Global Health Inequalities: Economics, Ethics and Politics

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Course delivered at Villanova University, PA, USA
Department of Global Interdisciplinary Studies (GIS), Garey Hall, Room B05

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Course Description

Life expectancy and health status play an essential role in development, yet despite some remarkable improvements, especially in the second half of the twentieth century, health remains an unequally distributed resource, both on a global scale and within populations.

This course offers a multidisciplinary approach to the topic of health inequalities, based on three perspectives for study: (1) an economic dimension, grounded in the links between health, poverty and employment; (2) a social dimension, that focuses on psycho-social determinants of health and the role played by health systems; and (3) a specifically political dimension, through which we will discuss the ethical foundations of state intervention against health inequality and look at how to assess the effects of policies in that area.

By design, this course will approach health inequalities through methods and concepts taken from various branches of the social sciences. How, for instance, can health economics measure these inequalities? What can political philosophy contribute to defining the ethics of global health? Even more generally, what is the overall contribution of the social sciences to the epidemiological study of health inequalities?

No previous knowledge in any of these topics is required for taking the course, but some curiosity in every of them will prove useful.

Note – This course is partly based on a course given at Sciences Po, Paris, in 2010. The initial version of the course was taught by Florence Jusot in 2008-2009.

Learning Objectives

- Acquire a general overview of the topic of health inequalities
- Experiment with the analytical toolbox used in health inequalities research
- Write up a country-based health report informed by the topic
Course Logistics

Class dates and times are copied below.

- Session 1  Feb 16, 2018  3pm-6pm
- Session 2  Feb 17, 2018  12pm-3pm
- Session 3  Feb 23, 2018  3pm-6pm
- Session 4  Feb 24, 2018  12pm-3pm

All material relevant to the course will be distributed via a Google Drive folder, the link to which will be mentioned in our first class together. Although a Google account will not be required to access the folder, I do recommend that you create a (free) Google account if you do not yet have one.

Two of the practice workshops that will take place during the course will make use of the Stata statistical software, from StataCorp. You do not need to own a copy of the software: the code will be run on my end.

Course Assignments

- Sessions 3 and 4 of the course each include reading workshops – please read the texts listed in those before class.
- The course will be assessed through a single final paper, for which instructions and a submission deadline will be delivered during the last class.

Important University Policies and Resources

Students with Disabilities who require academic accommodations should schedule an appointment with the Office for Learning Support. It is the policy of Villanova University to make reasonable academic accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. You must present verification and register with the Learning Support Office by contacting 610-519-5636 or at nancy.mott@villanova.edu. Registration is needed to receive accommodations.

Academic Integrity – You are expected to uphold Villanova’s Academic Integrity Policy and Code. Any incident of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences for disciplinary action. For the College’s statement on Academic Integrity, you should consult the Enchiridion. You may also view the university’s Academic Integrity Policy and Code, as well as other useful information related to writing papers, at the Academic Integrity Gateway web site: http://library.villanova.edu/Help/AcademicIntegrity. The fundamental principle here is that you should hold others’ intellectual labor sacrosanct and the law holds you responsible for any attempt to pass others’ work in any shape or form as yours. In addition to the general process, if you violate the policy, you will score F in the assignment and forfeit up to 50% of your cumulative score in the course, depending on the gravity of the infraction. When in doubt, please see the instructor.
Course Outline

Session 1. Introduction

- Defining and Measuring Health
- Global Health Inequalities and Development

Practice Workshop

Using PubMed to access the relevant academic literature.

Selected Readings (1)


Session 2. Socio-Economic Determinants

- Poverty, Income and Employment
  - Health as Human Capital
  - Health and Income Inequality
- Psycho-social Determinants of Health
  - Life-course Perspectives
  - Psycho-social Explanations

Practice Workshop


Selected Readings (2.1) Poverty, Income and Employment


**Selected Readings (2.2) Psycho-social Determinants of Health**


**Session 3. Health System Inequalities**

- **Introduction to Health Systems**
  - Health System Classification
  - Health System Reforms

- **Health Systems Inequalities**
  - Physician-Induced Inequalities
  - Insurance-Induced Inequalities

**Reading Workshop**


**Practice Workshop**

Selected Readings (3)


Session 4. Ethical and Policy Approaches

- Ethical Foundations of Public Health
  - ‘Classical’ Justice Approaches
  - Health Justice Approaches

- Politics of Health Inequalities
  - Theories of Agenda-Setting
  - Comparative Case Studies

Reading Workshop


Note – This looks like a short reading, but it adopts a highly formalized approach that might require some additional background reading if you have never studied welfare economics.

Selected Readings (4.1) Ethical Approaches


**Selected Readings (4.2) Policy Approaches**


Additional Readings

Policy Documents


Potvin, L., Moquet, M.-J. and Jones, C.M. (eds). *Réduire les inégalités sociales en santé* [ in French ]. INPES [ French National Institute for Health Prevention and Education ].


Academic Research


**Selected Websites**

Chetty, R. et al. [n.d.]. The Health Inequality Project.


University College London [UCL]. 2012. INEQ-CITIES Project.
