

# **Social Justice and Equality – in Search of John Cassel’s Epidemiology EPID 799C section 01**

Department of Epidemiology, UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health  
**Spring 2017 Syllabus (3 credit hours)**

**Class times: Mondays, 12:20-3:15pm, room 2304 McGavran-Greenberg**

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<b>Faculty</b>	Victor J. Schoenbach	William (“Bill”) Jenkins
Website	<a href="http://go.unc.edu/vjs/">http://go.unc.edu/vjs/</a>	
Email	vjs@unc.edu	bjenkins1945@yahoo.com
Telephone	919-966-7436	404-505-0555
Office hours	By appointment	By appointment

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## **Course Overview**

Justice is a core value of public health, and according to John Cassel, “Epidemiology is fundamentally engaged in the broader quest for social justice and equality”. Yet although epidemiology has contributed to dramatic improvements in public health since John Snow’s landmark studies, preventable disease, disability, and death remain widespread even in countries like the U.S., where aggregate levels of resources are abundant. Major health disparities have been widely recognized, and their reduction and elimination have been goals of national health policy for over two decades. Yet they persist even where it appears that the knowledge and resources to eliminate them are available.

This seminar seeks to understand the reasons for the persistence of gross disparities by looking back at the movement for health equity in the U.S. and analyzing underlying determinants of health inequities. The historical review begins with W.E.B. Dubois’ and B.T. Washington’s works at the beginning of the last century, takes an excursion through Sidney Kark’s and colleagues’ work in Pholela, South Africa, and accompanies the Karks and their colleagues as they bring the community health model to the U.S. The analysis of underlying determinants considers structural factors, especially economic and political ones, and how these in turn reflect historical and evolutionary forces as well as institutional and market dynamics. Since collective human behavior is the fundamental determinant of health equity and inequity, the analysis then considers social science and neuroscience insights into human cognitive, behavioral, and biological tendencies, and how these may be influenced in directions that advance public health. By developing a deeper understanding of human social behavior – perhaps the most important modifiable risk factor for health inequity – epidemiology can expand its contributions to the quest for social justice and equality.

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## **Learning Objectives**

The primary goal of this course is for all participants to broaden their awareness of the factors that influence public health and fruitful approaches to improve public health. After completing this course, students should be able to:

- Describe landmarks in the 100+ year movement to advance health equity.

- Analyze contemporary issues in health equity/health disparities in the context of this movement.
  - Give examples of how major health disparities are heavily influenced by social determinants.
  - Describe how these social determinants arise from the actions of individuals and institutions as they pursue expected objectives.
  - Explain how this process is shaped by fundamental economic, political, and evolutionary forces.
  - Cite examples of cognitive tendencies that contribute to narrow awareness exhibited in management, leadership, and political expression.
  - Cite biological and environmental influences on thinking, behavior, and consciousness.
  - Identify ways in which individual and collective consciousness influence public health and possible ways to improve these influences.
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## Course materials

A list of resources – articles, books and book chapters, audio and video resources, and websites – will be provided for each topic. There are required readings but no textbook. For the later topics, rather than required readings, students are encouraged to explore readings and other resources (seminars, media, interviews, outside discussions, writing, and reflection) that relate to their individual interests, so that class discussions can integrate ideas and information from a wider range of sources than any individual has time to examine.

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## Course Structure

The course will be divided into two major sections: I. The quest for social justice and equality, and II. Contextual factors and underlying determinants. Given the wide scope of these topics, the emphasis of the course will be on broadening our own awareness and increasing our ability to ask questions, draw connections across diverse phenomena, appreciate the joint influences of biological, cognitive, social, economic, technological, environmental, geographical, and historical factors, develop new insights about possible processes and hypotheses, and identify underutilized interventions and potential new ones.

Students, working alone or with others, will be expected to prepare for, participate in, and facilitate class or group discussions. Students will be encouraged to apply concepts from the course to their own areas of interest – and to share their insights with the class.

In addition to readings specifically assigned to the entire class, each student will read, listen to, or view at least 10 hours of additional relevant readings or multimedia items from the “virtual library of resources” or some other source and post in Sakai: (1) a 300-400 word precis of the content of each of 5 items and (2) a brief analytic appraisal of each item’s relevance (or lack of relevance) to the themes of the course. These posts will be made available to students in this and future semesters. Precis written by students in past semesters serve as examples – but please avoid writing a precis on an item that has already been reviewed. In addition to the Sakai posts,

each week two students will describe, discuss, and respond to questions about an item from the virtual library relevant to the week's topic (total time 5-10 minutes per student).

At midsemester, each student or pair of students will submit a 1-2 page proposal for a 10-20 page paper or project (e.g., audio, video, website, etc.). The paper will be due at the end of the course. Students will give presentations on their papers/projects during the next-to-last class.

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## Resources

An extensive list of materials to draw from is available in Sakai. Students may draw exclusively from these or from other materials they encounter. (Please provide a complete citation and URL if available for any resource you identify on your own.)

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## Course Requirements

Since the course is a collective learning activity, its success depends on active participation from all members. Students are expected to (1) post five precis in Sakai, as described above, and present at least twice in class (2) participate in and facilitate class discussions (except for excused absences), (3) develop a proposal and final project, (4) participate in the final project presentations, and (5) participate in the evaluations of each student's and the instructors' contributions to our collective learning. To thank you for your time and attention in submitting evaluations, these submissions will be recognized in assigning course grades.

The five evaluations will be: (a) brief anonymous mid-semester evaluation to help the instructors refine the course; (b) brief confidential mid-semester peer evaluation to give fellow course participants feedback about how helpful their contributions have been; (c) confidential end-of-course peer evaluation that will be used in compiling course grades; (d) confidential supplementary course evaluation for the instructors; and (e) the Department/School's anonymous course and instructor evaluations (see below). Links to the evaluation forms will be placed in Sakai except for the end-of-course evaluation conducted by the School (you will receive an email with the link to that webform).

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## Course Policies & Procedures

### UNC email policy



Per UNC email policy, all course-related communications will be sent via your official UNC email address as listed in ConnectCarolina or Sakai. It is your responsibility to ensure that you receive and read, in a timely manner, all EPID799c emails sent to your UNC email address. "Broadcast" emails (those sent to the entire class) will be archived in Sakai, so that you can verify that you are receiving them. Individually-sent emails may not be.

## Late Work Policy

A 10% deduction may be imposed for assignments that are submitted after 8:00am following the posted due date unless an extension has been obtained.

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## Evaluation

### Course grades will be computed on a 0-100% scale as follows:

Five Sakai posts (@5%)	25%
Class participation and presentations (peer and instructor ratings)	25%
Project proposal	5%
Final project presentation	10%
Final project paper/product	25%
Submission of evaluations	10%

### Letter grades – graduate students

**H:** Completion of course with a total score of 90% or greater

**P:** Completion of course with a total score of 65% - 89%

**L:** Completion of course with a total score of 50% - 65%

**F:** Students who achieve less than 50% in their course work will receive an F grade.

### Letter grades

**A:** Completion of course with a total score of 90% or greater (90-91% = A-)

**B:** Completion of course with a total score of 75% - 89% (75-79 = B-, 85-89 = B+)

**C:** Completion of course with a total score of 60% - 74% (60-64 = C-, 70-74 = C+)

**D:** Completion of course with a total score of 50% - 59%

**F:** Students who achieve less than 50% in their course work will receive an F grade.

In exceptional circumstances a grade of IN (incomplete) may be given in accordance with UNC policies.

### Letters of Recommendation

Should you need a letter of recommendation, please send an email to Vic and Bill with a subject line beginning “EPID799 recommendation request” and include the deadline for the recommendation and the other information they will need.

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## UNC Honor Code

The *Honor Code* and the *Campus Code*, embodying the ideals of academic honesty, integrity, and responsible citizenship, have for over 100 years governed the performance of all academic work and student conduct at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Acceptance by a student of enrollment in the University presupposes a commitment to the principles embodied in these codes and a respect for this most significant University tradition. Your participation in this course comes with our expectation that your work will be completed in full observance of the *Honor Code*. Academic dishonesty in any form is unacceptable, because any breach in academic integrity strikes destructively at the University's life and work. If you have any questions about your or our responsibility under the Honor System, please visit the Honor System website

([honor.unc.edu](http://honor.unc.edu)) and/or consult with someone in the Office of the Student Attorney General, the Office of the Dean of Students, and/or the EPID600 instructors.

EPID799 fully supports the Honor System at Carolina. We ask you to help by (a) following the instructions that accompany assignments for graded work and (b) reporting possible infractions to the instructors. The Honor System is a precious resource that enables freer and more collegial interactions between students and faculty. We all benefit from its vitality.

Please always follow guidelines about using the work of others, i.e., do not plagiarize (the Health Sciences Library has a tutorial on plagiarism and citing sources, [www.hsl.unc.edu/services/tutorials/PlagiarismTutorial/intro.html](http://www.hsl.unc.edu/services/tutorials/PlagiarismTutorial/intro.html)). Quotations, with proper citations, do not violate the Honor Code; however, extensive quotation does not demonstrate your understanding of the material.

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### **From the University lawyers**

1. By enrolling as a student in this course, you agree to abide by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill policies related to the Acceptable Use of online resources. Please consult the Acceptable Use Policy (<http://help.unc.edu/1672>) on topics such as copyright, net-etiquette and privacy protection.
2. As part of this course you may be asked to participate in online discussions or other online activities that may include personal information about you or other students in the course. Please be respectful of the rights and protection of other participants under the UNC Chapel Hill Information Security Policies ([http://its.unc.edu/ITS/about\\_its/its\\_policies/index.htm](http://its.unc.edu/ITS/about_its/its_policies/index.htm)) when participating in online classes.
3. When using online resources offered by organizations not affiliated with UNC Chapel Hill, such as Google or YouTube, please note that the Terms and Conditions of these companies and not the University's Terms and Conditions apply. These third parties may offer different degrees of privacy protection and access rights to online content. You should be well aware of this when posting content to sites not managed by UNC Chapel Hill.
4. When links to sites outside of the [unc.edu](http://unc.edu) domain are inserted in class discussions, please be mindful that clicking on sites not affiliated with UNC-Chapel Hill may pose a risk for your computer due to the possible presence of malware on such sites.

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### **Valuing, Recognizing, and Encouraging Diversity**

Promoting and valuing diversity in the classroom enriches learning and broadens everyone's perspectives. Inclusion and tolerance can lead to respect for others and their opinions, which is valuable in itself and is critical to maximizing the learning that occurs in this course. Other peoples' views may challenge our own closely held ideas and personal comfort zones. However, learning to understand and appreciate views different from our own can create a sense of community and promote excellence in the learning environment.

Diversity includes consideration of (1) the variety of life experiences others have had, and (2) factors related to “diversity of presence,” including, among others, age, economic circumstances, ethnic identification, disability, gender, geographic origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, and social position.

*This class will follow principles of inclusion, respect, tolerance, and acceptance that support the values of diversity.* Please bring any concerns to the attention of the instructors.

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## **Course Feedback and Evaluation**

The Department of Epidemiology participates in the School’s Course Evaluation System, the University's online course evaluation tool, enabled at the end of each semester. Your responses will be anonymous, with feedback provided in the aggregate; open-ended comments will be shared with instructors, but not identified with individual students. Although most comments are not made public, if you do not wish a comment to be shared publicly, please state that in the comment. Your participation in the course evaluation is a course expectation, as providing constructive feedback is a professional expectation. Such feedback is critical to improving the quality of our courses, as well as providing input to the assessment of your instructors.

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## **Words to Those Who Would Be Wise**

- Please save a copy of your responses to all assignments before you submit them electronically and retain the copy or confirmation email. Although fortunately rare, webform submissions and/or emails are occasionally erased or otherwise lost.
- If you need help, please do not hesitate to ask your instructors for assistance. Although plagiarism is of course prohibited, you are permitted to obtain assistance from classmates, librarians, or anyone else for this course. Significant assistance should be acknowledged.
- Should unforeseen events or life/work commitments occur during the semester which will impact your course work, please let the instructors know as soon as possible.

1/15/2017