

EXPOS 20: PARADOX IN PUBLIC HEALTH

Provisional Syllabus: Spring 2016

Final syllabus available in class will supersede all previous drafts.



INSTRUCTOR:

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CLASS:

CGIS-Knafel K-107
Section 201: Monday/Wednesday 10am
Section 202: Monday/Wednesday 11am

COURSE WEBSITE: [Under construction](#)

OFFICE HOURS: TBD

COURSE DESCRIPTION: What happens when public health efforts to improve the wellbeing of a population undermine the wellbeing of individuals in that population? Can this outcome be avoided? Public health is characterized by the implications of this fundamental paradox: the health needs of a population are often at odds with the health needs of the very individuals who comprise that population. How does this larger paradox play out across various public health campaigns? For example, public health as practiced today is intended to empower individuals to make their own health decisions; however, many public health policies (seatbelt laws, anti-smoking ordinances, etc.) actually limit individual choices.

In this class, we will use scientific articles to consider potential paradoxes in public health, both historical and contemporary. In Unit 1, we will wrestle with issues of current vaccination requirements, and consider the intersection of personal choice versus societal responsibility using current MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccines. In Unit 2, students will debate the nature of public health motivation and practice—who decides what existing public health needs are? Two case studies will guide this discussion: goiter—a successfully eliminated (but now reemerging!) disease of micronutrient deficiency—and ongoing tobacco-control efforts. In Unit 3, students will conduct their own research on a controversial modern public health issue of their choice, and consider how the larger tension between the individual and the population is manifested in the student's particular selected public health controversy.

Our course will be a combination of in-class and online discussion, activities, and lecture. Students will also be asked to meet individually with the instructor for conferences about the major papers. **At all times, questions/comments are welcomed and encouraged.**

UNITS IN BRIEF:

- **Unit 1:** All 50 US states require children to have vaccinations before entering public school. While all states currently allow medical exemptions from this requirement, some also allow religious and philosophical exemptions. Focusing on vaccines for measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR), students will use primary literature to craft and argue a policy position on vaccine mandates and exemptions. *Draft due date: February 19.*
- **Unit 2:** There have been many public health triumphs in the United States during the 20th century. We explore two of those examples—safer and healthier foods, and recognition of tobacco as a health hazard—using case studies from Michigan and Massachusetts respectively. But what is public health? What goals and motives does or should public health have? Students will explore these questions using the public health cases studies. *Draft due date: March 11.*
- **Unit 3:** Why is public health controversial? What are the main issues that frame that controversy? Within this framework, students will select a current, controversial public health intervention of their choice, and write a research paper outlining and taking a stand on the nature of the debate. *Draft due date: April 15.*

COURSE CONDUCT AND MATERIALS: You are expected to actively participate in your own educational process, via asking questions, engaging in discussion, and experimenting with learning techniques to determine which is most helpful to you. Use common sense, and be respectful of each other and yourself. All students are expected to take notes during class, and are responsible for the material covered during activities, in-class and online discussions, and lecture. Please do not use laptops during class unless otherwise instructed.

- There are **no required textbooks** for you to purchase for this course. Instead, I have compiled a set of texts and materials into a coursepack provided online and in-class over the course of the semester. You must **obtain a binder** in which to print and archive these materials.
- You **MUST purchase a spiral-bound notebook** or composition book. This will serve as your writing “lab book”, and you will be asked to do assignments and classwork in it. **You are expected to bring your notebook and course binder to every class.**

The course [website](#) has the syllabus, readings and other announcements. This will be the central administrative location for the class, so make sure to check it often. Outside of class, [email](#) is the primary method for communicating announcements and administrative arrangements. You must check your email daily, and you will be responsible for the information I post there. I will do the same, and will check and respond to email at least once each business day. Emails sent to the class are archived on the website.

Our [conferences](#) are meant to give you the kind of focused attention a writing student needs. We will have three conference meetings during the semester. They will focus largely on strategies for making the kinds of revisions that go past the meager and simplistic process of spell checking or even extending a paper’s length. Scheduling during conference week is tight, and exacerbated by lateness or missed appointments. The time we set aside for you is your time; wasted or missed appointments will not be rescheduled. You are, of course, encouraged to see me outside these conferences, either during my [office hours](#) or via email, but during conference week, I can’t hold office hours of any kind.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS: Your grades largely come from three major papers, each of which involves a draft, conference with me, revision, and final document. To take full advantage of the course, and to enable students to succeed on the major papers and assignments, there will be additional assigned activities and readings. The activities will be completed in-class or for homework. Activities and readings will be provided during class or available online on the course website. *Your participation grade is assessed holistically

Grade Breakdown	
Paper 1:	20%
Paper 2:	30%
Paper 3:	40%
Participation*:	10%

at the end of the semester based on the work in your Expos notebook, timely completion of short assignments and response papers, active participation in class, conferences and online, and thoughtful responses to the work of your peers; simply attending class is insufficient to receive full marks for participation.

Late policies: Successful operation of this course requires that we adhere to a tight schedule. Consequently, it is imperative that you arrive at class punctually and turn your work in on time. You will routinely have assignments due before class on Mondays and Wednesdays, and Fridays online. Please carefully review the Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Submission of Work, below: *if I cannot open or read a file you've uploaded for submission, it is subject to a late penalty.*

- **Late to class:** Class begins promptly at 7 minutes past the hour. If you arrive to class more than 10 minutes after the hour, you are considered to be late (three unexcused lates are equivalent to one absence). Students more than 20 minutes late to any class meeting are marked absent.
- **Late drafts/revisions:** Grades for unexcused late assignments will depreciate by a third of a letter grade per day, including any fraction of a day late, from the original due date/time. For example, if you would have gotten a B+, it depreciates to a B being one day late, a B- for 2 days late, and so on. Late drafts and revisions *both* affect the revised paper grade. Unexcused late drafts/revisions will not be accepted more than 4 days past the deadline. Due to the intense pace of the course, late drafts forfeit the opportunity to receive instructor feedback.
- **For those assignments that do not receive a letter grade,** late or incomplete assignments adversely affect your participation grade. Due to the intense pace of the course, late assignments forfeit the opportunity to receive instructor feedback.
- **Extensions:** Even in the most carefully organized semesters, unexpected circumstances arise. Therefore, each student is allowed ONE 24-hour extension without penalty. To avoid being penalized for your late work, you must:
 - Let me know by email at least one day before the assignment is due that you are taking your “wild card” extension;
 - Submit the work via the dropbox within 24 hours of the original due date/time;
 - Be on time with other work due on that day.
 - Caveat: Unfortunately, you **cannot** take the wild card extension on the draft of Paper 3, due to the semester’s scheduling constraints.