“It is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society.” – J. Krishnamurti

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the social production and distribution of health and illness within and across societies. A political economy approach is applied in order to better understand the fundamental causes of health inequalities and to examine the policy solutions most commonly proposed to address them. The course will equip students with theoretical and empirical insights from a range of disciplines—including economics, epidemiology, political science, and sociology—to facilitate a critical reading of contemporary research on the social determinants of health.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course will advance an understanding of:

- the macrosocial determinants of population health;
- competing theories of political economy;
- the political economy of contemporary capitalism; and
- the relationship between political economy and population health.

PREREQUISITES

Students enrolled in this course are required to have completed HST209: Introduction to Health or an equivalent course. The prerequisite may be waived at the discretion of the instructor.

COURSE STRUCTURE

This course is organized as a series of twelve seminars. Each seminar will consist of a facilitated discussion on an assigned set of readings.

COURSE DROP DATE

The final drop date for this course is Monday, November 7th.
COURSE COMMUNICATION

Students should not hesitate to contact the course instructor if they have any questions or concerns. Students should make sure to use their University of Toronto e-mail address when communicating with the course instructor. Course updates and readings will be posted on Portal.

COURSE EVALUATION

Participation (30%)

Students are expected to read the assigned readings prior to class in order to be able to participate meaningfully in the facilitated discussions. Participation will be evaluated based on the quality of their contributions to the facilitated discussions as well as on their ability to promote a supportive learning environment for their peers.

Seminar Paper (20%)

Students will complete a 1500 word seminar paper that presents and supports a thesis they develop in response to the assigned readings from a week of their choosing. Students are expected to engage critically with the key arguments and themes from the chosen readings.

Final Research Paper (50%)

Students will complete a 3000-3500 word research paper on one or more of the course themes. The final research paper should answer a specific research question, which students will formulate with the help of the course instructor. Students are expected to draw substantially from the broader literature with the aim of writing a paper of publishable quality.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Assignments submitted for evaluation should be the product of the student’s own work except where otherwise indicated. Students should review the University’s guidelines on academic conduct carefully. Should a student have any questions or concerns regarding these guidelines, they are expected to seek out additional information from the course instructor.

ACCESSIBILITY

If a student requires specific accommodations, they can contact the course instructor and/or the Accessibility Services Office. The St. George Campus Accessibility Services Office is located on the first floor of Robarts Library. Staff are available by appointment to help with assessing specific needs, providing referrals, and arranging for appropriate accommodations. The Accessibility Services Office can be contacted at (416) 978-8060 or through disability.services@utoronto.ca.
CURRICULUM

Week 1: Introduction
Week 2: Theorizing Health Inequalities
Week 3: Theorizing Marginalization
Week 4: Theorizing Political Economy (I)
Week 5: Theorizing Political Economy (II)
Week 6: Theorizing Welfare Capitalism
Week 7: Theorizing Neoliberal Capitalism
Week 8: Income Inequality
Week 9: Welfare Regimes
Week 10: Welfare Reform
Week 11: Neighbourhood Effects
Week 12: Social Capital

READINGS

Week 1: Introduction


Week 2: Theorizing Health Inequalities

How does the study of populations differ from the study of individuals? What are the strengths and limitations of a variable-oriented understanding of the social determinants of health? What do we mean by a fundamental cause of health inequalities? Why are health inequalities widening despite growing evidence on the social determinants of health?


Week 3: Theorizing Marginalization

What do we mean by the term marginalization? Who is marginalized and what are the causes of their marginalization? What are the interventions most commonly proposed as potential solutions to the problem of marginalization? Have they worked?


Week 4: Theorizing Political Economy (I)

What are the principal theoretical traditions informing the study of political economy? How have these different traditions conceptualized the relationship between politics and economics? Why is the study of political economy important to the theory and practice of politics today?


Week 5: Theorizing Political Economy (II)

What are the principal theoretical traditions informing the study of political economy? How have these different traditions conceptualized the relationship between politics and economics? Why is the study of political economy important to the theory and practice of politics today?


Week 6: Theorizing Welfare Capitalism

What is social policy? Why do states develop social policies? What are the political and economic origins of welfare capitalism? Why is the welfare state under attack?


Week 7: Theorizing Neoliberal Capitalism

How should we make sense of recent changes in the political economy of capitalism? What do these transformations reveal about the theory and practice of political economy? What are their implications for our understanding of the social determinants of health?


Week 8: Income Inequality

Is economic growth or economic equality a better predictor of population health? What are the causes of income inequality? What are the mechanisms underlying the observed relationship
between income inequality and population health? How can a political economy approach improve our understanding of that relationship?


OR


Week 9: Welfare Regimes

Are welfare states successful at promoting population health and health equity? How does the organization of the welfare state differ systematically across countries? Does it serve to describe distinct varieties of welfare capitalism?


Week 10: Welfare Reform

How and to what extent are the institutions of the welfare state being restructured? What are the political and economic rationales used to justify that restructuring? Are they satisfying? What bearing does that restructuring have on the promotion of population health and health equity?


Week 11: Neighbourhood Effects

Are neighbourhood contexts powerful predictors of health over and above the features of the individuals that inhabit them? What is the most appropriate way of conceptualizing the
multilevel relationship between neighbourhoods and health? Are neighbourhoods meaningful targets of interventions to improve the social determinants of health?


**Week 12: Social Capital**

What is social capital and why is it a good predictor of morbidity and mortality? Why has the construct of social capital captured the interest of scholars and policymakers? To what extent does the social capital approach draw attention away from and obscure our view of structural inequalities?
