

**Social epidemiology - syllabus**  
Sociology 3673-090, class number 2586  
Summer semester, 2018  
Department of Sociology  
University of Utah

Credit Hours: 3

Meeting Time: There is no regular set meeting time for this course  
Course officially begins: Monday, May 14  
Final Exam must be taken by: Friday, August 3

Location: Online through the [Canvas System](#); except for exams, which must be taken at a proctored testing center arranged through [UOnline](#)

**Instructor:**

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University of Utah

Office Hours:

By appointment

**Course description**

What are the major public health problems in our country and across the globe today? How do illnesses spread so quickly across a population? Why is life expectancy higher in some countries than others? Can public health policies and medical technologies control or reduce the spread of illness? Epidemiology is the study of the distribution and determinants of health-related outcomes in population. Epidemiology is also defined as the application of statistical analyses to the control of health problems and the formation of public health interventions. Students will use real-life data to explore how epidemiologists measure morbidity, mortality, and life expectancy across a population. They will examine the various types of research methods that epidemiologists use and discover how to statistically identify the risk factors or cause of a disease. Since this course fulfills the Quantitative Reasoning (QB) or Quantitative Intensive (QI) requirement of the University of Utah, special emphasis will be placed upon the application of quantitative calculations and logic.

## Course objectives

At the end of the course, students should be able to:

- calculate, interpret, and compare various measures of morbidity, mortality, survival, disease-exposure associations, and the validity and reliability of diagnostic tests
- explain the logic, pros and cons of various epidemiological study designs
- critically read, analyze and discuss social epidemiology literature

## Evaluation methods and criteria

### *Exams (40%)*

There will be two proctored exams: a midterm and a final.

**Midterm:** Week of June 18 – June 24

**Final:** Week of July 30 – August 3

Each student is responsible to arrange specific exam times through UOnline. The exams will be closed-book. However, students may bring one normal 8.5 by 11 inch page of notes (front and back) for reference, and use a basic calculator. You will have a maximum of 120 minutes to complete each exam. Each exam is worth 20 percent of your final grade.

### *Online quizzes (15%)*

There will be four timed quizzes completed online in Canvas. The quizzes will focus more specifically upon the conceptual/factual information presented in the course lectures, text, and readings. You may use whatever materials you wish to help you out, but you must not consult another person. Quizzes will be accessible from Thursday evening through Saturday night. Do not open the quiz before you plan on taking it! Once you begin a quiz, the timer starts and you will be unable to stop it. Make sure you are ready to take the quiz and you are in a stable computing environment before you start it.

Please note that no make-up quizzes will be given, even for emergency situations; however, I will drop your lowest quiz score from your final grade. Each graded quiz is worth 5 percent of your final grade.

### *Homework (20%)*

There will be four homework assignments throughout the semester, which will focus specifically upon quantitative calculations. These must be handwritten, scanned and submitted online through the Canvas system. Homework will be due by Saturday night. I suggest putting good effort into the homework, because it will help you prepare for the handwritten exam.

I will post a discussion board for each homework assignment. Participation in these discussions is not required, but past students have found them helpful. Collaboration is encouraged, but you must submit your own work.

Late homework might be accepted and awarded partial credit. Each homework assignment is worth five percent of your final grade.

*Online discussions (25%)*

There will be ten required discussion sessions: one for each additional assigned reading. The readings and discussions will cover a wide range of topics, and are designed to (1) give you experience in critically reading, analyzing and discussing epidemiological studies; (2) introduce you to research concerning health issues on a local, national and global scale; (3) facilitate critical discussion of some key social epidemiological paradigms; and (4) introduce you to policy and ethical considerations in public health research. For each required discussion, I will post a series of questions in a discussion board on Canvas. You are required to:

1. Provide a well-reasoned answer to at least one of my questions
2. Respond to at least two other student answers or responses

These questions are designed to facilitate discussion. Answers should be more than a simple “yes” or “no” or “I agree”. Reasonable answers will usually be at least four sentences in length. Consider: do you agree or disagree with the author’s claims? No study is perfect—do you notice limitations? Is the evidence convincing to you? Is there a better way address the question, and would it be feasible in terms of data and costs? Always explain *why* you think the way you do. Disagreement and critical thinking are part of healthy debate; however, rude and demeaning comments are not acceptable (see the **Student & faculty responsibilities** section of this syllabus).

Discussions are due on Saturday night. Each discussion is worth 2.5 percent of your final grade.

*Grading Scale*

|    |          |    |          |    |          |    |          |
|----|----------|----|----------|----|----------|----|----------|
| A  | 94-100%  | B  | 84-86.9% | C  | 74-76.9% | D  | 64-66.9% |
| A- | 90-93.9% | B- | 80-83.9% | C- | 70-73.9% | D- | 60-63.9% |
| B+ | 87-89.9% | C+ | 77-79.9% | D+ | 67-69.9% | E  | 0-59.9%  |

## Readings

### *Required text:*

Epidemiology (5th edition), by Leon Gordis. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier Saunders. 2014.

### *Additional assigned readings (provided by instructor):*

- Berkman, Lisa F. and Ichiro Kawachi. 2000. "A historical framework for social epidemiology." Pp. 3-12 in *Social Epidemiology*, edited by L. F. Berkman and I. Kawachi. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bongaarts, John, Thomas Buettner, Gerhard Heilig, and François Pelletier. 2008. "Has the HIV Epidemic Peaked?" *Population and Development Review* 34:199-224.
- Hatzenbuehler, Mark L., Katherine M. Keyes, and Deborah S. Hasin. 2009. "State-Level Policies and Psychiatric Morbidity In Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Populations." *American Journal of Public Health* 99:2275-2281.
- Kiene, Susan M. and William D. Barta. 2006. "A Brief Individualized Computer-Delivered Sexual Risk Reduction Intervention Increases HIV/AIDS Preventive Behavior." *Journal of Adolescent Health* 39:404-410.
- Link, Bruce G. and Jo Phelan. 1995. "Social Conditions As Fundamental Causes of Disease." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 35:80-94.
- Macintyre, Sally, Sheila Maciver, and Anne Sooman. 1993. "Area, Class and Health: Should we be Focusing on Places or People?" *Journal of Social Policy* 22:213-234.
- McMichael, Anthony J., Martin McKee, Vladimir Shkolnikov, and Tapani Valkonen. 2004. "Mortality trends and setbacks: global convergence or divergence?" *The Lancet* 363:1155-1159.
- Reilly, John J, Julie Armstrong, Ahmad R Dorosty, Pauline M Emmett, A Ness, I Rogers, Colin Steer, and Andrea Sherriff. 2005. "Early life risk factors for obesity in childhood: cohort study." *BMJ* 330:1357.
- Smeeth, Liam, Claire Cook, Eric Fombonne, Lisa Heavey, Laura C. Rodrigues, Peter G. Smith, and Andrew J. Hall. 2004. "MMR vaccination and pervasive developmental disorders: a case-control study." *The Lancet* 364:963-969.
- Wise, Paul H. 2003. "The Anatomy of a Disparity in Infant Mortality." *Annual Review of Public Health* 24:341-362.

## Anticipated schedule

For simplicity, the course is divided into four modules. Every effort will be made to follow this schedule, but it is subject to change.

| <b>Module</b>  | <b>Dates</b>         | <b>Text material</b> | <b>Additional reading</b> | <b>Due</b>          |
|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Module 1       | 05/14 – 05/19        | Ch 1, 2              | Berkman                   | Discussion          |
|                | 05/21 – 05/26        | Ch 3, 4              | Bongaarts                 | Discussion Quiz     |
|                | 05/28 – 06/02        | Ch 6                 | McMichael                 | Discussion Homework |
| Module 2       | 06/04 – 06/09        | Ch 7, 8              | Kiene                     | Discussion Quiz     |
|                | 06/11 – 06/16        | Ch 20                | Wise                      | Discussion Homework |
| <i>Midterm</i> | <i>06/18 – 06/23</i> | <i>Midterm</i>       | <i>Midterm</i>            | <i>Midterm</i>      |
| Module 3       | 06/25 – 06/30        | Ch 9, 10             | Macintyre                 | Discussion          |
|                | 07/02 – 07/07        | Ch 11, 12, 13        | Reilly                    | Discussion Quiz     |
|                | 07/09 – 07/14        | Ch 14, 15            | Smeeth                    | Discussion Homework |
| Module 4       | 07/16 – 07/21        | Ch 5                 | Hatzenbuehler             | Discussion Quiz     |
|                | 07/23 – 07/28        | Ch 17 / 19           | Link                      | Discussion Homework |
| <i>Final</i>   | <i>07/30 – 08/05</i> | <i>Final</i>         | <i>Final</i>              | <i>Final</i>        |

## **Student and faculty responsibilities**

It is the responsibility of both students and the instructor to maintain an environment that is safe, respectful, and conducive to learning and critically thinking. Individuals in the course will have different backgrounds and viewpoints. Open and critical dialogue is essential to achieve the objectives of the course; but comments or actions that are hurtful, unkind, uncivil, or intimidating will hamper the learning process, and are not acceptable.

All students are expected to maintain professional behavior in the classroom setting, according to the Student Code, spelled out in the Student Handbook. Students have specific rights in the classroom as detailed in Article III of the Code. The Code also specifies proscribed conduct (Article XI) that involves cheating on tests, plagiarism, and/or collusion, as well as fraud, theft, etc. Students should read the Code carefully and know they are responsible for the content. According to Faculty Rules and Regulations, it is the faculty responsibility to enforce responsible classroom behaviors, beginning with verbal warnings and progressing to dismissal from class and a failing grade. Students have the right to appeal such action to the Student Behavior Committee.

## **Online components of course**

Note that most portions of this course will be completed online. The following notes are important:

- Electronic or equipment failure:
  - It is your responsibility to maintain your computer and related equipment in order to participate in the online portion of the course.
  - Equipment failures will not be an acceptable excuse for late or absent assignments.
- Canvas uses electronic dating, so you cannot submit quizzes late.
  - Some students are in different time-zones. The due dates for the online components of this class will follow Utah time. Make sure you keep this in mind when you complete your assignments and quizzes. If you need help with this, please contact me early.
- Discussion threads, e-mails, and chat rooms are all considered to be equivalent to classrooms, and student behavior within those environments shall conform to the Student Code. Specifically:
  - Posting photos or comments that would be off-topic in a classroom are still off-topic in an online posting.
  - Using angry or abusive language is called "flaming", is not acceptable, and will be dealt with according to the Student Code.
  - Do not use ALL CAPS, except for titles, since it is the equivalent of shouting online, as is overuse of certain punctuation marks such as exclamation points !!!! and question marks ?????.
  - Off-color language and photos are never appropriate.

### **Academic misconduct statement**

Per University of Utah regulations (Policy # 6-400). “A student who engages in academic misconduct,” as defined in Part I.B. and including, but not limited to, cheating, falsification, or plagiarism, “may be subject to academic sanctions including but not limited to a grade reduction, failing grade, probation, suspension or dismissal from the program or the University, or revocation of the student's degree or certificate. Sanctions may also include community service, a written reprimand, and/or a written statement of misconduct that can be put into an appropriate record maintained for purposes of the profession or discipline for which the student is preparing.” Please refer to the Student Code for full elaboration of student academic and behavioral misconduct policies (<http://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-400.php>).

### **Sexual misconduct statement**

Addressing sexual misconduct: Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a Civil Rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran's status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 135 Park Building, 801-581-8365, or the Office of the Dean of Students, 270 Union Building, 801-581-7066. For support and confidential consultation, contact the Center for Student Wellness, 426 SSB, 801-581-7776. To report to the police, contact the Department of Public Safety, 801-585-2677(COPS).

### **Americans with disabilities act (ADA)**

The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations.