

## **E33.1325:**

### **Understanding social context and risk behavior: Public health approaches.**

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**Office Hours:** by appointment

### **Class Time & Location:**

Monday & Wednesday, 9:30-10:45; Silver 410

### **Course Description:**

This course will focus on the risks and consequences of health behaviors. You will become familiar with the distribution of these risks and consequences across populations and the associated risk factors. The approach will involve an examination of the ways in which behaviors associated with health risks are shaped by, and in turn, shape larger social contexts. You will be introduced to evidence regarding the role of these different contexts on risk behavior, and the successes and challenges of various interventions that have addressed such issues. The course places these behaviors in a larger historical context, examining the social interpretations that have influenced how interventions were designed and targeted. Further, it makes use of different frameworks with which to understand these contexts and each contribute to the design, implementation and evaluation of such interventions. Topics addressed will include legal drugs (alcohol, tobacco), illicit drugs, sexual behavior, violence, and injuries and accidents. For each domain, we will examine the history, biomedical consequences, epidemiology, and public health approaches.

### **Course Objectives:**

1. Define and describe risk behaviors, and consider their distribution throughout the population.
2. Introduce students to the relationship between social context and risk behavior, paying particular attention to differences related to class, race, geographic area, and age group.
3. Explore the relationship between the social construction of these behaviors historically and the epidemiology of risk behavior.
4. Consider the evolution of interventions related to these issues, contrasting criminal justice, social sanction and public health approaches.
5. Assess the ways in which the consequences of these behaviors have different impacts for different social groups.

### **Learning Objectives:**

1. To recognize various risk behaviors and their distribution throughout the population.
2. To understand the methods and efficacy of different approaches and interventions to reduce risk behaviors.
3. To consider some frameworks for understanding the way in which social context affects behaviors.
4. To understand the historic origins of current policies and programs to address risk behaviors for these conditions.

## **Assignments and Student Evaluation:**

Exam 1 (20 points)

Analysis paper (25 points)

Exam 2 (20 points)

Class participation/attendance (15 points)

Case studies (20 points; 4 x 5 points each)

**Exam 1 (20 points):** Students will be given an exam requiring them to use class texts and information from class to 1) analyze issues of social contexts and risk behaviors and their meaning for public health interventions, and 2) synthesize these concepts across risk behaviors.

**Prevention/Intervention Analysis paper (25 points):** Students will identify one prevention material (e.g., brochure, video, intervention, etc.) targeting one of the 6 risk topics addressed in class. Then, in a paper of no more than 1,500 words, write an analytic essay with the following components: (1) briefly describe the material and identify the topic/issue/behavior the materials are trying to address, and the population and social context targeted by the materials; (2) describe how the material is consistent with or different from other public health approaches to this risk; (3) based on your understanding of the risk behavior, evaluate the innovation, shortcomings, and approach of the material and reflect on how this material might be effective or ineffective in addressing risk; and (4) describe how you might strengthen it. This assignment is due at the start of class on Wednesday, May 4<sup>th</sup>. The assignment is worth 25 points. There is a 3-point deduction for each day late.

**Exam 2 (20 points):** Students will be given an exam requiring them to use class texts and information from class to 1) analyze issues of social contexts and risk behaviors and their meaning for public health interventions, and 2) synthesize these concepts across risk behaviors.

**Class participation (15 points):** Completing the readings is essential to class participation.

**Case studies (20 points):** At the conclusion of each topic section, students will complete a series of short essay questions building upon the readings, lectures, and class discussion. You must complete 4 of the 6 case studies.

## **Attendance policy:**

Students will be required to sign-in at each class. More than 2 unexcused absences will result in a deduction of 2 points per additional missed class. If you have an illness or medical emergency that prevents you from attending class, please bring a note from your health care provider. Travel for Spring Break and end-of-semester departures will not be considered excused absences; please consider this when booking travel.

**Grading & Grading Scale:**

A “C” grade demonstrates adequate work and participation; a “B” grade demonstrates above average work and participation; an “A” grade demonstrates superior participation and mastery of the material via thoughtful synthesis and analysis.

100-93 = A; 92-90 = A-, 89-87 = B+; 86-83 = B; 80-82 = B-; 79-77 = C+; 76-73 = C; 70-72 = C-; 69-67 = D+; 66-60 = D; below 60 = F

**Books & Readings:**

[Note: Readings should be completed prior to that class. For example, the Brandt, ch. 5-6 listed with Class #3 should be completed before you come to class that day.]

Allan Brandt. *The Cigarette Century: The Rise, Fall and Deadly Persistence of the Product that Defined America*. New York: Basic Books, 2007.

Daniel Okrent. *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition*. New York: Scribner, 2010.

Perry Halkitis. *Methamphetamine Addiction: Biological Foundations, Psychological Factors, and Social Consequences*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2009.

Lynn Ponton. *The Sex Lives of Teenagers: Revealing the Secret World of Adolescent Boys and Girls*. New York: Plume, 2001.

James Gilligan. *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic*. New York: Vintage Books, 1997.

David Hemenway. *While We Were Sleeping: Success Stories in Injury and Violence Prevention*. Berkeley: University of California, 2009.

**Disability statement:**

If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact The Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities, 719 Broadway, 212-998-4980. They will work with you to determine what accommodations are necessary and appropriate.

**Academic Integrity:**

It is important that students understand the academic code of conduct at New York University and follow it closely. Any form of academic misconduct, including plagiarism, will not be tolerated and will be subject to disciplinary procedures; these may include receiving a failing grade for an assignment, receiving a failing grade for the course, or referral to the Committee on Student Discipline. In order to avoid plagiarism, it is important that you always cite others' ideas as you write your papers. Students are encouraged to make use of the writing resources on campus, and should have their papers proofread and edited prior to submitting them for a grade. Also see: [http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic\\_integrity](http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity)

Class #	Date	Title	Reading
1	Jan 24	*Course Introduction and Overview	--
2	Jan 26	*Introduction to public health approaches	--
3	Jan 31	Tobacco [Historical]	Brandt, ch. 5-6
4	Feb 2	Tobacco [Biomedical]	Brandt, ch. 7-8
5	Feb 7	Tobacco [Epidemiology]	Brandt, ch. 9
6	Feb 9	Tobacco [Public health approaches] (Case Study due)	Brandt, ch. 11
7	Feb	Alcohol [Historical]	Okrent, ch. 1-4
8	Feb 14	Alcohol [Biomedical]	Okrent, ch. 5-7
9	Feb 16	Alcohol [Epidemiology]	Okrent, ch. 8-11
10	Feb 23	Alcohol [Public health approaches] (Case Study due)	Okrent, ch. 12-14
11	Feb 28	Illicit Drugs [Historical]	Halkitis, ch. 1-2
12	Mar 2	Illicit Drugs [Biomedical]	Halkitis, ch. 3-4
13	Mar 7	Illicit Drugs [Epidemiology]	Halkitis, ch. 5-6
14	Mar 9	Illicit Drugs [Public health approaches] (Case Study due)	Halkitis, ch. 7-8
15	Mar 21	**Exam 1**	--
16	Mar 23	Sexual Risk [Historical]	Ponton, ch. Intro, 1 & 5
17	Mar 28	Sexual Risk [Biomedical]	Ponton, ch. 6-7
18	Mar 30	Sexual Risk [Epidemiology]	Ponton, ch. 8-9
19	Apr 4	Sexual Risk [Public health approaches] (Case Study due)	Ponton, ch. 10-11
20	Apr 6	Violence [Historical]	Gilligan, ch. 1-3
21	Apr 11	Violence [Biomedical]	Gilligan, ch. 4-5
22	Apr 13	Violence [Epidemiology]	Gilligan, ch. 6-7
23	Apr 18	Violence [Public health approaches] (Case Study due)	Gilligan, ch. 8-10
24	Apr 20	Accidents & Injuries [Historical]	Hemenway, ch. 1-2
25	Apr 25	Accidents & Injuries [Biomedical]	Hemenway, ch. 3-4
26	Apr 27	Accidents & Injuries [Epidemiology]	Hemenway, ch. 8-10
27	May 2	Accidents & Injuries [Public Health approaches] (Case Study due)	--
28	May 4	**Analysis Paper due** & Class review	--
29	May 9	**Exam 2**	--

**Note:** Syllabus and class plan are subject to change according to course progression.