Course Description:
What is socioeconomic status? What does it have to do with our health? This topics course addresses these questions from biopsychological perspective. In doing so, an emphasis will be placed on specific aspects of physical health and health behaviors for which there are known socioeconomic disparities. By the end of the course, students will have a deeper understanding of how biological and health psychologists (1) define and measure socioeconomic status, (2) conceptualize health disparities, and (3) investigate the complex factors associated with socioeconomic health disparities. Students will also learn about intervention and policy approaches aimed at reducing socioeconomic health disparities across the lifespan. Class meetings will consist of discussions of primary readings from the literature. These discussions will be facilitated by students and the instructor. Reaction papers to reading assignments and a final term paper are required.

Pre-requisites:
Introduction to Psychology and Research Methods are required (PSY 0010 or 0012 or 0015 or 0200) and (PSY 0032 or 0035 or 1031). Introduction to Neuroscience or Biopsychology and Health Psychology are preferred.

Course Objective:
This course will introduce you to the primary research literature on health disparities, emphasizing studies of disparities in health that are patterned by socioeconomic status. By the end of the course, you will have an advanced working knowledge of key research on the main questions in this area, including major research methodologies and theories that have a biological emphasis. As a result of this knowledge, you will be able to write a term paper that expresses your ability to synthesize and critique existing concepts and research in the health disparities literature and proposes to take work in this area in new directions.

Course Format:
For most weeks throughout the semester, I will provide an interactive- and discussion-based overview of a particular topic on socioeconomic health disparities. This overview will typically happen on Tuesdays, and it will often rely on material from the course textbook and supplementary materials from other sources (see schedule). My overview is meant to ensure that everyone has the basic background for a subsequent discussion of a research article in the same week. The research article discussions will typically occur on Thursdays of each week, and the majority of these discussions will be led by students (see schedule).

You will need to bring your book to class, specifically on those days when we will be discussing assigned chapters. There are figures and tables in each chapter that we will work through as a group. You must also bring a copy (electronic or printed) of the assigned journal article for the student led discussions.
It is **CRITICAL** that you do the reading **before class**. If not, you will not get much out of this class. Also, you will be evaluated on the basis of (1) your active participation in discussions; (2) your skill in presenting, leading, and moderating discussions of research articles; (3) the quality of your questions posted on courseweb for in-class discussions; and (4) the quality of your reaction papers and a final term paper.

Required Text:
- Health Inequality, Author: Bartly, Publisher: Wiley, Year Published: 04, Price: 69.95 (new). ISBN: 9780745627793.

**Important Supplementary Resources:**
- The MacArthur Research Network on Socioeconomic Status and Health [http://www.macses.ucsf.edu/](http://www.macses.ucsf.edu/)
- Unnatural Causes: An online collection of health inequity resources linked to a documentary series we will view and react to in class [http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/](http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/)
- Race, Ethnicity, and Health: A Public Health Reader, 2nd Edition, Thomas A. LaVeist (Editor), Lydia A. Isaac (Editor), 2012.

**Class Requirements and Grading:**

1. **Attendance, reading, and active class participation (10 points):**
   Students are expected to read assigned readings (e.g., chapters and research articles) **before** each class, and to contribute to discussions by speaking up, asking questions, and making comments on a regular basis. Attendance includes arriving to class on time and staying until the official end time. Thus, these points are based on being in class, and when in class actively **participating in** and **contributing to** class discussions. Two of these points will come from posting your idea for your final paper on CourseWeb and providing some feedback to a classmate’s idea, too. Instructions for this will be given later in the semester.

   **Personal experience is fine, but thoughts and ideas should be from reading or empirical.**

2. **Posting discussion questions (15 points):**
   To ensure adequate class preparation, **all students** must post at least one discussion question on **each** assigned research article on the CourseWeb site’s discussion board no later than 9AM on the day of our class meeting (see course schedule below). In the event that CourseWeb is **inaccessible**, the questions should be emailed to me so that I can share them with the class. Students moderating a discussion are not required to post questions about the articles they will discuss. The questions should be **theoretical** or **integrative** in nature (i.e., they may point out a confound or problem with the methods of the study, a weakness or issue with the authors interpretations of their results, results that contradict ideas or findings presented in other readings or the course text, and even new ideas for future research on the topic under consideration, etc.). Questions are not to be about clarification (e.g., “I don’t understand what the authors mean by the income-to-needs ratio. Can you please explain this?”), although clarification questions are welcome during the class meetings. These questions will generally form the basis of our in-class discussions. To help you develop your skills in asking questions, I will provide you with feedback on your questions in the beginning of the semester.

3. **Moderating discussion (25 points):**
   All students are expected to moderate one in-class discussion of a research article during the semester. **Moderators** should prepare by reading the assigned articles thoroughly and by reading all posted questions. It
will also help if moderators read additional materials (e.g., some of the web sites listed above in the syllabus, other papers cited in the article under discussion, and relevant papers cited in the text or discussed by the instructor). Moderators are expected to keep the discussion going until the end of the class period. Depending on the class size, student led discussions can be done in teams or groups that I will form. Assignment dates for student-led discussions will be made in the first week of class. Specifically, I will ask students to rank order all of the articles in terms of interest level, and then based on these rankings across students, I will form discussion teams as necessary. When students present articles in teams, I will pay close attention to whether team members are sharing responsibilities equally.

When moderating a discussion of a research article, it is your job to answer these questions for your classmates:

1. What research questions are being addressed, and what is the importance of this study? Here, links can be made to the chapter readings each week.
2. Who are the subjects, and what is the design of the study?
3. What methods are used and what is being measured, manipulated, compared, or correlated?
4. What are the main findings?
5. What are the take home messages, and what can we conclude from the study?
6. What are the strengths of this study?
7. What next steps should researchers take in this area (i.e., what are the next studies that should be done?)

After addressing the questions above, it is then the students’ job to offer a constructive critique of the work, focusing on the issues below. It is at this point where we should begin to consider and incorporate the questions posed on CourseWeb from fellow students:

1. Are the study’s questions asked in the best possible way, or are there other ways in which the study’s questions could have been better framed?
2. Is the study designed/executed in a way that enables the questions to be addressed? What are alternative ways this study could have been designed?
3. Were different constructs (e.g., socioeconomic status, ethnicity, etc.) measured in the best possible way? If not, then what could have been done differently?
4. Are the measures consistent or different with what other researchers in the field have done? And what are the implications of these similarities or differences in measurement approach? Here, it may be helpful to use the text for guidance about other research.
5. How well do the findings answer the research questions? To what extent do they raise new questions?
6. What could be done to improve the study and push the area of research forward?

Basically, your job here is to be a critic, and tell us everything that you think is wrong with the study. So, take a skeptical stance towards anything you read, and challenge your classmates to justify the actions taken in the study being presented.

In your presentations, you may find it helpful to refer to specific figures and tables in the article to explain results. You may find it helpful to create a handout, outline, or very short PowerPoint presentation answering the questions above or using them as an organizational framework. These could be shared with the class.

Note that asking and addressing the questions above is meant to help develop your skills in critically and creatively evaluating the evidence and basis for researchers’ claims and beliefs, not only in this field but in others as well. Developing these skills may also help you to better appreciate and think about the basis of your own views and beliefs about different topics. In short, these are important skills that will extend to situations beyond this classroom and your college experience.
4. Reaction papers (20 points):
All students are expected to write 2 reaction papers during the semester, each worth 10 points.

Reaction Paper 1: This paper must be based on a particular week’s readings as a whole (i.e., the readings done on a Tuesday and Thursday for a given week – in other words a chapter and an article in most cases). Here, it is your choice as to which particular week’s readings you will write about and react to. This reaction paper should clearly describe your overall evaluation of the area of research or ideas we considered in that week, as understood from the readings. You might offer your disagreements with an author’s conceptual framework, describe methodological weaknesses that run through the studies, suggest new directions for research in the area, or even describe a new model for thinking about the issues. You should also think about comparing results and concepts across papers from other weeks as they relate to what we considered in a given week, noticing where there are differences or similarities, and offering your explanations for your observations and comparisons. The idea here is to offer a critical evaluation of what you’ve read, and make some suggestions about how to push the field forward. You can certainly base your reaction paper on the readings done during the week in which you moderated a discussion. Making clear connections between the ideas in the chapters and the work in articles is very important.

These reaction papers are required to be limited to no more than 3 pages, with double-spacing. Any papers longer than than this will not be accepted under any circumstances. The last possible date to turn in Reaction Paper 1 on time is 11/25/2014. After that date, the paper will be considered late and points will be deducted as described below.

Reaction Paper 2: This paper must be written in response to the viewing of the Unnatural Causes Documentary Series. We will be watching 3 individual episodes from this series. For each episode, you will be required to answer 1 comprehension question and 1 discussion question from the online guide that accompanies each episode. The links to these guides are provided in the schedule below.

Reaction paper 2 is required to be limited to no more than 3 pages, with double-spacing. You should aim to allocate 1 page’s worth of writing to 1 episode (e.g., answer a comprehension and a discussion question in one page for each individual episode). Any papers longer than than 3 pages will not be accepted under any circumstances. Reaction Paper 2 is due on 10/07/2014.

If you miss one or both classes when we view the videos, you may check them out or watch them in the library and provide your reaction paper later. You can even complete your viewing and turn in Reaction Paper 2 earlier than the scheduled viewing! This would be great planning ahead if you know you’re going to have exams or travel around that time!

For all reaction papers, I will automatically deduct 5 points if they are late, regardless of the reason and regardless of when they are turned in during the semester. However, I will not accept any reaction papers after December 5th, 2014.

5. Final term paper (30 points):
Your final term paper will consist of two major parts: a) a brief review of the literature on a topic of your choice on socioeconomic status and a particular aspect of physical health or a particular disease (e.g., asthma, stroke, coronary heart disease, diabetes, obesity, etc.); and b) a research proposal for a new study that takes the existing research in a new direction. This paper should reflect an integration of what you have learned over the course of the semester.
You may use Reaction Paper 1 as the basis of your review of the literature under the following conditions. (1) it must be revised so as to incorporate whatever feedback that I am able to provide to you on Reaction Paper 1 (assuming that you turn it in early enough for me to provide you with feedback). And (2) it must incorporate new references that are not included in Reaction Paper 1. Essentially, points will be deducted if you simply copy and paste (e.g., duplicate) Reaction Paper 1 as your literature review.

Define SES
Apply a model, multiple models, or integration of models
Define key terms
Make sure to be specific
Make sure the topic is relevant to disparities
Do not assume that I know what stress is, what measures are (cort, ll6), or how these are relevant to outcome or IV.
Build empirical support for ideas (example).

The paper should be no more than 12 pages, double spaced, including references (the bibliography). Additional instructions will be provided later in the semester.

The final paper is due on December 5th. No extensions will be granted for any reason.

Plagiarism will not be tolerated (see the Academic Integrity Policy at the bottom of the syllabus). Papers that show little independent thought, either due to extremely heavy use of direct quotes or extreme similarity to any other document will receive very low grades. Please do not use a paper that you wrote for another class in this one. If it becomes clear that you have done this, it will adversely affect your grade. In some cases, I may use online tools to evaluate potential cases of plagerism.

6. Extra credit options (up to 5 points):

Go see a talk! Throughout the semester, there will be lectures on campus that are relevant to what we cover in class. I will make announcements about these in class and on course web when possible. Also, if you hear about a lecture that you think may be relevant for the class, please let me know so that I can make an announcement. The lecture must be about physical health or a topic relevant to social disparities. If you attend a lecture during the semester, and you can make a connection to a topic we cover in class, then I will assign up to one point of extra credit to you if you provide me with a hard copy of the lecture’s announcement and email me summary of what the lecture was about – emphasizing how you think it relates to a topic covered in class. In other words, answer these questions: what was the lecture about? Why was it interesting to you? What new information did you learn? Were you skeptical about anything that was presented? If you were, why were you? Was there anything in the lecture that related to what we’re talking about in class? If so what was it? How exactly did it relate to a class topic or reading? Did anything in the lecture change the way you thought about something? If so, how so? The most relevant lecture announcements will likely be posted on the web sites for the African Studies Program, Department of Psychology, Department of Sociology, Center for Health Equity, Graduate School of Public Health, and the Department of Psychiatry. Please check the events and calendar links on these sites to learn about lectures. Up to one point of extra credit can be awarded for each lecture attended and summarized.

Write about a study! Another way to earn extra credit is to write a summary of a research article that is cited in your textbook or in a research article we discuss in class. For these, it is acceptable to provide a general description of the article by answering the questions above that are meant to help moderate the in-class discussions. Up to one point of extra credit can be awarded for each article summarized. Doing this sort of activity will help with your final term paper!
Write a letter to somebody! A final way to earn extra credit over the semester is by writing letters to people who are important to you (e.g., a former teacher, coach, or mentor, a friend, your boyfriend/girlfriend, or a relative) describing the way that a topic from class is relevant to this person. If you’d like, you can also write a letter to someone important to you explaining the way a topic is relevant to your own life. You can choose any topic from the class material. Your letters should be in essay form, and they should be carefully edited and spell-checked. Each letter that you write will be worth 1 point.

Extra credit: specific instructions: Again, all of these extra credit opportunities are optional. However, the more you write, the better your grade will be! I will not share templates or examples for any of these, because I want this work to be original and your own. Be creative. Have fun with this!

For your extra credit, please email your writing to biopsych@pitt.edu

Please give an appropriate title in the Subject Line (e.g., Amanda Smith: Extra Credit #1, Amanda Smith: Extra Credit #2, etc.)

Extra credit will not be accepted after December 5th, when the final term paper is due.

USING TURNITIN.COM

We will be using turnitin.com for Reaction Papers and Final Papers. You may need to create an account if you don’t have one. Once you have an account, sign up for this class:

Class ID: 8296966
Password: health2014

You must use your Pitt email address to create your turnitin.com account. Otherwise, I can’t link you with this specific class.

(e.g., For each assignment, you have to give it a descriptive name: e.g., Reaction Paper 1)

Additional guidelines: Your work must be completed independently. Your assignments will be checked against other assignments from this class and other existing materials to guard against plagiarism, so be sure that your work is entirely original and your own. If you wish, you may check your “originality report” to see that your work is not seen to overlap with that of others (a low % overlap indicates unique work). Please refer to the cheating and plagiarism policy in the syllabus for more information. **This is also very important: When you are directly referring to or talking about material from other sources, be sure to cite! Avoid using quotations or direct quotes. Use your own words.**
Grading Scale:

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Auditing this course:
To maintain a consistent class environment, unofficial audits of this course will not be allowed, and individuals who wish to audit this course formally will be expected to attend at least ¾ of the class meetings (at least 10), and to complete the above-stated participation, question posting, and moderation requirements. Auditors will not be expected to write reaction papers or term papers, but may do so if they wish.

Disabilities:
If you have a disability that requires special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, you need to notify both the instructor and the Disability Resources and Services no later than the 2nd week of the term. You may be asked to provide documentation of your disability to determine the appropriateness of accommodations. To notify Disability Resources and Services, call 648-7890 (Voice or TTD) to schedule an appointment. The Office is located in 140 William Pitt Union.

Academic Integrity:
Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh’s Policy on Academic Integrity. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy.

If you are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me. It is your responsibility to determine this prior to turning in drafts or papers. All violations of academic integrity in this course, including plagiarism, will minimally result in having violation of academic integrity paperwork filed with your academic dean.

Statement on Classroom Recording:
To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student’s own private use.
Class schedule

Week 1: What do we mean by socioeconomic health disparities?

08/26/2014

• Class overview, course mechanics, syllabus review, and homework assignment.

08/28/2014

• Chapter 1 in Bartley (pp. 1-21)

Week 2: How do we measure socioeconomic status and it’s relationship to health?

09/02/2014

• Chapter 2 in Bartley
• Discussion of demographics handout from First Class (try to complete before class)

09/04/2014

• Class discussion of the following article, led by Gianaros:
• Post questions on CourseWeb by 9am, 09/04
• Finalize groups and assignments for student-led discussions in class.

Week 3: Pathways, Part 1: Behavioral factors

09/09/2014

• Chapter 4 in Bartley
• Reaching for a healthier life, pp. 23-26 (includes Fact 4: Personal Behaviors Matter). Available online, see above.

09/11/2014

• Class discussion of the following article, student led.
• Post questions by 9am, 09/11
Week 4: Pathways, Part 2: Psychosocial factors

09/16/2014

- Chapter 5 in Bartley
- Reaching for a healthier life, pp. 34-37 (includes Fact 7: Stress Matters). Available online, see above.

09/18/2014

- *Class discussion of the following article, student led.*
- *Post questions by 9am, 09/18*

Week 5: Pathways, Part 3: Material and Environmental factors

09/23/2014

- Chapter 6 in Bartley

09/25/2014

- *Class discussion of the following article, student led.*
- *Post questions by 9am, 09/25*

Week 6: Unnatural Causes Documentary Series and Reaction Papers

09/30/2014

- In Sickness and In Wealth, How does the distribution of power, wealth and resources shape opportunities for health?
- Link to discussion guide containing comprehension and discussion questions to choose from for your reaction papers: http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/assets/uploads/file/UC_DiscussionGuide_1.pdf

10/02/2014

- Place Matters, Why is your street address such a strong predictor of your health?
- Link to discussion guide containing comprehension and discussion questions to choose from for your reaction papers: http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/assets/uploads/file/UC_DiscussionGuide_5.pdf
• Not Just a Paycheck, Why do layoffs take such a huge toll in Michigan but cause hardly a ripple in Sweden?

**Week 7: Pathways, Part 4: Lifcourse effects**

10/07/2014

• Chapter 7 in Bartley
• Reaction Paper 2 (based on documentaries) is due in class

10/09/2014

• *Class discussion of the following article, student led.*
• *Post questions by 9am, 10/09*

**Week 8: Pathways, Part 5: Teasing apart cause, effect, and the role of stress ...**

10/14/2014

• Fall recess, class cancelled.

10/16/2014

• *Class discussion of the following article, student led.*
• *Post questions by 9am, 10/16*

**Week 9: Neighborhoods and larger social environments**

10/21/2014

• Chapter 8 in Bartley
• Reaching for a healthier life, pp. 16-18 (includes Fact 2: Neighborhoods Matter). Available online, see above.

10/23/2014

• *Class discussion of the following article, student led.*
• *Post questions by 9am, 10/23*
Week 10: Gender

10/28/2014

• Chapter 9 in Bartley

10/30/2014

• Class discussion of the following article, student led.
• Post questions by 9am, 10/30

Week 11: Race and ethnicity, Part 1

11/04/2014

• Chapter 10 in Bartley
• Reaching for a healthier life, pp. 30-33 (includes Fact 6: Race Matters). Available online, see above.
• Viewing and discussion of documentary: When the Bough Breaks, Can racism become embedded in the body and affect birth outcomes?

11/06/2014

• Viewing of documentary: Bad Sugar, What are the connections between diabetes, oppression, and empowerment in two Native American communities?

Week 12: Race and ethnicity, Part 2

11/11/2014

• Class discussion of the following article, student led.
• Post questions by 9am, 11/11

11/13/2014

• Class discussion of the following article, student led.
• Post questions by 9am, 11/13
Week 13: Interventions and social policy

11/18/2014

- Chapter 11 in Bartley
- Reaching for a healthier life, pp. 44-50 (includes Social Policy). Available online, see above.

11/21/2014

- *Class discussion of the following article, student led.*
- *Post questions by 9am, 11/21*

Week 14: Synthesis and integration

11/25/2014

- Class cancelled – BUT ...
- Post brief description of your final paper ideas on CourseWeb, and provide a comment or question on a classmate’s idea (worth 2 points total).
- *Reaction Paper 1 final deadline.*

11/27/2014

- Thanksgiving recess.

Week 15: Is it all just relative?

12/02/2014

- *Class discussion of the following article, student led.*
- *Post questions by 9am, 12/02*

12/04/2014

- *Class discussion of the following article, student led.*
- *Post questions by 9am, 12/04*

12/05/2014

- Final paper due by 12AM
- Final deadline for extra credit assignments – 12AM (by email to biopsych@pitt.edu)