Expos 248: What is Health and How Do We Achieve It?
Fall Term, 2018
Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:30-11:45am | Sever Hall 212

Course Website: https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/52169

INSTRUCTOR
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COURSE DESCRIPTION
The U.S. spends more on healthcare than any country in the world. What are we getting for all that money? Are we more healthy than all of the world? How would we even know if we were healthier? What “health” is and what it means to be “healthy” are more challenging questions than they may seem. It may be living very long, having healthy behavior, or being happy. It could be a combination of all of these, and it could be different for different people. Understanding what we mean when we talk about health is important to promoting health, so we know what we’re aiming for. This course will explore what health is, what it means to be healthy or not healthy, and how we can improve people’s health. In Unit 1 we will look at definitions of health from the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and see how well they work in case examples—whether, for instance, someone like Stephen Hawking would be considered healthy by these definitions, and what may be missing from them. In Unit 2 we will assess policies designed to improve health, focusing on obesity and weight. We will read conflicting views of obesity as a medical condition or a descriptor of body size, and grapple with a situation where opinions and science point in different directions. The Unit 2 essay will tackle how should we develop policy around obesity in this context of contradicting perspectives. In Unit 3 students will conduct independent research on ways to improve college students’ health, building from the definition work of Unit 1 and the policy work of Unit 2. The materials for the course will consist of medical and public health articles, online health data sources, and videos/TED talks. Students will have the opportunity to participate in “verbal practice” exercises at Harvard’s Global Health Education and Learning Incubator to help them write and communicate to audiences more effectively.

CURRICULUM DESCRIPTION
This course is divided into three units, each organized around an essay or a paper. We write two versions of each essay in Expos, version 1 is “draft” and version 2 is “revision.” The draft is a complete version of your essay, termed “draft” only because you will submit another version following feedback. It is not shorter or different than a final version. Good writing normally involves multiple drafts with iterations of revision and we model this process in Expos. Your “revised” essay will be your final version for our purposes, and the one on which you will be evaluated (i.e., graded).

For the first two units we will read articles or look at online materials that will form the basis for two short “response papers”, followed by a draft essay and then a revised essay. The response papers will focus on a
specific aspect of the materials for that unit or a preparatory part of your essay. We will generally discuss the content of the response papers in class. Your draft essay will be submitted next, after which we will have an individual 20-minute conference to discuss modifications and improvements. We will have at least one class session devoted to “workshopping” the draft essays—meaning peer critiquing of each other’s essays including written and verbal feedback. We will also have a “verbal exercise” day at the Global Health Education and Learning Incubator (GHELI) to refine thinking and articulation of ideas—to improve your writing. You will then write a revised essay based on all of this feedback and this will be your final submission for the unit. The revised essay will receive a grade and all other assignments and activities will be ungraded but will count toward your Preparation and Engagement grade (see grading section below).

Unit 3 is different—it will be an independent research paper. You will identify and locate materials (i.e., sources) on your own. The response papers for this unit will be initial components of your paper—a research topic, a bibliography, an outline, etc. You will work in research “pods” for this unit, sharing materials and search strategies, helping one another by reviewing writing pieces and eventually drafts. You will write a draft paper and then a revision, with an intervening group conference and workshopping as in the other units. As always, only the revised version of the paper will be graded.

Each essay will include a writer’s letter at the end—we will discuss these in class. It will be addressed to the reader for that essay: me for units 1 and 2, your research pod for unit 3. You will also write an initial and final writer’s letter to introduce and conclude the course. These will be described in class.

Each unit will also have a verbal practice component, held at the Global Health Education and Learning Incubator at Harvard (https://gheli.harvard.edu/; 104 Mount Auburn St., 3rd floor—same location as my office). These will be held during class time but at the Incubator instead of in our regular classroom. We will use oral exercises and videotaping to focus and refine the arguments and content of your essays. These are practice sessions—and they help with writing! They’re informal, and fun—in addition to being immensely helpful in focusing one’s thoughts.

The units are discrete chunks but build upon each other in content and skills. Each has a separate page on the course website including all the materials, assignments, and dates for that unit. The overall course schedule is also on the course site, as well as this syllabus and course resources.

Please note that there may be changes in the syllabus and/or schedule during the semester. These will be announced via the course website and a revised document posted. You are responsible for any changes that are announced on the course site, so make sure to check it regularly.

UNIT 1: What is health?
This unit will lay the foundation for our study of health this semester. We will look at different definitions of health to understand what we mean when we say someone is healthy, and similarly, what we are aiming for when we seek to improve health. While this is a broad topic that could be explored from numerous angles, we will focus on two key sources of definitions, the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The former is the oversight body for public health internationally; the latter is the same for the U.S. We will read some perspectives on what health means, including what people think is a disease and what is not, how disease is a nebulous concept, and how some people view disease as “edifying”—the perspective that disease can be enlightening or morally illuminating. As a way of grounding our study in the “real world”, we will consider individuals whose stories and circumstances provide insight into how we define health. Your essay for this unit will present your definition of health drawn from the ones we read and the issues raised in the individuals’ stories. You will use evidence from the reading material to support your definition and address countervailing ones.
UNIT 2: Obesity and health

Obesity is in the news nearly daily, described as an “epidemic” against which we are fighting a “war”. A high volume of media coverage combined with alarmist language can lead to hurried and sometimes poorly considered responses, by individuals, health professionals, and policy makers. Think about the Ebola epidemics, or the “shoe bomber.” As humans we have a tendency to panic in the face of threats, and not always adequately consider scientific evidence in our policy responses. In this unit we will critically examine the relationship between obesity and health, based on science, and assess obesity prevention strategies in the US. We will study adult obesity prevention and apply that evidence to assess policy proposals for children.

It is not uncommon in science to apply knowledge from one context to advance understanding of another. We study diseases in mice to understand biologic mechanisms that we extrapolate to humans. The validity of these extrapolations depends on the similarity between mice and humans: if biology was identical then mouse-based conclusions would perfectly predict human results. Extending this framework to policy, we can use knowledge of obesity in adults to critically assess obesity prevention in children. Reasoning through analogy is the underlying premise of this unit; it is used in many disciplines from medicine to literature, and allows for the advancement of knowledge without “starting from scratch” each time.

Building upon our study of the definition of health in unit 1, this unit’s reading will focus on the effects of weight on different aspects of health. Questions we will tackle include: what are the different ways to define “obese”? How does the definition affect our assessment of health in the context of weight? Are there differing views of the relationship between weight and health? What is the science underlying weight and health? What policies have been implemented to address the “war on obesity”? What effect have these had on health? What policies should we be promoting?

For this unit’s essay you will write a critical appraisal of three childhood obesity prevention policies that have been implemented or are under consideration in the U.S., drawing on the perspectives and evidence of our. These policies are all hotly debated in legislatures across the country. Some are currently in place at the federal or state level, or as voluntary measures, but all are vulnerable to change as more evidence is collected and as political winds shift. You will use the lens of adult obesity science and policy as a lens to assess children’s policy options.

UNIT 3: How to improve health

Unit 3 is about research papers. You will go through all the steps of writing a research paper based on your own topic. You will develop a research question, find sources that inform your question, develop a thesis—an argument related to your question, identify specific evidence from your sources that supports your argument, analyze (or interpret) the evidence, and draw conclusions from your analysis. These steps form the basis of any research paper across disciplines. This paper will give you a framework for future research papers you will write in your college courses and beyond.

The topic for this unit is improving health. In previous units we have defined health, assessed ostensibly health-improving policies in light of our definition of health, and now you will choose a health topic that you are interested in and research ways to improve health in that regard. To narrow this potentially gigantic topical range, we will focus on the health of college students in the U.S. This is an topic about which you all have some knowledge and in which you have some investment. Your task for this paper is to choose an area of health that is relevant to U.S. college students and develop a question that you can research and write about in the time we have available. That means it cannot be too broad, but must be broad enough to say something meaningful.

This paper is 8-10 pages in length. It should include at least 5 sources and no more than 10. Sources should be science-based; they can be published papers, credible web sites (such as government agencies that publish data, universities, major medical centers—you know credible from not, and can use your judgment (e.g., Wikipedia is not a credible site, despite the factual basis of much information there)), government reports, and books. For
research papers recently published sources are generally better, on the order of the last 10-15 years, though
classic papers may be older (e.g., the Framingham Heart study papers were published long ago but form the basis
of much knowledge on cardiovascular disease today).

As usual, you will submit a draft paper and then a final revision. You will be formed into research “pods” based on
your questions to share sources, provide feedback, and assist one another through the writing process. Research
in the sciences is nearly always conducted in teams, with lead authors and collaborating authors, and although
you will write your papers independently our work will incorporate some of the team-based elements of scientific
research.

**COURSE WEBSITE**
Please check the website regularly for announcements, to turn in assignments, and to access resources:
https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/52169
The site includes all materials for the units, assignments, resources, a class schedule. Make sure that you look at
the site to know what is there and when things are due.
**You are responsible for any course announcements, syllabus updates, or changes in assignments posted on the website.**

**MATERIALS**
There are no books for this class but there are on-line resources that will be distributed via the course website or
by email, or will be accessible via the Harvard libraries or other websites. These will be included in the packet for
each unit. **You are required to print all readings** for the course and bring them with you to class in your workbook
folder. Please make sure that you have access to a reliable printer or another way to print materials. On occasion
materials will be handed-out in class.

**REFERENCE MATERIALS**
These are all available on the course website under the “Course Resources” tab.

This will be used throughout the course. Please download a copy to your computer and keep a copy in your
workbook:
Elements of an Academic Argument

These will also be used as reference for citing sources in unit 3. Bookmark the links but no need to download the
entire documents:
Harvard Guide to Using Sources
https://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/

APA style for citing sources
https://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/apa

We will view videos and exercises from Harvard Writes during the semester. Bookmark the link:
http://harvardwrites.com/

**WORKBOOK**
You will use a notebook/workbook throughout the semester to take in-class notes, notes on readings/videos,
notes during conferences and workshops, to collect sources, web sites, and to store paper copies of materials.
Please get a paper notebook that has pockets or a notebook plus a binder/folder that you can bring to class. I may
ask to look at your notes or lists or materials at some time during the semester so please keep things just for this
**CLASS EXPECTATIONS AND POLICIES**

This course meets twice per week and attendance is required. You will have homework for every class—either reading, note writing in your workbook, a written assignment that is submitted, or a combination of these. You are expected to complete all assignments on time and be prepared for class. This is a small seminar and everyone’s participation is expected and required. You will work with one another in class and on some exercises, critiquing one another’s writing and learning how to provide feedback. Missing class hurts yourself and your fellow students.

We will meet on occasion at the Harvard Global Health Education and Learning Incubator, 104 Mount Auburn St., 3rd floor (same location as my office). When class is held at GHELI it will be at the same time except at this location instead of our regular classroom. These class sessions are an integral part of the curriculum and attendance is required. They use verbal exercises to improve writing. Please let me know if you have any questions about them.

The Harvard College Writing Program follows specific policies for absences from class and completion of work that apply to all sections of Expos 20:

**WRITING PROGRAM POLICY ON ABSENCES**

Because Expos has a shorter semester and fewer class hours than other courses, and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential. If you are absent without medical excuse more than twice, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade. On the occasion of your second unexcused absence, you will receive a letter warning you of your situation. This letter will also be sent to your Resident Dean, so the College can give you whatever supervision and support you need to complete the course.

Apart from religious holidays, only medical absences can be excused. In the case of a medical problem, you should contact your preceptor before the class to explain, but in any event within 24 hours: otherwise you will be required to provide a note from UHS or another medical official, or your Resident Dean. Absences because of special events such as athletic meets, debates, conferences, and concerts are not excusable absences. If such an event is very important to you, you may decide to take one of your two allowable unexcused absences; but again, you are expected to contact your preceptor beforehand if you will miss a class, or at least within 24 hours. If you wish to attend an event that will put you over the two-absence limit, you should contact your Resident Dean and you must directly petition the Expository Writing Senior Preceptor, who will grant such petitions only in extraordinary circumstances and only when your work in the class has been exemplary.

**WRITING PROGRAM POLICY ON COMPLETION OF WORK**

Because your Expos course is a planned sequence of writing, you must write all of the assigned essays to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of the course—not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind. You will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements, therefore, if you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit. The letter will also specify the new date by which you must submit the late work, and be copied to your Resident Dean. If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by this new date, and you have not documented a medical problem, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Any time that you quote, paraphrase, or integrate others’ ideas into your work you must cite it. This is standard in science writing and is not something to be avoided. Indeed, many articles have a citation for nearly every
sentence in an introduction where the stage is being set for the paper/essay. Plagiarism is using others’ ideas without proper attribution. We will discuss ways to integrate others’ ideas into your work and how to properly cite their work. Not doing so, however, is considered plagiarism and is taken quite seriously, by me and by the University. Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to review by the Honor Council, including potential disciplinary action. This is something we will work on throughout the semester and is a focus of Expos. You should not be anxious about this but rather aware. And you should always feel free to consult with me if you are unsure about whether or when to cite.

Harvard Honor Code: Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one’s own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs. [https://honor.fas.harvard.edu/honor-code](https://honor.fas.harvard.edu/honor-code)

COLLABORATION
Much of the work in this class will involve peer feedback and collaboration, including the group work of unit 3. Aside from what is included in the course by design, you may collaborate with other students in this class to develop or refine ideas, identify and assess sources, provide peer review of written work, and discuss writing techniques or challenges. You may also consult with student tutors at the Writing Center. Any other collaboration with students or others, inside or outside of this class, must be approved by me. All work submitted for this course must be your own: response papers, essay drafts and revisions. You may not co-write any assignments unless expressly directed to do so. If you have any questions about what constitutes collaboration or are unsure, please consult with me. Unauthorized collaboration on assignments is considered a serious offence by the university, so please exert caution around this issue.

In addition, we will follow policies specific to our class:

ASSIGNMENT POLICIES
All assignments are submitted via the course website. They must be in Microsoft Word format (.doc or .docx). You are responsible for them being uncorrupted and readable by me! If I can’t open a file then I cannot give you credit for completing it.

Assignments are due on time. Class moves quickly and many assignments will be discussed in class immediately after they are due. Late submissions will therefore not be accepted except in extenuating circumstances (medical or family emergencies), and only with prior approval by me.

CLASSROOM CULTURE
Cell phones must be turned off or turned to silent and stored out of sight during class. I will permit you to take photos of work done on the board for your notes, but that is the only permissible use of phones during class. We may at times use laptops during class, but aside from these instances they must be kept closed during class. Notes should be taken on paper and can be scanned/photographed for electronic storage if desired. Handouts should be kept in your workbook and can similarly be electronically stored if desired.

You will be providing feedback to one another on your work throughout the semester. Providing constructive criticism is an acquired skill which we will practice. Absolutely essential is showing respect and consideration for the recipient at all times. I expect all feedback, whether written or verbal, to be delivered courteously and respectfully.
Class begins on time and you are expected to be present and ready to participate at the start. Two late arrivals of 10 minutes or more will be considered an unexcused absence.

ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION FORMAT
All assignments will be submitted electronically via the course website. Files must be in Microsoft Word format (ending in .doc or .docx). You are responsible for the file being readable. Written documents should be formatted as follows:

- 11 or 12 point font
- Times New Roman, Arial, or Calibri font
- Double spaced
- 1” margins
- Page numbers on all pages
- Paragraph numbers preceding each paragraph
- Your name in header or footer of all pages
- Your name and assignment name in file name (e.g., Wittenberg_essay_draft_unit_1)

Essay title should be at top of first page (do not use title page).
Writer's letter should be at the end of the essay (do not need to number paragraphs in writer's letters).

GRADING CRITERIA
There are two components that contribute to your final course grade:

Preparation and Engagement (25%)

- Demonstrated completion of readings/materials (10%)
- Meaningful contribution to in-class exercises, discussions, and workshops (10%)
- On-time submission of response papers and homework assignments, attendance and on-time arrival, general respect for class policies and procedures (5%)

Competency (75%)
Essay drafts are required but are ungraded; revisions are graded.

- Essay 1 (20%)
- Essay 2 (25%)
- Essay 3 (30%)

The essays are of increasing length and complexity so are weighted accordingly in grading.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS
If you need special accommodations you must email me a copy of the letter from the Accessible Education Office: http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~aeo.

QUESTIONS
If you have questions or concerns regarding the course please do not hesitate to raise them with me during office hours, or email me directly and we can set up a time to talk.