Improving Worker Health: Social Movements, Policy Debates, and Public Health
Community Health Sciences CM470, Environmental Health Sciences M471, Labor & Workplace Studies M170

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Units: 4 units
Course Location: Public Health Building, Room 61-269
Course Schedule: Thursdays, 9:00am - 11:50pm
Class web site: https://moodle2.sscnet.ucla.edu/course/view/13S-LBRWSM170-1

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Studies indicate that we are spending more time at work. Despite these trends, health researchers, policymakers and practitioners too often ignore the impact of the work environment on health status. This course introduces the field of occupational health and safety in the larger public health and social arena, examining historical trends, social movements to advance worker health and safety, and current controversies.

Course readings and discussions will provide a theoretical and practical foundation to understand the intersection between the work environment and health, to analyze the cause of health disparities, and to debate the philosophies underlying current occupational health policies and interventions.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Examine the role of the work environment as a determinant of health and wellbeing
- Analyze occupational health disparities by gender, race/ethnicity, and class
- Investigate historical trends and sociopolitical factors that shape occupational health research and policy decisions
- Explore the theoretical underpinnings of occupational health and worksite health promotion programs
PREREQUISITES

This course is geared to students interested in: the sociopolitical and historic origins underlying the effect of work on health; worker, community and environmental justice organizing; community-based interventions to improve workers’ health; and current policy debates in occupational health and safety including the intersection of science and policy and injured workers’ access to health care.

Course topics focus on issues of interest to graduate students in Community Health Sciences, Environmental Health Sciences, and Urban Planning. The course is also open to upper level undergraduate students (juniors/seniors). It will be of particular interest to those with a minor in Labor and Workplace Studies.

COURSE STRUCTURE & REQUIREMENTS

1. Reading/Resources

- Course Readings on website
- See additional resources at end of syllabus and website

2. Class schedule, participation & weekly assignments

The course schedule will be flexible as needed based on the availability of guest speakers and potential for a worksite visit. Students are expected to complete required readings prior to class and be prepared to discuss them based on questions distributed in advance. Graduate student teams will strengthen facilitation skills by organizing a discussion around readings in one class during the quarter following guidelines distributed in class.

3. Field assignment

The goal of the field assignment is to become familiar with and contribute to a local campaign to improve working conditions or a national occupational health and safety policy debate. During the quarter, students will dedicate 8-10 hours to fieldwork with a local organization or field research on a current topic of interest.

Examples include:
- Field work with the CLEAN car wash campaign to evaluate past heat illness prevention campaigns and make recommendations to Car Wash Worker Organizing Committee members for this summer’s campaign;
- Field work with St. John’s network of Community Health Centers to support integration of a Healthy Work Initiative into their outreach, education, patient care and data collection programs, especially those with garment, car wash and restaurant workers;
- Field research to document the history of the struggle for an ergonomics standard, a highly controversial regulation to protect workers from musculoskeletal disorders (back strain, neck, shoulder, wrist and other injuries) that affect an estimated 1/3 of the
workforce. Research to be conducted through a group interview with key OHS professionals and labor activists.

- Field work to support activities for a local Workers’ Memorial Week of Action the last week in April, integrating worker health and safety into immigrant workers’ rights.
- Field research about current debates over controversial regulations to protect poultry workers and construction workers exposed to silica dust; retaliation against workers, with and without legal documents; sustainable food policy guidelines; refinery safety or workers hired through temp staffing agencies.
- Field research to analyze current initiatives to promote California hotel housekeeping, safe patient handling or workplace violence prevention standards or to a new refinery safety initiative to engage workers and communities.

Field assignments should be conducted in small teams. Details will be discussed in class and, based on the interests of students in the class, will be finalized with key organizations. Assignments are designed to provide opportunities for a combination of field-based work with local organizations and field research that does not have to be conducted off-site. In either case, the work will contribute to current campaigns and initiatives. Teams will present results of their field assignment the last week of class.

4. Papers

Students will submit three papers (4-6 pages double-spaced) to apply class discussions and readings to current worker health programs and policies. All papers should be posted on the website by noon the day before class for that week.

- Paper 1 will explore family work histories. Assignment will be distributed the first week of class. Due Week 3, 4/16
- Paper 2 will explore a program or policy related to the field assignment you choose. Selected papers may be the basis for an article in the journal, New Solutions, Occupational and Environmental Health Policy. Due Week 8, 5/21.
- Paper 3 is a summary, reflections and analysis of the field assignment based on readings and themes discussed in class. Due Week 10, June 4.

Papers will be graded based on five criteria: 1. Analysis (paper should not be just descriptive), 2. Organization (clear structure, intro, conclusion, argument easy to follow), 3. Content (knowledge, quality and creativity), 4. Citations and sources (adequate citations, number and diversity of sources, consistent formatting of citations and works cited), 5. Writing quality (basic writing skills, basic formatting such as page numbers, paper has been proofed before submitting)

**COURSE GRADE**

Course grades are based on successful completion of the following requirements.
Graduate students:

1. Class attendance, preparation and participation, lead discussion of readings in one class session (25%)
2. Field assignment and team presentation of field work (25%)
   - Individual log
   - Team presentation of fieldwork
3. Three papers, 4-6 pages each (50%)

Undergraduate students:

1. Class attendance, preparation, participation (25%)
2. Field assignment and team presentation of field work (25%)
   - Individual log
   - Team presentation of fieldwork
3. Three papers, 4-6 pages each (50%)
Syllabus (Subject to Change)

Note: Readings designated for a specific week should be read prior to that class session.

SECTION 1: OVERVIEW - WORKPLACE HAZARDS, HEALTH INEQUITIES

Week 1 (April 3): Work and Health – What is the connection?

1. Introduction & overview of course
2. Work and health – A comprehensive framework
3. Scope of the problem
4. Brief History of occupational safety & health

Assignment: Readings for Week 2; Decide on fieldwork focus; Family Work History, Due Week 3 April 17.

Week 2 (Apr 10): Work: A Social Determinant of Health

1. Case Study/Videoclips: a) Safety hazards: Las Vegas construction workers; b) Production pressures and job stress, ergonomics and work organization: poultry workers and cigar makers
3. Role of government: Intro to OSHA

Readings for Week 2:

- Levy and Wegman, Chpt. 1, Occupational and Environmental Health: An Overview, pp. 3-20 (note especially Figures 1-7 and 1-8 on pp 11-12
- Levy and Wegman, Chpt. 2, “The social context of occupational and environmental health.” pp. 21-38

Week 3 (Apr 17): Health Disparities – Health Equity

1. Changing workplace, Changing workforce: health inequities, contingent jobs
2. What we know and what we don’t: Limitations of OSH data, Underreporting
3. Case Study: Hotel workers and California’s Repetitive Motion Injury Prevention Standard – Applying Azaroff’s conceptual filters

Readings for Week 3:


Graduate students: Select one of articles from Occupational Health Disparities conference. Note – these are on the course website in Supplemental Readings, Occ Health Disparities sub-folder. Grad students should read and integrate one of these articles into Paper 2 and/or 3.

SECTION 2: ROLE OF LABOR/SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES; PUBLIC HEALTH STRATEGIES

Week 4 (April 24): Social Movements: Role of Unions, Worker Centers, Coalitions

1. Changing roles of Unions, Worker Centers and Worker Health
2. Worker Center speaker (note: Arturo Archilla from Make the Road New York came to class Week 2)

Readings for Week 4:


Note: Week of Workers Memorial activities. Schedule may change to accommodate participation in activities.

Week 5 (May 1): Science, Politics & Policy in the Occupational Safety & Health Arena

1. Case study of Chemicals at Work and Beyond
   o Safe until proven hazardous? U.S. and European approaches to regulation
   o Workers are People Too
2. Science, Politics & Regulation – Weigh the evidence or wait for more evidence?
3. Cal/OSHA: Possibilities and Constraints to Government Regulation

**Readings for Week 5:**


**Week 6 (May 8): Worksite Visit**

Applying theory to reality: Worksite visit to commercial laundry. Alsco, 900 N. Highland (see course website for info)

**Readings for Week 6 and 7:**


**Week 7 (May 15): Public Health Strategies Community-based Research, Education, Organizing to Improve Worker Health**
1. Overview – Principles of popular education and community-based action research
2. Race, class, gender and power dynamics in occupational health and safety programs
3. Intervention strategies to prevent work-related injuries & disease

Readings for Week 7:

- See Week 6

SECTION 3: CURRENT INITIATIVES & DEBATES

Week 8 (May 22):  Current Debates - Promoting health, preventing illness

1. Principles of Workers’ Comp
2. The health promotion, health & safety divide – Why does it exist? Is it justified?
   Innovative approaches to “Total Worker Health.”
3. Role of Community Health Centers: the South Los Angeles Healthy Work Initiative

Readings for Week 8:


Week 9 (May 29):  Current Debates – Jobs, Worker Health, Environmental Justice in the US and Beyond

1. Bridging the Workplace-Community-Environment Divide: Case studies of conflict and alliances
2. Worker health in a global economy (Video - Red Dust: Women Workers in China)

Readings for Week 9:


**Week 10 (June 5): Field Assignment Presentations**

- Final project presentations
- Wrap-Up

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

- Eliminating Health and Safety Disparities at Work, Sept. 2011 NIOSH Conference website – papers, videos, PPT presentations on a range of occupational health disparities topics including work organization and job insecurity; discrimination, abuse and bullying; effects of labor, economic and social policies; approaches to integrate occupational health in comprehensive public health programs; environmental justice; and education and training strategies: See website: [http://www.aoecddata.org/conferences/healthdisparities/index.html](http://www.aoecddata.org/conferences/healthdisparities/index.html) and papers on course website from May 2014 Special issue of the American J of Industrial Medicine.


- Relevant OSH statistical summaries & news clippings that highlight current controversies and debates:
  - Blog of commentaries about current events and debates: [http://scienceblogs.com/thepumphandle/](http://scienceblogs.com/thepumphandle/)
  - Debates about government and regulatory initiatives (see info on Triangle Shirtwaist Fire) [http://crywolfproject.org/](http://crywolfproject.org/); Click Issues tab
  - Archive of news articles and commentary about worker health and safety stories in the news: [http://spewingforth.blogspot.com/](http://spewingforth.blogspot.com/)

- Reference Textbooks (Available in LOSH Library)
  - Historical books: e.g. Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, Textile mill workers