Maternal and Child Health  
Florida State University  
Fall 2015  
Tuesday, 9:30-12, Bellamy 517

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Overview  
The dramatic reduction in infant and maternal mortality is one of the great public health achievements of the past century. Yet, infant mortality rates in the U.S. today remain some of the highest among industrialized countries, and maternal mortality in the U.S. has recently been on the increase. With approximately 4 million births occurring in the United States every year, maternal and child health is an area of pressing importance. It is also a timeless one. Concern about fertility and maternal and infant welfare has been a mainstay of public health priorities, political rhetoric, and policymaking in the U.S. since the early twentieth century, especially as maternal and child health statistics are one of the main gauges of a “nation’s health.”

This course covers contemporary issues in maternal and child health (MCH), focusing particularly on the social dimensions of MCH problems and policies. We will survey historical and demographic trends in MCH, discuss determinants of MCH, scrutinize how evidence is taken up in the MCH policy arena, and analyze how cultural values and norms inflect understandings of maternal and child health imperatives. We will examine maternal and child health disparities and explore how such disparities perpetuate inequalities more widely. In doing so, we will consider how concerns about maternal and child health reflect not only anxieties about the state of the public’s health but also broader social preoccupations with issues of gender, race, class, sexuality, citizenship, and the family. While some readings incorporate international perspectives, the course material will focus predominately on the United States. Nevertheless, interested students may choose global topics for the paper project.

Requirements  
You will be evaluated in the course based on four major components:

Attendance and participation: This is a seminar, and your participation, attendance, and active engagement with readings will be critical to its success. I expect attendance at all sessions; if you need to miss a class, please let me know ahead of time if at all possible. You should have completed all readings before the start of each class and bring your notes to class, with discussion points in mind. Please note that while maternal and child health may on the surface sound innocuous (after all, one might ask, who could be against healthy mothers and healthy babies?), we will
discuss topics in class that are highly political and controversial. I expect students to engage in thoughtful and respectful discussions.

You will also be responsible, along with one or two other students, for leading class discussion once during the semester. Your group will present the main ideas and arguments of the readings and assess how they fit in with any other relevant course material at this point in the course trajectory. You may use PPT, handouts, or other pedagogical materials as you see fit. Beyond presenting the overview, your group should also bring at least five analytic discussion questions for the class to consider.

\textit{Critical response papers:} You will choose five weeks (from weeks 3-14) for which you will turn in a response paper, no longer than one single-spaced page in length. These papers should be emailed to me by noon on the Monday before the class meeting during which we will be discussing the pertinent readings. These papers should clearly engage the week’s materials, not through summation but through analytic and critical engagement with key themes or questions that appeal to you as you are reading. You may tie in your own research interests if relevant. These papers will be graded on a “check” system: a check-minus indicates that the paper offers neither a clear synthesis of the readings nor original analytic thought; a check indicates that the paper solidly addresses the readings in a thoughtful way; a check plus indicates exceptional intellectual engagement with the readings and clear writing.

\textit{Research paper:} This assignment allows you to go into greater depth about a topic that interests you or that intersects with your own research interests. The paper should be 12-15pp, double-spaced, in length. More details will be provided as the course progresses, and I am happy to talk about paper ideas/topics at any point in the semester. You should turn in (by email or in person) 1-2 paragraphs describing your plans for your final paper to me by \textbf{September 29. The final version is due to me by December 8.}

\textit{Research presentation:} The last session of the course will consist of student presentations of final paper topics. These presentations will be very brief (about 5 minutes).

\textbf{Assessment}
Your final grade in this course will be based on the following:
- Attendance and participation, including leading one discussion: 25%
- Response papers (5): 30%
- Research paper: 35%
- Research presentation: 10%

\textbf{Policies}
\textit{University Attendance Policy}
Excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and
official University activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children or close family members experience serious illness.

**Academic Honor Policy**

In the academic setting it is critical that the work you present is original and that you cite outside sources rigorously and appropriately. Please see me if you have a question about plagiarism. The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University’s expectations for the integrity of students’ academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living up to their pledge to “...be honest and truthful and... [to] strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University.” (Florida State University Academic Honor Policy, found at [http://fda.fsu.edu/Academics/Academic-Honor-Policy](http://fda.fsu.edu/Academics/Academic-Honor-Policy).

**Disabilities Policy**

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center as well as bring me a letter indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class. This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request. For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact:

Student Disability Resource Center  
874 Traditions Way  
108 Student Services Building  
Florida State University  
Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167  
(850) 644-9566 (voice)  
(850) 644-8504 (TDD)  
sdrc@admin.fsu.edu  
[http://www.disabilitycenter.fsu.edu/](http://www.disabilitycenter.fsu.edu/)

**Syllabus Change Policy**

Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation of your performance in this course, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.
COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Week 1: Introduction to MCH
August 25

No readings. Email one discussion question pertaining to next week’s readings in addition to your ranked preferences for leading discussion to me by noon on Monday, August 31.

Week 2: Historical Foundations and Trends
September 1


Week 3: Risk Factors and Life Course Perspectives
September 8


Week 4: MCH Disparities
September 15


Week 5: Maternal Mortality
September 22


**Week 6: Controlling Fertility**  
**September 29**


**Week 7: Pregnancy and the Maternal-Fetal Relationship**  
**October 6**


**Week 8: Reproductive Technologies**  
**October 13**


**Week 9: Prenatal Health and Infant Morbidity/Mortality**  
**October 20**


**Week 10: Childbirth**  
**October 27**


Nelson, Margaret J. and Rebecca Popenoe. 2001. “Looking Within: Race, Class and


**Week 11: Maternal and Child Nutrition**

**November 3**


**Week 12: Child Health and Medical Interventions**

**November 10**


**Week 13: The Politics of Keeping Children Healthy**
**November 17**


**Week 14: The Politics of Prevention**
**November 24**


**Week 15: Presentations**
**December 1**

**Final paper due to me via email: Tuesday, December 8, by 5pm**