

**Saint Leo University**

**SOC 348  
Medical Sociology**

**Course Description:**

A critical examination of health, illness, and healthcare from a sociological perspective, the course examines how health, disease, and treatment are socially defined; how social stratification of race, class, gender, and age affects health and illness; and how power influences the structure of healthcare and healthcare professions. In addition to physical illness, the course includes mental health and disability. Issues are considered from a US and global perspective.

**Prerequisite:**

ENG 122

**Textbooks:**

Weitz, Rose. 2010. *The Sociology of Health, Illness, and Health Care: A Critical Approach*, 7th edition. Wadsworth.

ISBN: 0-495-59887-9

Skloot, Rebecca. 2010. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. New York: Crown Publishing.

**Learning Outcomes:**

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to

1. Analyze health issues from a sociological perspective;
2. Explain how social dimensions of race, class, gender, and ethnicity affect health;
3. Identify the main healthcare issues in the US and developing countries;
4. Consider the ethical dimension of healthcare issues;
5. Describe the structure of the US healthcare system;
6. Critically assess the US healthcare system in comparison to others around the world;

**Core Value:**

*Community:* Saint Leo University develops hospitable Christian learning communities everywhere we serve. We foster a spirit of belonging, unity, and interdependence based on mutual trust and respect to create socially responsible environments that challenge all of us to listen, to learn, to change, and to serve.

**Evaluation:**

**Midterm Exam (20%)**

**Final Exam (20%)**

There will be a mid-term exam and a final exam. Both will consist of essay questions and will NOT be cumulative.

### **Picture Project (20%)**

This assignment is designed to elicit the meaning of health in your life. Take photographs that represent “health”. You can use any kind of camera (digital, disposable). If possible, a digital camera is preferred. The photographs can be of people, places or things. In your paper, describe each one (what is it a picture of), why you took it, and what it represents about health.

### **Health Care Report (25%)**

To complete this assignment you will investigate how a country of your choice had dealt with the task of providing health care to its residents. You are free to investigate the health care system of whichever country you choose. Whichever that may be, your goal is to become an “expert” in this country’s health care system. In writing the paper, you can use the following or some other outline, so long as you address all the points, or at least describe your attempts to do so, and so long as the paper is well organized and easy to read. Remember that your task is an educational one: you are teaching your readers about the health care system you’ve “adopted.”

#### **INTRODUCTION**

First, you will briefly describe how the country developed the system it currently has, that is, you will provide the historical background, including information about the political struggles among different stakeholders (doctors, private insurance companies, pharmaceutical companies, individuals of different political orientations, or anything interesting you might find). In providing this background, you can draw from course readings, or add your own.

#### **ANALYSIS**

it should include all of the following issues, or at least your attempts to find information about them.

##### 1) COVERAGE:

- a. Who is covered?
- b. What it covered?

##### 2) FINANCING:

- a. What rule is used to collect money (income, health status);
- b. Who administers the money (government, mutual funds, or private insurers?)
- c. Is there profit making in the administration? If yes, are administrators regulated (i.e. constrained in how much or how they can price their policies, in who they need to accept, or in the minimum services they must provide?)
- d. Is there any cost-sharing? Of what type? If so, who shares the costs?

##### 3) COST CONTROL:

- a. How does the system get the best bang for the health care buck, i.e. how does it bargain for best prices and keep costs low?
- b. Is “cost sharing” (shifting costs to consumers) used as a mechanism of “cost control” (for the system, or to make “consumers” more “cost conscious”, yet maybe posing financial barriers to at least some individuals)? Is “moral hazard” an assumption? (bear in mind our class discussion of this theory).

You may also want to find out how services are paid for, for instance, whether doctors are paid fee-for-service, a fixed amount per patient (capitation), a salary, or some mix of all of these; whether there are drug formularies for drugs; and whether hospitals are adjudicated a global budgets, or an amount per disease or condition they treat (Diagnostic Related Groups or DRG). The ability of a system to use global budgets, fee schedules, capitation or drug formularies reflects the purchasing power of large pools (if payers are divided, they have little bargaining power vis-à-vis providers).

##### 4) ROLE OF PRIVATE INSURANCE

You should also find out if, if there is an amount of coverage guaranteed by a national program, whether private insurers are allowed to offer insurance for guaranteed services, and under which conditions.

5) DELIVERY

You will examine questions of delivery, that is, the ratio between primary care doctors and specialists, whether doctors work solo, in group practices, as employees of medical institutions, whether there are “gate-keepers” (i.e. primary doctors who refer patients to specialists, etc), whether the system uses electronic medical records, etc. and what, in your view, might be the implications of those features of organization of delivery for the efficiency of the system. State clearly if your sources distinguish problems of *delivery* from problems of *financing* or if they collapse them (e.g. if they imply or suggest that electronic medical records or health promotion can solve what you may identify as underfunding or unfair financing).

6) INSURANCE PRINCIPLE

**Discussion (15%)**

**Grading Scale:**

**Grade Score (%)**

A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	84-86
B-	80-83
C+	77-79
C	74-76
C-	70-73
D+	67-69
D	60-66
F	0-59

**Assessment of the Learning Outcomes:**

Course Learning Outcome	Assessment Method
1	Picture Project, Midterm, Discussion
2	Picture Project, Midterm, Discussion, Health Care Report, Discussion
3	Health Care Report, Midterm, Discussion
4	Final Exam, Discussion
5	Final Exam, Discussion
6	Health Care Report, Final Exam, Discussion

## Course Schedule:

### Module 1 Social Sources of Illness

#### Objectives

When you complete this module, you should be able to:

- Describe the modern disease profile in more developed, less developed, and least developed countries.
- Analyze the social process that encourages or discourages individuals from adopting health behaviors.
- Identify the impact of social networks and social stress on health.
- Describe the way that globalization affects health around the world.

#### Readings

#### Assignments

Items to be Completed:	Due No Later Than:
Post an introduction to the class	Thursday 11:59 PM EST/EDT
Post an initial response to the discussion question	Thursday 11:59 PM EST/EDT
Post responses to at least two classmates	Sunday 11:59 PM EST/EDT

### Module 2 The Social Distribution of Illness in the US and Developing Countries

#### Objectives

When you complete this module, you should be able to:

- Describe and analyze how social class affects health and illness.
- Describe and analyze how the combined impact of poverty and ethnicity on health.
- Describe and analyze the impact of age on health and illness.
- Describe and analyze how sex and gender can affect health and illness.

#### Readings

#### Assignments

Items to be Completed:	Due No Later Than:
Post an initial response to the discussion question	Thursday 11:59 PM EST/EDT
Post responses to at least two classmates	Sunday 11:59 PM EST/EDT

### Module 3 Meaning and Experience of Illness

#### Objectives

When you complete this module, you should be able to:

- Compare and contrast the medical and sociological models of illness.
- Evaluate the concept of a sick role.
- Analyze how individuals who experience disability respond to their diagnosis, manage their health care, and manage or fight against the stigma.

#### Readings

## Assignments

<b>Items to be Completed:</b>	<b>Due No Later Than:</b>
Post an initial response to the discussion question	Thursday 11:59 PM EST/EDT
Post responses to at least two classmates	Sunday 11:59 PM EST/EDT
Picture Project Due	Sunday 11:59 PM EST/EDT

### Module 4                      **Mental Illness**

#### Objectives

When you complete this module, you should be able to:

- Analyze how ethnicity, gender, social class, social stress, and social capital affects mental illness.
- Compare and Contrast the medical and sociological models of mental illness.
- Describe how medical and social ideas about mental illness have evolved over time.
- Compare and contrast how mental illness is treated in the U.S. and developing countries.

#### Readings

#### Assignments

<b>Items to be Completed:</b>	<b>Due No Later Than:</b>
Post an initial response to the discussion question	Thursday 11:59 PM EST/EDT
Post responses to at least two classmates	Sunday 11:59 PM EST/EDT
Midterm Exam	Sunday 11:59 PM EST/EDT

### Module 5                      **Health Care in the US and Other Countries**

#### Objectives

When you complete this module, you should be able to:

- Identify strengths, weaknesses, and challenges in healthcare systems in both the most developed and least developed nations.
- Explain why health care in the United States is so costly.
- Describe the history of US health insurance coverage and how it's changed over time.
- Identify the most important measures for evaluating health care systems internationally.

#### Readings

#### Assignments

<b>Items to be Completed:</b>	<b>Due No Later Than:</b>
Post an initial response to the discussion question	Thursday 11:59 PM EST/EDT
Post responses to at least two classmates	Sunday 11:59 PM EST/EDT

### Module 6                      **Health Care Settings and Technologies**

## Objectives

When you complete this module, you should be able to:

- Describe and evaluate the ways that hospitals, nursing homes, and hospice care are now structured.
- Assess the benefits and burdens of caring for ill and disabled individuals at home.
- Analyze the nature and consequences of health care technologies.

## Readings

## Assignments

Items to be Completed:	Due No Later Than:
Post an initial response to the discussion question	Thursday 11:59 PM EST/EDT
Post responses to at least two classmates	Sunday 11:59 PM EST/EDT

## Module 7

### Health Care Professionals

## Objectives

When you complete this module, you should be able to:

- Assess how the medical profession gained professional dominance and the current threat to that dominance.
- Describe and analyze medicine's core values and their consequences for patients.
- Provide a sociological analysis of doctor-patient relationships.
- Identify and assess the factors that lead to professionalization for various allied health professionals.

## Readings

## Assignments

Items to be Completed:	Due No Later Than:
Post an initial response to the discussion question	Thursday 11:59 PM EST/EDT
Post responses to at least two classmates	Sunday 11:59 PM EST/EDT
Health Care Report	Sunday 11:59 PM EST/EDT

## Module 8

### Bioethics

## Objectives

When you complete this module, you should be able to:

- Describe the key cases in the history of bioethics.
- Evaluate the issues involved in several contemporary bioethics debates.
- Assess the impact and limitations of bioethics on research, medical education, and clinical practice.

## Readings

## Assignments

Items to be Completed:	Due No Later Than:
Post an initial response to the discussion question	Thursday 11:59 PM EST/EDT
Post responses to at least two classmates	Sunday 11:59 PM EST/EDT
Final Exam	Sunday 11:59 PM EST/EDT

