COURSE DESCRIPTION

HB 749 is designed to orient students toward major contemporary health issues and to foster an understanding of the way that social, environmental, and cultural contexts can contribute to either health or illness. The course is premised on the notion that understanding how context influences these outcomes is of direct importance to social work practice in a variety of different domains. The course is organized into three overall modules. The first introduces students to important historical, theoretical, and current perspectives on health and illness and provides the groundwork for the rest of the course. The second module focuses on health and illness using the social ecology of health model. In this section, each week will consider how a different ecological context may influence health, using a specific topic in health or illness as a case study. The last module focuses on emergent issues in health and illness, integrating the knowledge from the first two modules in order to demonstrate to students the multitude of ways in which social contexts can jointly promote health-related outcomes.
SOCIAL WORK COMPETENCIES

THIS COURSE SUPPORTS THE ATTAINMENT OF ADVANCED COMPETENCY IN:

Competency 2.1.1 Professional Identity
Competency 2.1.2 Ethical Practice
Competency 2.1.3 Critical Thinking
Competency 2.1.4 Diversity in Practice
Competency 2.1.5 Human Rights and Justice
Competency 2.1.6 Research Based Practice
Competency 2.1.7 Human Behavior
Competency 2.1.8 Policy Practice
Competency 2.1.9 Practice Contexts
Competency 2.1.10 Engage, Assess, Intervene, Evaluate

Specific assignments in this course will assess your attainment of this competency.

Information about the specific competencies and related practice behaviors addressed in this course and your other MSW courses can be found at http://www.bu.edu/ssw/students/current/competency-map/.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Critically describe and evaluate how social factors affect health and illness outcomes.
2. Describe and apply the social ecological framework to health problems in a social work context.
3. Apply social and behavioral science theories and concepts to health and illness.
4. Demonstrate an understanding of health disparities and the implications of these disparities for social work practice.
5. Identify the causes of social and behavioral factors that affect the health of individuals and populations.
6. Identify micro-, meso-, and macro-level concerns, assets, resources and deficits for social work interventions.

TEXTBOOK and READINGS

Class time is used to integrate the reading material through lectures, discussions, and experiential learning. Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss, analyze, and critique all assigned readings.

Textbook: The textbook listed below is required and may be purchased in the BU Bookstore or mail ordered from Barnes & Noble.


Readings: All required and recommended readings are available online through Mugar Library and a hard copy will be available in the library resource room at each of the off-Campus sites.

Go to: library.bu.edu
- Click on “Course Reserves”
- Enter ssw hb749 and click on “Search”
- Click on the title link
  - To search for a reading by author, click on “Author “ to alphabetize all the readings by last name
- Enter the password – ssw (in lower case) – and click on “Submit”
- If you wish to save a copy of the article, click on the small disk image (Save a Copy) on the command bar directly above the article and save it to your hard drive or to a disk/CD/flash drive. It is often helpful to create folders on your personal computer to organize your course readings, e.g., “HB749 Readings.” Creating folders will allow you to save articles in one location so that you can read or print them at a later date.
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## Session 1. Course Overview, Historical Perspectives, and Urban Health  
(Date: 1/23/12)

**Objectives:** The student will be able to:
1. Understand the fundamental importance of social and environmental factors for health/illness.
2. Summarize historical perspectives on social environment and health, population, and disease.
3. Identify links between the urban environment and health.

**Required:**

TEXT: Chap. 1, “Why study social and behavioral factors in public health?”  
Chap. 2, “Historical perspectives on population and disease”


**Recommended:**


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## Session 2. Theories, Concepts, and Models  
(Date: 1/30/12)

**Objectives:** The student will be able to:
1. Describe basic health-related theories, concepts and models from a range of social and behavioral disciplines that are used in public health and social work research and practice.
2. Recognize the role of social and community factors in both the onset and solution of health problems.

**Required:**

TEXT: Chap. 4, “Behavioral and social science theory”
Chap. 5, “Health and illness behavior”
Chap. 6, “The social environment and health”


**Recommended:**


**Session 3. Social Epidemiology**

**(Date: 2/6/12)**

**Objectives:** The student will be able to
1. Have basic knowledge of the field of social epidemiology and the role of social factors in determining health outcomes.
2. Understand the current state of social inequality in health and illness in the U.S.
3. Acknowledge the difficulty in attributing identifying causal relationships between social factors and health/illness outcomes.

**Required:**
**TEXT:** Chap. 3, “Social epidemiology”


**Recommended**


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**Session 4. Context:** Biological and Genetic Determinants of Health  
**Case:** Substance Use and Abuse  
(Date: 2/13/12)

**Objectives:** The student will be able to:
1. Understand how current science models the influences of genetic and environmental influences on health.
2. Understand how gene-environment (GXE) interactions relate to health outcomes.
3. Identify how genetic and hereditary influences affect alcoholism and substance abuse.

**Required:**


Recommended:

*Any of the articles from Volume 36, Issue 4 of the Journal Behavior Genetics, which is a special issue focused on substance use. See Zucker (2006) below.


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<th>Session 5.</th>
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<td><strong>Case:</strong></td>
<td>Health Risk Behaviors</td>
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(Date: Tues., 2/21/12)

Objectives: The student will be able to:
1. Learn the complex ways that family roles, structures, relationships influence health.
2. Understand the role of parental monitoring in adolescent health risk behaviors.

Required:


**Recommended:**


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**Session 6. Context:** Neighborhoods and Communities  
**Case:** Asthma  
(Date: 2/27/12)

**Objectives:** The student will be able to:
1. Understand the way that neighborhoods and other physical spaces may affect physical health.
2. Appreciate the complexity of conducting space-based research: analytic and study design issues.
3. Review links between neighborhoods and risk for asthma; environmental justice.

**Required:**


**Recommended:**

TEXT: Chap. 14, “Community-based approaches to health”

Bruile, R. J., & Pellow, D. N. (2006). Environmental justice: Human health and


**Session 7. ** **Context:** Race  **Case:** Allostatic Load and Weathering  **(Date: 3/5/12)**

**Objectives:** The student will be able to:
1. Identify race and ethnic disparities in health and illness.
2. Understand the role stress might play in these disparities via allostatic load and "weathering."

**Required:**
TEXT: Chap. 8, “Comparative health cultures”

Chap. 9, “Health disparities, diversity, and cultural competence”


**Recommended:**

blacks, and people of Mexican origin: Effects of ethnicity, nativity, and acculturation. 

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<th>Session 8. Context: Socioeconomic Status (SES)</th>
<th>Case: Infant Mortality</th>
<th>(Date: 3/19/12)</th>
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**Objectives:** The student will be able to:
1. Identify the role of U.S. SES gradient in health and illness.
2. Understand "paradoxes" in the role of SES and health: the epidemiologic paradox.
3. Summarize how SES is related to infant mortality.

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


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<th>Session 9. Context: Federal and State Policy</th>
<th>(Date: 3/26/12)</th>
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**Objectives:** The student will be able to:
1. Know various federal and state policies related to health and illness.
2. Be current on recent developments in federal health care reform.
3. Be able to articulate competing perspectives about market-based health reform in the U.S.

**Required:**
(links will be provided to KFF readings)


The Kaiser Family Foundation (2011). Summary of coverage provisions in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Publication #8023-R.


Group A


Group B


Group C

Recommended:

For a review of some basic of the health reform law, please see: http://healthreform.kff.org/the-basics.aspx

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<th>Session 10. Obesity</th>
<th>(Date: 4/2/12)</th>
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Objectives: The student will be able to:
1. Understand the extent of obesity epidemic and its implications.
2. Identify the complex social ecological factors that contribute to the obesity epidemic in America today.
3. Explore options for prevention and intervention for obesity.
Required:


*Only read: Chapter 4: "Tipping the Scales," 82–109.*

Recommended:
TEXT: Chap. 17, “Childhood overweight and obesity”


Session 11. HIV/AIDS  
(Date:4/9/12)

Objectives: The student will be able to:
1. Recognize current issues and trends regarding HIV/AIDS from a global perspective.
2. Describe how social factors and environmental contexts influence HIV transmission in diverse populations.
3. Understand the role of social work with regard to HIV/AIDS.

Required:


**Recommended:**


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**Session 12. Diabetes** *(Date: 4/23/12)*

**Objectives:** The student will be able to:
1. Recognize current issues and trends regarding diabetes from a U.S. perspective.
2. Describe how social factors and environmental contexts influence the management of diabetes in diverse populations.
3. Understand the role of social work with regard to diabetes.

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


**Session 13. Cardiovascular Disease**  
(Date: 4/30/12)

**Objectives:** The student will be able to:
1. Recognize current issues and trends regarding cardiovascular disease from a U.S. perspective.
2. Describe how social factors and environmental contexts influence cardiovascular risk in diverse populations.
3. Understand the role of social work with regard to cardiovascular disease.

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


**Session 14. Student Poster Presentations**  
(Date: 5/7/12)

**Objectives:** The student will be able to:
1. Reflect on the content covered and learned during the semester.
2. Evaluate the course.

Class Activity: Students will present their posters.
ASSIGNMENTS

In the early part of the semester students will organize into groups of 4 or 5 to choose a health/illness topic that will be the focus of their assignments for the course.

Picking the Group Topic
In the first class, students will be placed into a group of 4 or 5, each focused on a different population. Each group will be responsible for selecting a topic on health or illness that will frame its work for the rest of the semester. A representative from each group should email the instructors no later than January 29th with a proposed topic, which will be subject to approval.

Due Dates
Selection of group topic 1/29
Brief Papers 1 & 2 Theory & Urban Context (Week 4 – 2/13)
Brief Papers 3 & 4 Social Work Application & Ecological Context (Week 8 – 3/19)
Poster (Week 13 – 4/30)
Poster Presentation (Week 14 – 5/7)

Grade Calculation
Brief Paper 1 10%
Brief Paper 2 10%
Brief Paper 3 10%
Brief Paper 4 10%
Poster 30%
Poster Presentation 10%
Class Participation 20% (5% for policy conversation)
TOTAL 100%

Assignments and social work competencies

Each student in a group will be responsible for producing individual work (brief papers) as well as a final group poster that summarizes and synthesizes the material from each group member. There are two aims to the assignment structure:

1. To foster holistic expertise in a specific topic of health or illness, with specific focus on multiple domains of the topic, including: theory; relevance to urban settings; and, application to social work practice.
2. To improve students' ability to produce concise yet comprehensive written work.

Thus, the assignments support the development of a number of specific social work competencies. The focus on multiple domains related to a specific health topic is
meant to aid students’ ability to apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments (competency 2.1.3) with specific attention to the advanced macro practice skill of identifying, evaluating and integrating multiple sources of knowledge. The focus on concise writing in the brief papers format also affords students the opportunity to demonstrate effective oral and written communication, a foundation practice behavior associated with competency 2.1.3.

Students will be expected to rely on high-quality academic literature in their brief papers and group poster. Thus, in the assignments, students will be able to engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research (competency 2.1.6) with specific opportunity to utilize qualitative and quantitative research to understand the nature of communities and organizations and the best practice to improve well-being in these macro systems, the advanced macro practice behavior associated with competency 2.1.6.

The focus on identification and application of relevant theory in brief paper #2 promotes students’ ability to apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment (competency 2.1.7), with the expectation that students will be able to apply HBSE theories including systems [theories]…to guide assessment, intervention, and evaluation, the advanced macro practice behavior associated with competency 2.1.7. Likewise, the requirement that students use an ecological approach in brief paper #4 and in the construction of their final papers supports competency 2.1.7 and the attendant advanced macro practice behavior.

**Brief Papers**

Each student in a group will be responsible for producing four brief papers related to his or her topic.

- Each paper will be no longer than 3 double-spaced pages with 1-inch margins in 12-point font. These are strict requirements.
- It is expected that you use a minimum of 5 references for each brief paper, although you may use more if you deem it necessary.
- Papers 1 & 2 will be handed in together, and papers 3 & 4 will be handed in together. However, each paper will be graded separately and on its own merit.

The general topics of the first three brief papers have been chosen in advance and will be completed by each group member independently. Each paper is worth 10% of the final course grade.
Brief Papers 1 & 2 – Theory & Urban Context
Due: 2/13/11

Theory

Students will apply one of the theories discussed in the readings of Week 2 to their topics. This brief should introduce the topic, provide a short justification for its importance and apply your chosen theory to your topic.

In your introduction, you will have to convince the reader (me) of the “importance” of your topic. This should not be a statement of why the topic is important to you, but rather a clear indication of the scope of the health topic you have selected. Typically, this is accomplished through the use of data. We have numerous models for how to do this in the syllabus. You might consider, e.g., the first paragraph of Prescott et al. (2006) from week 4.

In order to adequately apply a theory, you must first systematically identify and summarize its relevant components or tenets; do not assume that the reader understands the theory’s nuances. Next, you must systematically describe how these components help inform your specific topic. It is not necessary to find articles that apply the theory for you.

Urban Context

In this brief, students will address the urban context of their health/illness topics.

The urban environment might be relevant to your topics in different ways. For example, papers might consider: the urban epidemiology of the particular topic; issues of treatment in the urban environment; existing urban intervention/prevention strategies, or the plausible need for such services, etc.

Our readings from week 1 (Galea & Vlahov, 2005; Palepu & Tyndall, 2005) should be used for this assignment, as they identify relevant aspects of the urban environment that are related to health outcomes and intervention/prevention efforts.

Brief Papers 3 & 4 – Social Work Implications & Ecological Context
Due: 3/19/11

Social Work Implications

Relying implicitly on the material from the previous two briefs, students will consider concrete implications for social work practice in the 3rd brief. That is, in this brief, students are expected to make recommendations for how social workers might address the topic under consideration. Recommendations might involve either clinical or macro practice (or both), but should be specific in nature.
Ecological Context

For the 4th brief paper, each member of a group will select a different ecological context from the Social Ecology of Health model (found on page 15 of the course text). Not all ecological contexts will be equally pertinent to each topic, and so group members should take care in selecting which contexts to jointly cover.

Students will consider their topics in a similar fashion to the "case study" model presented throughout the course: thus, each paper will describe how a specific ecological context is relevant to the topic of interest. For example, in a group focused on obesity, one group member might consider the influence of the home or family while another might examine the role of neighborhoods. Briefs should reference relevant research and should not rely on personal opinion.

General Grading Criteria for Brief Papers:

Apart from the specific guidelines outlined above, in general the following criteria will be met in a well-written brief paper:

1. Succinctly and cogently addresses the topic at hand and meets all the requirements of the assignment as indicated above.
2. Does not exceed the 3-page limit.
3. Is written using APA formatting (no abstract necessary), with appropriate internal documentation and a reference list (not counted toward the page limit).
4. Uses quotations sparingly, if at all.
5. Contains few, if any, spelling or grammar errors.

Poster and Presentation:

Completed Poster Due: 4/30/12 (30% of course grade)
Presentation: 5/7/12 (10% of course grade)

Using the knowledge and material accumulated in the completion of their brief papers, each group will prepare a poster on its topic, similar to those found at academic conferences. Instructors will provide a template for this poster into which student work can be inserted. Students will turn in completed versions of their poster templates on April 30; the professor will arrange to have a full size version of the poster printed, and students will present these posters to the instructors and to their classmates on the last day of class.

It is expected that students' brief papers will provide much of the information for the poster. Thus, each group is expected to synthesize material from each of the first three brief papers and to combine information from the fourth brief for inclusion on the poster.

Each poster should contain information on the following sections:
1. Description of the topic, containing information on its epidemiology and social epidemiology.
2. Application of theory to the topic.
3. Summary of the relevance of the urban context to the topic.
4. Consideration of the social ecology of the topic.
5. Implications for social work practice.
6. Directions for future research on the topic.
7. Reference list for the sources cited on the poster.

*Students may use bulleting to present information on the poster.*

On the last day of class, students will present their posters in a "poster session." Each member of the group is expected to have a role in the presentation.
COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

Attendance
As developing professional colleagues, students are expected to attend all class sessions and participate actively, respectful of each other's contributions, of clients and client confidentiality, and of the instructor and the shared process of learning. Students are expected to attend all class sessions and to inform the instructor in advance of any absences. Failure to attend class sessions is likely to have a negative effect on the student’s course grade.

Students should notify instructors by phone or e-mail of any impending absence, indicating how they will obtain material from the missed session. Since the framework for each class is established in the opening minutes of the session, it is important that all participants arrive on time. A persistent pattern of unapproved lateness may negatively affect a student’s course grade.

Academic Honesty
Papers and presentations in the School of Social Work must meet standards of academic honesty and integrity, avoiding any possibility of plagiarism or other forms of academic misconduct. For specific information about the BUSSW policy regarding academic misconduct, see Student Handbook: Ways & Means (http://www.bu.edu/ssw/current/stud_hb/index.shtml).

Pages 64–68 of the BUSSW Ways & Means Handbook (distributed to all entering students) describes forms of academic misconduct, including plagiarism, that can result in a student's referral to the School's Status Review Committee for review of the student's overall performance and readiness to continue in professional social work education. Plagiarism (p. 64) "is the act of representing someone else's creative and/or academic work as one's own, whether in full or part. It can be an act of commission, in which one intentionally appropriates the words, pictures, or ideas of another; or it can be an act of omission, in which one fails to acknowledge/document/give credit to the source, creator, and/or copyright owners of those words, pictures, or ideas. Any fabrication (i.e. making up) of material, quotes, or sources other than created in a work of fiction, is also plagiarism.

Plagiarism also includes, but is not limited to, the purchase, copying, or uncited use of another's work; use of material translated from another language as though it were original to the student; copying material word for word without quotation marks and attribution to its source; and presenting collaborative work as though it were the presenter's work alone.

Students may not submit the same material for two courses without prior written approval of both instructors involved. Making false statements regarding academic misconduct or attributing the misconduct wholly to others is also misconduct. Pressuring a faculty member or fellow student to behave unethically is also academic misconduct and grounds for Status Review.
Writing Style and References

Students with disabilities:
If you have a disability and want to request reasonable accommodation, the University requires that you consult with Boston University’s Office of Disability Services for information regarding this process ([http://www.bu.edu/disability/](http://www.bu.edu/disability/)).

Academic writing assistance:
If you would like academic writing assistance, information can be found at [http://www.bu.edu/ssw/current/academic/assistance/index.shtml](http://www.bu.edu/ssw/current/academic/assistance/index.shtml) or contact the BUSSW Office of Student Services.

Electronic devices in the classroom:
Computers may be used to support the learning activities in the classroom, with permission of your instructor. These include such activities as taking notes and accessing course readings under discussion. However, non-academic use of laptops and other devices are distracting and seriously disrupt the learning process for everyone. Neither computers nor other electronic devices are to be used in the classroom for non-academic reasons. This includes e-mailing, texting, social networking, and use of the Internet. The use of cell phones during class time is prohibited. Please turn off cell phones and refrain from taking calls unless you are “on call” and have cleared this with the instructor prior to class. Under such circumstances, please put your phone on vibrate, sit close to a door, and step out of the room to take the call.

Religious holidays:
The school, in scheduling classes on religious holiday, intends that students observing those holidays be given ample opportunity to make up work. Faculty members who wish to observe religious holidays will arrange for another faculty member to meet their classes or for canceled classes to be reschedule.

OTHER COURSE POLICIES

Class Participation
Students are expected to participate actively in class, and in a manner that is respectful of each other's contributions, of clients and client confidentiality, and of the instructor and the shared process of learning. Full participation creates an effective learning environment. We expect that each student will contribute to the in-class learning experience by actively listening, speaking, and sometimes leading class discussions. Each student is a learning resource for other students and faculty. The common foundation for discussion rests with the readings. We believe that both verbal and written skills are important to social workers. You will have the opportunity to participate in small groups as well as in larger class
discussions. **Class participation counts for 20% of your grade** and is evaluated on the following criteria: attendance, level of preparation demonstrated in oral questions and comments in small and large group discussions, and quality of written responses to in-class exercises. Participation in the dialogue about policy reform will be worth **5% of your grade for the semester**.

**Late Assignments**
It is your responsibility to submit assignments on time. Late assignments will be not be given full credit. If you submit an assignment after the due date and time 10% of the total assignment point value will be deducted automatically. For example, if an assignment is worth 25 points, 2.5 points will be deducted prior to grading. Additional credit will be deducted for each additional day, or fraction thereof, than the assignment is late. You can avoid the late deduction(s) by planning ahead and contacting me to make alternative arrangements.

**Confidentiality**
Federal health regulations of 2003 mandate the protection of client confidentiality by changing the name of the client, significant others, agency, conditions, other descriptors, and geographic locations that could lead to client identification.