



**The University of Western Ontario**  
**SOCIOLOGY 9263A**  
**Selected Topics in Health**  
**Fall 2016**  
**Tuesdays, 1:30-4:30**

**Social Inequalities in Health**

**Dr. Andrea Willson**

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**Course Description**

In this seminar, we will examine how a sociological perspective can assist us in understanding inequality in health. Health in adulthood is the result of lifelong experiences that begin at conception, and therefore we will focus on the mechanisms that maintain and magnify disparities in physical and mental health over the life course. The study of health inequality is multidisciplinary, cross-fertilization has occurred across disciplines, and the literature is vast; therefore this course focuses on an introduction to the major sociological conceptual frameworks and empirical research from Canada and the U.S. examining social inequalities in health.

**Learning Outcomes**

Students who complete this course successfully will be able to:

- \* Synthesize and critically evaluate theoretical arguments, current research and scholarship relating to social inequalities in health.
- \* Demonstrate an ability to present and discuss ideas clearly and articulately through effective oral and written communication.
- \* Demonstrate an ability to engage in scholarly discussion and debate.

**Course Material(s)**

There is no textbook for this course; all of the following required readings are available electronically from Western Libraries, the course OWL website, or will be provided in class.

## Methods of Evaluation

Each component is described below.

Participation	20%	
Leading class discussion	20%	
Final paper:		
Paper	50%	(December 19)
Presentation	10%	

### Participation

This course is organized as a seminar. Class periods will be organized around a mix of lecture and student-led discussion. It is critical that everyone read the assigned readings each week and come to class ready to actively participate in the discussion—to ask questions, speak to debates in the literature, challenge what class members (including me) have said, and relate the material to your own research. The more you participate, the more you will get from the class and the more interesting it will be for all of us. Participation will be evaluated both on the quality and frequency of contribution.

\*\*As part of your class participation grade, and to help prepare everyone to discuss the articles, you should write two questions/comments for discussion from the readings each week. Questions should be emailed to me at our class OWL website by 9 a.m. the day of class. You are not required to submit questions on the day of your presentation, and you may skip one submission.

### In-class presentations

Students will sign up to lead one or two class sessions (depending on class size and determined on the first day of class) sometime during the semester. This involves carefully studying the assigned readings, preparing a set of questions to stimulate discussion, and assisting with keeping the dialogue moving during that session's discussion. It is important to understand that the purpose of the presentation is not to provide a summary of the readings to the class, but instead to engage the class in a critical analysis that synthesizes, compares, critiques, and draws conclusions about what we know of the topic based on the readings.

### Final Paper presentation

Students will briefly (10-15 min.) present their paper to the class.

### Final Paper

The paper should draw upon and extend course material or apply course material to your research interest. The form of the paper can be a) an original report of empirical research; b) a potentially fundable research proposal, or c) a review or theory paper of publishable quality. You must inform me of which option you will take and your topic by submitting a 2-3 page (double-spaced) description in the 6th week of the course (Feb 9).

## **Important Policies**

### ***Plagiarism***

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence (the Scholastic Offence Policy can be viewed in the Western Academic Calendar).

### ***Plagiarism Checking***

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

### ***Scholastic Offences***

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following web site:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/appeals\\_discipline/index.html](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/appeals_discipline/index.html)

### ***Accommodation***

Only in exceptional circumstances may a student be provided special accommodation in the completion of a course requirement (i.e., exams, papers). To request a one-time accommodation (brief illness, family emergency), the student should inform the professor when they are able so accommodation can be made. To request other accommodation(s), the student must first meet with the Graduate Chair to discuss options. Medical documentation, where required, will be kept on file in the Sociology graduate program office.

### ***Completion of Course Requirements***

Course requirements must be completed by the end of the term in which the course is offered (Fall-December 31; Winter-April 30, Summer-August 31). Only in exceptional circumstances may a student take additional time to complete the course requirements. In such a case, the student must first meet with the Graduate Chair to request permission to carry the incomplete. Medical documentation, where required, will be kept on file in the Sociology graduate program office. More details regarding incompletes are outlined in the Graduate Handbook:

[http://www.sociology.uwo.ca/graduate\\_handbook/course\\_information.html](http://www.sociology.uwo.ca/graduate_handbook/course_information.html)

## **Mental Health**

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Health and Wellness Western for a complete list of options to obtain help: [http://uwo.ca/health/mental\\_wellbeing/](http://uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/)

## **Health and Wellness**

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they

feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. The [Wellness Education Centre](http://se.uwo.ca/wec.html) (*lower level UCC*) assists students in finding mental health and other related resources best suited to their needs: <http://se.uwo.ca/wec.html> Western's School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies' [Living Well](http://grad.uwo.ca/current_students/living_well/index.html) website provides tips for thriving at grad school and other helpful information: [http://grad.uwo.ca/current\\_students/living\\_well/index.html](http://grad.uwo.ca/current_students/living_well/index.html)

Western provides several on-campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in [Western's Campus Recreation Centre](http://www.westernmustangs.ca/index.aspx?path=ims#): <http://www.westernmustangs.ca/index.aspx?path=ims#> Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. Also, we encourage you to check out the Faculty of Music web page <http://www.music.uwo.ca/>, and our own McIntosh Gallery <http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/>.

## Course Schedule and Readings

I may make minor changes to the course during the semester. Announcements of any changes will be made in class and students are responsible for adjusting to these changes.

Note: The symbol ► indicates a reading that I have selected from a text and will be provided at the beginning of the term. All other readings are journal articles that are available online through Western Libraries.

1. **September 13: *Getting Organized***
2. **September 20: *Conceptual frameworks: Fundamental Cause Theory and the Life Course Perspective, Part I***
3. **September 27: *Conceptual frameworks: The Life Course Perspective, Part II***
4. **October 4: *Conceptual frameworks: Stress Process Theory***
5. **October 11: *Early Life Influences and the Persistence of Health Disparities into Old Age, Part I***
6. **October 18: *Early Life Influences and the Persistence of Health Disparities into Old Age, Part II***  
**\*\*PAPER TOPICS DUE\*\***
7. **October 25: *Gender and life course influences on health***
8. **November 1: *Race-ethnicity and immigration***
9. **November 8: *Mental health and the life course, Part I***

10. November 15: *Mental health and the life course, Part II*
11. November 22: *Work, health and disability*
12. November 29: *Future directions in research on health inequality*
13. December 6: **Student Presentations**

**FINAL PAPERS DUE DECEMBER 19**