The History of Public Health

History 506: 322
Professor Julie Livingston
M/W 2:50-4:10
Hardenbergh Hall Room A7

Contact Information
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Office Hours: Wednesdays 1:00-2:30 (or by appointment)

Course Description
This course surveys the modern history of attempts to protect the health of human populations. We will explore both shifting patterns of disease and illness, and the emergence and growth of public health as a domain of expert knowledge and policy. Students will learn to place key themes in public health in historical perspective. These themes include: the “epidemiological transition”; the tension between civil liberties and the public’s health; urbanization; epidemics; vaccination and the law; hygiene and morality; eugenics, the political economy of health and disease; the development of epidemiology and statistical modes of enquiry; the relationship between medicine and public health. The course will focus mainly on the U.S. and Western Europe.

The current threats posed by environmental toxins as well the emergence of new deadly diseases HIV/AIDS and the rising rates of obesity and diabetes have combined with our interest in bodily culture to pushed public health to the forefront of our national political agenda and our public consciousness. Yet, certain skills and knowledge are required for the public to think critically and participate fully in the ongoing dialogues about the role of science and the state in providing for our collective physical well-being. The course is intended to introduce students to some of the major historical forces that determine our experiences of health, and to remind us that certain historical transformations have shaped those systems, imbuing them with particular features in the process. Students will learn to read, analyze, and question basic epidemiological data (such as that which regularly appears in our newspapers). They will also be asked to think critically about certain legal frameworks in America and elsewhere that determine the state’s power to intervene in the bodies and lives of individuals. They will think about epidemic disease and its social, political, and biological consequences. Lastly we will think about how the epidemiological transition has affected public health and the paradigm of safety and risk management. Classes will consist of a mixture of lecture and discussion.

Course Requirements:

Midterm exam: 30% (identification of terms and essay)
Two essays: 40% (20% each)
Class Participation: 30%

Class participation involves showing up prepared and contributing meaningfully to the discussion. Attendance is important, but not adequate in and of itself. Each student is allowed one unexcused absence no questions asked. I may require documentation to excuse an absence, so you will need to check with me on a case-by-case basis. Unexcused absences after the initial one will be reflected in a lowering of your final grade. Those who are habitually late for class will receive a similar reduction in their grade.

The essays (5-7 pages each) will be based on class readings and discussions. You will not use ANY outside sources for your essays. There are no reading assignments for the dates the essays are due to allow you to focus on your writing. Deadlines are FIRM. Late papers will be marked down one step (i.e. an A becomes an A-) for each day they are late. Failure to hand in a paper altogether will result in a grade of zero. Papers are due at the start of class. Those handed in later in the day will be considered a day late, and thus subject to a penalty. Students may submit late papers through Sakai.

This is a 300 level class, and it requires a fair amount of reading and writing. Please plan accordingly. You will read an average of 100 pages per week. You are expected to complete the assigned reading BEFORE class and to come to class with the readings in hand. Much of class discussion will be based on the readings. Those who are habitually unprepared for class (regardless of their attendance record) will find this fact reflected in the class participation portion of their grade.

Plagiarism (theft, borrowing, or purchase of another’s words and ideas without attribution) is serious business and will not be tolerated in this class. Students caught plagiarizing will at minimum receive an F for that project without exception. Repeat or major offenders will fail the course and be forwarded to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action. Ignorance will not be accepted at an excuse in cases of violation. You must understand clearly what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. If you need more information you should consult The Writing Program’s excellent student-friendly explanation of plagiarism at http://wp.rutgers.edu/courses/201/plagiarism_policy/

Disability Accommodation:
Students requesting accommodation must first contact the Office of Disability Services http://disabilityservices.rutgers.edu/request.html who will determine eligibility. Please bring any Letters of Accommodation to my attention.

Topics and Readings

Jan 22: Introduction
Jan 27: What is Public Health?

Charles Rosenberg, “Explaining Epidemics”, in *Explaining Epidemics*, pp. 278-318


Jan 29: Plague in the Middle Ages and the Origins of Modern Public Health


Feb 3: Medical Police, Poverty and State versus Voluntarism


Feb 5: Miasmatism, Trade, and Port City Politics


Feb 10: The Professionalization of Public Health in Europe


Feb 12: Vaccination and Resistance


Feb 17  Shoe leather epidemiology and epidemic disease.

Peter Panum, “Observations Made During the Epidemic of Measles on Faroe Islands in the Year 1846”, in *The Challenge of Epidemiology*, pp. 37-41


Feb 19: The New Public Health in America


Henry Sigerist, “Civilization Against Disease,” [1940], in *Civilization and Disease*, pp. 229-244.

Feb 24: Immigration, Ethnicity, and American Urban Space


Feb 26  **Midterm exam**


Elizabeth Blackmar, “Accountability for Public Health: Regulating the Housing Market in Nineteenth Century New York City,” *Hives of Sickness*, pp. 42-64.

March 5: Occupational Health


March 10: Eugenics as Public Health


March 12: McKeown and his critics

Thomas McKeown, *The Role of Medicine: Dream, Mirage, or Nemesis?* Pp. 45-65


Colgrove J. The McKeown thesis: a historical controversy and its enduring


View in class *Unnatural causes: is inequality making us sick?* Episode 1

March 17-19  NO CLASS SPRING BREAK

March 24: Race, Racism, and the U.S. Public Health Service: The Tuskegee Syphilis Study


Letter from Dr Irwin Schatz to Dr Donald Rockwell, Henry Ford Hospital, Detroit, Michigan, June 11, 1965.

**Paper topic distributed**

March 26: Detention, Quarantine, and the Law


March 31: Heart Disease, Cancer, and the Epidemiological Transition


April 2: **Paper due**

View film in class La Operacion

April 7: The Business of Health


April 9: AIDS in America – Public Health Activism Meets a Conservative State


April 14: Health Disparities


Nancy Krieger, “Discrimination and Health”, in L.F. Berkman and I. Kawachi eds. Social Epidemiology, pp.36-37


In Class Film Episode 2: When the Bough Breaks (how race get “under the skin”) 29 minutes

April 16 Clean Air/Clean Water

In Class Film – Homo Toxicus

April 21: Personal Responsibility/Corporate Responsibility/State Responsibility?


April 23: Emergency


Paper topic distributed
April 28: The Pharmaceuticalization of Public Health


April 30: Vaccination Revisited


Frontline: The Vaccine Wars (in class film)

May 5: Wrap Up/ Review

**Paper due**