. *Gender & Society*, 31(1), 74-95.

Thursday October 3rd: Biomedicine and Human Difference (27 pages)

Duster, T. (2015). A post-genomic surprise. The molecular reinscription of race in science, law and medicine. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 66(1), 1-27.

Week 3

Tuesday October 8th: Racialized Bodies and the Production of Medical Knowledge (10 pages)

Vyas, D. A., Eisenstein, L. G., & Jones, D. S. (2020). "Hidden in plain sight—reconsidering the use of race correction in clinical algorithms." *New England Journal of*

Medicine, 383(9), 874-882.

Lewis, A. C., et. al. (2022). Getting genetic ancestry right for science and society. *Science*, 376(6590), 250-252.

Take-home essay assignment discussed in class

Thursday October 10th: Medicalization and Biomedicalization (37 pages)

Conrad, P. (2005). The shifting engines of medicalization. *Journal of health and social behavior*, 46(1), 3-14.

Clarke, A. E., & Shim, J. (2011). "Medicalization and biomedicalization revisited: technoscience and transformations of health, illness and American medicine." In *Handbook of the sociology of health, illness, and healing*, Edited by Pescosolido, B.A., Martin, J.K., McLeod, J.D., and Rogers, A. Springer New York, NY. 173-199.

Week 4

Tuesday October 15th: Gender and Embodiment (52 pages)

Lorde, A. (2020). "Introduction" and "Chapter 2. Breast Cancer: A Black Lesbian Feminist Experience," in *The Cancer Journals*. Penguin. 12-20 and 27-52.

Jain, S. L. (2013). "Chapter 3. Cancer Butch: A trip up the fast lane," in *Malignant: How Cancer Becomes Us*. Univ of California Press. 67-87

Thursday October 17th: *Quiz I.* Measurement

Gordon, A. and Hobbes, M. (Hosts). (2021, Aug 3rd) "The Body Mass Index" [Audio podcast episode] *Maintenance Phase* (Audio and transcript available online: https://www.listennotes.com/podcasts/maintenance-phase/the-body-mass-index-Bh_iPpSHIxA/)

Boero, N. (2007). All the news that's fat to print: The American "obesity epidemic" and the media. *Qualitative Sociology*, 30, 41-60.

Take Home Essay I due Sunday October 20th by 11:59pm on Canvas

Week 5

B. THE POLITICS OF CARE

Tuesday October 22nd: Social Movements and Community Care-1 (39 pages)

Epstein, Steven. 2000. "Democracy, Expertise, and AIDS Treatment Activism." in *Science, Technology, and Democracy*, edited by D. Kleinman. Albany: State University of New York Press. 15- 32.

Klawiter, Maren. (1999) "Racing for the Cure, Walking Women, and Toxic Touring: Mapping Cultures of Action within the Bay Area Terrain of Breast Cancer." *Social Problems* 46 (1): 104-126

Thursday October 24th: Social Movements and Community Care-2 (37 pages)

Nelson, A. (2011). "Ch.4 Spin Doctors: The Politics of Sickle Cell Anemia," in *Body and soul: The Black Panther Party and the fight against medical discrimination*. U of Minnesota Press. 115-152.

Week 6Thursday October 31st: Guest Lecture: Clay Davis, Biohackers and DIY Biologists

Talbot, M. (2020) The Rogue Experiments. *The New Yorker*.

Tuesday October 29th: *Quiz II* Medical Apartheid

Washington, H. A. (2006). "Ch. 8 The Black Stork," pp. 216-246 in *Medical apartheid: The dark history of medical experimentation on Black Americans from colonial times to the present*. Doubleday Books.

Hassan (2024) "Israel's war on Gaza is a health justice issue, too," in *Al Jazeera* (available online: <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/3/1/the-war-on-gaza-is-a-health-justice-issue-too>Links to an external site.)

C. MEDICINE AND CAPITALISM

Week 7Tuesday November 5th: Wellness and American Health (41 pages)

Kirkland, A. (2014). Critical perspectives on wellness. *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law*, 39(5), 971-988.

Thursday November 7th: Neoliberal Medicine (65 pages)

Schneider, Eric C., and David Squires. 2017. "From Last to First: Could the U.S. Health Care System Become the Best in the World?" *New England Journal of Medicine*. 377: 901-904.

Belluz, J. and Buissionarie, M. (2019) "How McKinsey infiltrated the world of global public health." *Vox* (Available in Canvas and at <https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2019/12/13/21004456/bill-gates-mck-insey-global-public-health-bcg>.)

Week 8

Tuesday November 12th: Pharmaceutical-Industrial Complex (33 pages)

Sismondo, S. (2007). "Ghost management: how much of the medical literature is shaped behind the scenes by the pharmaceutical industry?" *PLoS Medicine*, 4(9), e286. 1429-1432.

Dumit, Joseph. 2012. Chapter 2: Pharmaceutical Witnessing and Direct-to-Consumer Advertising, in *Drugs for Life: How Pharmaceutical Companies Define Our Health*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press., 55-85

Take-Home Essay II posted

Thursday November 14th: Labor and Economization of Healthcare (45 pages)

Livne, R. (2014). Economies of dying: The moralization of economic scarcity in US hospice care. *American Sociological Review*, 79(5), 888-911.

Seim, J. (2020). "Introduction," *Bandage, sort, and bustle: Ambulance crews on the front lines of urban suffering*. Univ of California Press. pp. 1-22.

Week 9

Tuesday November 19th: The Value of Human Tissue (18 pages)

Dobbs, Davis (2018) "What Is Your DNA Worth?" in *Beyond Bioethics*, Editors Marcy Darnofsky and Osagie Obasogie, University of California Press. 245-250

Deomampo, D. (2019). Racialized commodities: Race and value in human egg donation. *Medical Anthropology*, 38(7), 620-633.

Thursday November 21st: *Quiz III* Open for overflow/rescheduling.

Week 10

Tuesday November 27th: Course Review

Take Home Essay II Due: December 10th 11:50pm