Course description:
This course examines the epidemiology of stress and health, and addresses the protective capacity of networks of social relationships. The course will address the effects of a wide variety of life stressors – such as chronic illness, the death of a loved one, childhood trauma, and financial hardship – on health problems such as substance abuse, mental disorders, and physical illness. Likewise, a variety of social support structures for coping with these life stressors will be discussed, including peer groups, family support, and community-level social networks.

Students will be introduced to key terms and concepts, examine theories that help to explain the effects of stress and social relationships on health, and discuss important methodological considerations for doing research on stress, social relationships and health. We will also review a variety of social epidemiological research findings that provide evidence of linkages between stress, social relationships, and health outcomes, throughout the life course and in various settings. Finally, we will focus on applied intervention work that has attempted to promote health by targeting and mobilizing social relationships and facilitating coping with life stressors.

Course objectives:
This course is designed to help students develop a broad appreciation for the linkages between stress, social relationships, and health. Such an appreciation should enable students to better understand findings emerging from social epidemiological research, and draw insights from these findings that lead to more effective interventions and more well-informed public policy decisions and recommendations.

After completion of this course, students should be able to:
1. Define and distinguish between stress and social relationship terms and concepts, such as stressful life events, chronic strains, social networks and social support;
2. Understand and explain the historical foundations and major theoretical roots of the study of stress, social relationships, and health;
3. Identify and utilize appropriate measurement techniques for assessing stress and social relationships;
4. Discuss research findings related to the health effects of various stressors and specific aspects of social relationships in different populations;
5. Identify, assess, and summarize the findings of programs that have targeted stressors, and/or have incorporated social relationship factors to promote health; and
6. Incorporate stress reduction and social support elements into the design of relevant health promotion programs and policies.
Class policies and expectations:

- All students are expected to attend class, participate in class discussions and complete the required readings. Class absences will need to be justified ahead of time.

- All assignments are to be handed in on time. A minimum of 5% per day will be deducted for late papers/assignments.

- Academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism or unauthorized collaboration on any assignment will result in a fail grade for the assignment, and could result in a fail grade for the class. Please refer to the booklet, Community Rights and Responsibilities (http://www.albany.edu/judicial_affairs/standardsofconduct.html), for a full explanation of the University’s standards of conduct. The University Library website has an excellent guide to avoiding plagiarism (http://library.albany.edu/usered/plagiarism/index.html). You will be expected to have completed this tutorial before the first assignment is due, and are responsible for knowing the material. Please see me if you have any questions about this.

Any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent him/her from fully demonstrating his/her abilities should contact me by the second week of class to discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and facilitate your educational experience.

Readings:

A collection of required readings will be available through the electronic reserve system (ERES) at the UAlbany library. You can access the ERES page through the library’s web page (http://library.albany.edu/). The course password will be announced in class. Some additional readings may also be distributed in class or posted on ERES throughout the semester.
Course requirements:

Class participation 20%
Literature review paper 30%
- Lit review summary 10%
Final written assignment 40%

(Final grading scheme: A-E)

Class participation:
- Students are expected to attend class and participate in class discussions and exercises on a regular basis. Students should prepare for class by thoughtfully reading the assigned articles/chapters before each class session so that they are ready to be active contributors to the class.
- Students should come to each class with 1-2 discussion questions based on the readings for that week and/or an item from the current news, a movie, a book, or some other type of media that speaks to the proposed links between stress and/or social relationship factors, and health. Each week, any student may be asked to share his/her question(s) or news items with the rest of the class.

Literature review paper and summary:
- Each student will be required to submit a written review (i.e., summary and critique) of the research literature on a specific topic related to stress, social relationships, and health. Topics will be selected in consultation with the instructor. The main text of this written assignment should be between 1,500-2,000 words. This assignment is due in class on October 18.
- Students will also be required to prepare a brief (1 page) summary of their literature review, highlighting its major findings (also due on October 18). The format for this written summary will be provided by the instructor. Some students will also be asked to provide an oral summary of their literature review during this class period.

Final written assignment:
- The final project is a written assignment formatted as either:
  a) A research proposal;
  b) A public health program/intervention proposal; or
  c) A policy statement.
  o Research proposals should be between 1,500 and 3,000 words, and must be written independently. Any student wishing to write a research proposal for this assignment will need to gain approval from the instructor.
  o Program/intervention proposals should be between 2,400 and 3,600 words, and can be written individually or in student pairs.
  o Policy statements should be between 1,500 and 3,000 words, and must be written independently.
- The instructor will provide students with instructions on the proper format for each option. All written assignments will be due on December 6. Student pairs who write program/intervention proposals will also be asked to share their ideas with the class on this day.
| Session 1 | August 30 | Introduction and Course Overview  
The Scientific Study of Stress and Social Networks |
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**Session 1**  
**August 30**  
**Introduction and Course Overview**  
The Scientific Study of Stress and Social Relationships


**Session 2**  
**September 6**  
**Stress, Social Networks, and Health: A Review of the Research**


_Self-selected article (read bring to class)_

**Session 3**  
**September 13**  
**Stress Concepts and Measurement Strategies**


**Session 4**  
**September 20**  
**Social Networks Concepts and Measurement Strategies**


**Session 5**  
**September 27**  
**Modeling the Stress Process: Physiological Mechanisms**


**Session 6  October 4  Modeling the Stress Process: Psychosocial Mechanisms**


**Session 7  October 11  Modeling the Stress Process: The Role of Health Behaviors**


**Session 8  October 18  Modeling the Stress Process: Lifecourse Perspectives**


Session 9    October 25    Stress and Social Status: Race and Ethnicity


“Living in Disadvantaged Neighborhoods is Bad for Your Health” webclip from Unnatural Causes. (http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/video_clips_detail.php?res_id=217)


Session 10    November 8    Stress and Social Status: Gender, Education, and Social Class


Session 11    November 15    Stress-focused Interventions


Session 12  November 29  Interventions Targeting Social Networks


Choose 1 of the following:


Review before class
http://www.communitycaregivers.org/
http://www.caringbridge.org/

Session 13  December 6  Stress and Social Policy


Reread: