SPPH 527
Introduction to the Determinants of Health
UBC School of Population and Public Health
Wednesdays, 9am – Noon, School of Population & Public Health (Room B104)

NOTE: The course outline and readings are in draft and are subject to change.

Course Description
It is now generally accepted that a combination of personal, social and economic factors influence health status of individuals as well as populations. There is, however, still a great deal of debate about what the specific or most important influences are, and the mechanisms or pathways by which health is either damaged or promoted, and whether and how these factors can be influenced by public policy or other interventions. This course will provide an introduction to some of the foundational thinking that has given rise to the concept of population health and an overview of the current state of research related to the social determinants of health.

Purpose and Objectives: By the end of this course, students will be able to:

• Understand philosophical and theoretical reasons why social determinants are linked to population health
• Identify the key social determinants of health and a selection of frameworks that link these to the population’s health
• Describe some of the pathways through which those determinants affect population-level health and social well-being
• Articulate case examples of policy initiatives and programs either proposed or currently in place to address issues in population health

Instructors:
Jean Shoveller, PhD, Professor (School of Population and Public Health), Email: jean.shoveller@ubc.ca Office Hours: By appointment
Travis Salway, PhD, Post-Doctoral Fellow (School of Population and Public Health), Email: travis.salway@bccdc.ca Office Hours: By appointment

Class Time & Location: Wednesdays, 9am – noon; SPPH B104 (2206 East Mall).
Class will start promptly at 9am, and students are expected to attend (except under extenuating circumstances) and to arrive on time.

Evaluation
• Weekly short quiz on readings (each week when readings are assigned): 30%
• Mid-term examination (in-class, week 7, 18 Oct): 30%
• Policy briefing paper (due Friday, 1 Dec by midnight Pacific time): 40%

NOTE: You must provide via email the topic for your policy brief and 3 citations that you will use in your policy brief, with a 2-3 sentence explanation of the relevance of each citation. Emails due to Travis and Jeannie by midnight of 27th September.
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IMPORTANT

Typically, no late assignments will be accepted. Extensions of the due date for the written assignments will be considered pending extenuating circumstances. Assignments submitted later than the due date will be penalized 10% of the possible grade for each day past due. Each written assignment is due to be emailed to both of the course instructors on time and on the designated due date.

Students are expected to know what constitutes plagiarism, that plagiarism is a form of academic misconduct, and that such misconduct is subject to penalty. Please review the Student Discipline section of the UBC Calendar (available on on-line at www.ubc.ca).
Class Schedule

Week 1 (September 6) – Coordinators: Jean Shoveller & Travis Salway

We begin with an overview lecture on the origins of population health and social determinants. Here, we introduce the notion of the social gradient and structural determinants of health. We also introduce the place that health care systems have within current structures and their potential to function as one, but not the sole, determinant of health. During this class, we also will review the course outline and administrative issues.

Optional readings:

- Evans RG and Stoddart GL. Producing Health, Consuming Health Care. Social Science and Medicine 1990; 31(12):1247-63. (This is Chapter 2 - Why are some people healthy and others not?)

Week 2 (September 13) – Coordinators: Jean Shoveller & Travis Salway

Introduction to some foundational ideas associated with linking the social world to health outcomes at a population level (Geoffrey Rose). We will also show excerpts from the film “Unnatural Causes”.

Readings:


Optional readings:


Week 3 (September 20) – Coordinators: Jean Shoveller & Travis Salway

This class is an introduction to the importance of understanding measurement of inequalities, including absolute and relative inequalities, and their implications for understanding, evaluating and responding to inequalities in health.

Readings:

Week 4 (September 27) – Coordinators: Jean Shoveller & Travis Salway

We will discuss how interventions can sometimes (un)intentionally contribute to increased inequalities (i.e., the Inequality Paradox). During this class, we also will begin to overview the characterization of population-health interventions, featuring examples from within and beyond the health sector.

Readings:


Optional Readings:


Week 5 (October 4) – Coordinators: Jean Shoveller & Travis Salway, with Invited Guest Danya Fast

This class will concentrate on place and its links with population health.

Readings:


Supplementary Readings:


Week 6 (October 11) – Coordinators: Jean Shoveller & Travis Salway

During this class, we will continue to examine population-health interventions in more depth. We also will review the concept of proportionate universality.

Readings:

  [http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/publications/proportionate_universality_brief__final.pdf](http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/publications/proportionate_universality_brief__final.pdf)

Week 7 (October 18) – Coordinators: Jean Shoveller & Travis Salway

Midterm Exam: Arrive at 0900hrs! The exam will begin promptly at 0915hrs (no one arriving after 9:15 will be admitted). The midterm will take approximately 2 hours to complete.
Week 8 (October 25) – Coordinators: Jean Shoveller & Travis Salway, with Invited Guest Andrea Krüsi

The class will expand upon our discussion regarding interventions to examine how structural interventions (e.g., legal structures) can sometimes (un)intentionally contribute to increased inequalities.

Readings:


Week 9 (November 1) – Coordinators: Jean Shoveller & Travis Salway, with Invited Guest Rod Knight

This class is an introduction to population and public health ethics, and introduces the importance of understanding measurement of inequalities. We will explore key concepts, such as justice and equity as well as absolute and relative inequalities, and implications for understanding, evaluating and responding to inequalities in health.

Readings:


Optional readings:


This is available online through a UBC subscription to Oxford Scholarship Online. It can be accessed while you are on campus, or by using a VPN set-up on your computer when you are aware from campus.

Week 10 (November 8) – Coordinator: Travis Salway

This class will examine several processes by which social and cultural environments can shape access to health care and health outcomes of populations. We will explore key terminologies, including acculturation, social capital, and social networks.

Readings:

Week 11 (November 15) – Coordinators: Travis Salway & Jeannie Shoveller

Social stigma is increasingly regarded as a fundamental cause of ill health in its own right. In this class we will investigate the health status of sexual and gender minorities as a case study of how multiple, context-dependent (i.e., time, place) mechanisms explain persistent social inequities in mental and sexual health.

Readings:

Week 12 (November 22) – Coordinators: Jean Shoveller & Travis Salway

Austerity: This class will launch our examination of austerity and austerity measures influence population health. Here, we begin by a close reading of Stuckler, D. and Basu, S. 2013. The Body Economic: Why Austerity Kills, Toronto: HarperCollins, a text that we will return to throughout the second half of our course together. We will also introduce the notion of migration and its influence on population health.

Readings:

Week 13 (November 29) – Coordinators: Travis Salway & Jean Shoveller

Context is a key aspect to understanding which population health interventions are equity enhancing (i.e., redressing systematic differences in health status that are deemed unfair or unjust) – as well as the inverse. This class will introduce the notion of context, using examples from multiple areas of intervention.

Readings:
- Martens, P., Chateau, D., Burland, E., Finlayson, G., Smith, M., Taylor, C., Brownell,

Weekly quiz on readings

**Purpose** To demonstrate your understanding of the weekly readings assigned.

**Content** The students will be asked to provide a short response to a question pertaining to one or more of the readings.

**Value:** 30%

**Format** The weekly quiz will be hand-written on foolscap paper. There will be 2-4 questions developed each week, and students will be randomized to a specific question.

**Marking rubric**

**Content (2 points)**

Articulation of one or more ‘key’ issues or questions on which the student is asked to describe; the student must clearly answer/describe the question/issue as it was presented in the reading(s) (2 points).
Policy Brief

Purpose To prepare a briefing paper describing the relationship between a determinant of health and health outcomes, and a recommendation for action to modify either the determinant or the relationship. NOTE: Your recommendation for action to modify the health outcomes must represent a population health intervention as defined throughout the course (i.e., it must not be an individually oriented intervention, such as an individually-oriented intervention that takes place within clinical encounters).

Due Date Friday of the final week of classes, emailed to course instructor by midnight

Value: 40%

Content The paper should follow a standard briefing paper format: issue / background, current situation, options with pros and cons, and recommended action. Students may choose to follow a different format, as long as that format fits the criterion of crafting a briefing paper for a policy-maker.

The paper is not to exceed 1,500 words (strictly enforced), excluding references and figures / tables (which are not required). Your paper should include 5-10 resources / papers that provide the evidence upon which the briefing is based.

Format Please use double spacing and a standard reference style.

Marking rubric

Issue / Purpose and Background – 10 points
• Identification of your audience – for whom are you writing this briefing?
• Clear purpose, clearly articulated – why is this topic important and why should people care?
• Precise definition of terms

The current situation – 30 points
• Clear description of the association between the social determinant and the outcome, supported by appropriate references.
• Current status of your outcome and current action (or inaction) on your social determinant.
• Concise summary of evidence about the relationship between your determinant and outcome

Options with pros and cons – 30 points
• Identify 2 or 3 different ways that your audience might respond to the current situation
• Use research evidence to critique each option – including intended and possible unintended effects

Recommended action – 10 points
• Identify your recommended option
• Justify recommendation, including further research that may be required

Language and expression – 20 points
• Demonstrates clear organization and logical development of ideas
• Language is clear and concise
• The presentation of ideas is free of grammatical, spelling, punctuation, and typographical errors, colloquialisms, and slang