

ISSUES IN GLOBAL PUBLIC HEALTH

(PSCI 227; 3 credits) Spring 2010

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Office hours: MW2-4 and by appointment (LA 348)***

Course Objectives

To function as informed and active citizens in a world suffused by proximate, distant, and transnational health challenges, students gain by developing awareness and sensitivities regarding public-health issues of global concern. PSCI 227 is designed to engage as well as inform. The overarching question we will tackle this semester is: “What transnational, national, and local policies, skills, and insights will help us address current and future challenges to global health?” The Institute of Medicine asserts that public-health literacy is an “essential part of the training of citizens” and that it “prepares students to contribute to the health of the public through positive decision-making and constructive action in personal, professional, and civic arenas.” The instructor’s scholarly work on the value of transnational competence for health-care professionals will provide the basis for building skills intended to enable you to participate creatively and effectively both as a professional and as a concerned citizen when global health challenges arise in the future.

Course Description

While exploring big and enduring issues of global public health, we initially will focus on “finding the right questions.” In the process, you will be introduced to diverse perspectives and approaches, constraints and capacities, ethical dilemmas, policy options, and challenges involved in making decisions under conditions of uncertainty. You are encouraged to make and explore interdisciplinary as well as transnational connections.

PSCI 227 treats current public-health challenges in industrialized and low-income countries, including chronic and infectious illnesses. Issues covered include the impact of social and political inequities on the global burden of illness, health impacts of climate change, undernourishment and malnutrition, sanitation and access to clean water, the obesity epidemic, funding disparities, the “fatal flow of expertise” from low-income to wealthy countries, transnational and indigenous health care, medical tourism, health as a human right and development resource, health implications of displacement, migration, travel, and migrant health care, remote (rural) and reservation health challenges, armed conflict and health, public-disaster and health-emergency preparedness and response, quarantines and isolation, service-learning experiences, and academic preparation for emerging transnational challenges. In comparative perspective, the course explores the individual, environmental, resource, and governance (national, international, and non-governmental) context of

public-health policy, interventions, and outcomes and addresses questions of health equity and justice, regional problematics and contributors, and the concerns of vulnerable populations along with possibilities for health advocacy. Through individual and group research projects, you will prepare to work collaboratively with future partners.

Learning Outcomes

The course focuses on skill learning consistent with the transnational-competence framework. You are expected to distinguish and develop analytic, emotional, creative, communicative, and functional competencies. You will learn to frame questions about global public-health challenges, analyze underlying contributing factors, verify and refute, resolve ethical dilemmas, construct transdisciplinary approaches working in teams, and critically assess implementation strategies and policy alternatives. Specific learning outcomes include:

- Demonstrate understanding of the history, principles, and burdens of public health in a global context
- Demonstrate ability to discern interconnections among local and transnational, upstream and midstream, forces that facilitate and constrain global health
- Demonstrate ability to identify and distinguish the multiple and transnationally interconnected social, political, economic, environmental, cultural, biological, and behavioral determinants of individual and population health
- Demonstrate ability to compare health conditions in the Global South with health conditions in the Global North (including remote rural areas and Native American reservations) and awareness of factors that contribute to health vulnerabilities and wide disparities in health opportunity
- Demonstrate ability to analyze the effects of politics and social/economic policies at the local, tribal, state/provincial, national, and international levels on public-health systems
- Demonstrate appreciation for the role of individual capabilities and resilience, contextual resources, community collaboration, and transnational partnership in promoting public health
- Demonstrate ability to identify and critically assess cost-effective approaches aimed at reducing health disparities now and for generations to follow
- Demonstrate ability to identify health-promoting individual lifestyle behaviors and socially responsible local and transnational participation in promoting public health

Learning Methods

The course integrates multiple and multidisciplinary learning methods. The emphasis is on student-centered learning. Reading assignments present controversies in transnational perspective as well as ethical dilemmas.

Most classes will be conducted using the group-discussion approach that promotes student-centered learning. Based on assigned reading that includes work by medical anthropologists, climate-change scholars, public-health specialists, political scientists focused on health policy and transnational governance, physicians, analysts of transnational migration, and others, each of you will serve as a discussion facilitator on an enduring and/or arising issue of global public health (by providing a critical

summary of assigned readings and leading small-group discussion centered around one question raised by the instructor and one question of your own construction).