1. COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course examines social and environmental factors contributing to racial/ethnic and gender disparities in health and mental health, with an emphasis on the effects of poverty and discrimination. Using a lifecourse perspective that integrates biological and social risk and protective processes (Kuh et al., 2003), the etiology, course and outcome of specific health and mental health problems will be examined in depth. Examples include depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, obesity and eating disorders, disparities in pregnancy outcome, and breast and prostate cancer. Current conceptual and methodological issues and controversies will be addressed. Examples include defining and measuring poverty and discrimination; ecosocial theory and biological expression or "embodiment" of poverty and discrimination (Krieger, 2001); accumulation of risk, critical and sensitive periods, transitions and turning points; psychoneuroendocrine processes; and gene-environment interactions. Racial/ethnic and gender differences in health/mental health care beyond those attributable to known access-related factors will also be explored, including patient-level factors such as mistrust and provider-level factors such as bias, stereotyping, and uncertainty (IOM, 2003). Implications for social work, social policy, and social justice will be addressed throughout.

2. COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Describe current conceptual frameworks for understanding health and mental health disparities.

2. Analyze the effects of poverty and discrimination on specific racial/ethnic and gender disparities in health and mental health using a lifecourse perspective.

3. Identify current controversies, gaps in knowledge, and future directions for research to eliminate racial/ethnic and gender disparities in health and mental health.
4. Discuss the role of social work and social policy in eliminating health/mental health disparities.

3. COURSE DESIGN:

The course format includes lectures, discussion, written assignments, and presentations by guest speakers.

4. RELATIONSHIP OF THE COURSE TO THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK’S FOUR CURRICULAR THEMES:

- Multiculturalism and Diversity are addressed throughout in content related to risk and protective factors for health and mental health disparities.

- Social Justice and Social Change are addressed in content on the inequity of health and mental health disparities and in the need for reforms in practice, programs, and policy.

- Promotion, Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation are addressed by considering health disparities from lifecourse and ecosocial perspectives.

- Behavioral and Social Science Research is presented throughout the course; course readings draw on the literature of a broad array of academic disciplines and health professions.

5. COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- Students are expected to complete the required readings prior to class, to attend class regularly, and to be active participants in class discussions (20% of course grade). If an urgent situation arises and you are unable to attend class, please notify me by telephone or e-mail me before the class session.

- Three brief (2-3 pages) integrative papers drawing on course readings and lectures will be required. Due dates and details will be provided in a separate handout (30% of course grade).

- The main requirement for the course is a 15-20 page paper for journal submission or a research proposal; further details will be provided. A draft of the paper or proposal will be due on April 5 and a final version, including a formal response to my comments, will be due April 18.
SESSION I. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS, DEFINITIONS, AND CONTROVERSIES

Required (please read in the following order):


Recommended


II. EMBODYING INEQUALITY: DISPARITIES IN CANCER INCIDENCE AND OUTCOME

Required (please read in the following order):


Recommended


SESSION III. EMBODYING INEQUALITY: DISPARITIES IN PREGNANCY OUTCOME

Required (please read in the following order):


Recommended:


SESSION IV. POVERTY, DISCRIMINATION, AND CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT

Required (Please read in the following order):


**Recommended:**


**SESSIONS V & VI. MENTAL HEALTH DISPARITIES: OVERVIEW**

**Required (please read in the following order):**


**Recommended:**


SESSION VII. DEPRESSION

Required (please read in the following order):


Recommended:


SESSION VIII. POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Required (please read in the following order):


Recommended


SESSION IX. DISPARITIES IN SUBSTANCE USE

**Required (please read in the following order):**


**Recommended**


SESSION X. POVERTY, DISCRIMINATION, AND HIV/AIDS

Required (please read in the following order):


Recommended:


SESSION XI.  FOOD INSECURITY, OBESITY, & EATING DISORDERS

Required (please read in the following order):


Recommended:


SESSION XII. THE CLINICAL ENCOUNTER

Required (please read in the following order):


Recommended:


SESSION XIII. HEALTH DISPARITIES AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Required (please read in the following order):


SESSION IV. SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS