Calendar Description
An overview of the link between social inequality and emotional inequality, focusing on differences in mental health across social groups and the role of stress and coping resources in explaining group differences.

Prerequisite
The prerequisite for Sociology 363 is either a Sociology 200 level or higher course or a Psychology 200 level or higher course. Students without the prerequisite will be removed from the course when discovered.

Overview
This course considers the influence of social environment and social experience on mental distress and disorder, focusing especially on differences in mental health by social statuses and across groups, and explanations of these differences in terms of exposure to different types of stress and access to social and/or personal coping resources.

A sociological perspective on mental health typically uses mental health as a “social mirror” --- an efficient marker which “reflects” the emotional consequences of experience in varying social environments, social conditions, and both social contexts and individual histories in individual’s lives. In this role, mental health is aggregated shorthand, a reference point, for the meanings that flow from the summed impact of past and current experience.

The course can be viewed as a logical sequence of issues that arise in considering the experiential course of a person at risk for mental health problems. We begin with the
problem of defining and measuring disorder and distress, and then consider variations in
mental health that are related to social position or category, such as social class, gender,
race, and marital status. The course then uses the Stress Process model as an organizing
framework for explaining the role of social inequality and social experience in mental
health. This section introduces the basic components of this model, with an emphasis on
varieties of stressors and coping resources. Given a person with a mental health problem,
then, the next section considers the life consequences of these problems, focusing as
examples on educational marriage, and adult achievement outcomes. Finally, we consider
important themes in recent mental health research, focusing on the life course perspective,
the impact of social contexts such as neighbourhoods, workplaces, schools, and
communities, and the impact of macro-stressful events, such as 9/11 and school shootings.

My approach in this course is to consider the better-known and/or most prevalent disorders
and problems, including depression, anxiety disorders, and substance abuse in particular.
We do not restrict our attention to disorders, however. A good deal of the important
variation in mental health is not captured by considering only those with a disorder vs. all
others. I will discuss mental health issues in terms of a gradient of problems from the minor
to the severe, thus including those with real problems but who do not qualify for specific
diagnoses. Studying the full range of mental health is important to a sociological approach,
since the full distribution of mental health is a sensitive indicator of sources of social
disadvantage and inequality.

Required Work

I will give one term test (all short-answer), two pop quizzes in class, and a final exam. The
two in-class quizzes will occur in one class before the first test, and another after the first
test. They will be short, and take only a few minutes. Each test is worth 5 points: signing
your name is worth 3 points; answering a question about the previous class will add 1
point, and answering a question about the current class will add 1 point.

The term test will be short answer only, but the final will be short answer plus one short
essay, based on your choice of two questions. Term work will include either a short paper
(4 to 6 pages double-spaced) handed in by the due date in class or a series of comments on
readings that you post online on the dates readings are assigned for class. These
comments must be posted before the class in which the reading is scheduled to be
discussed – before 12 noon on Wednesday.

Note that the test and the final are non-cumulative.

The short-answer sections of tests are somewhat unique in format. Basically, types of
responses vary by the type of question. Some questions are multiple choice, some are fill-in-
the-blank, some ask you to choose the correct word to complete a sentence, and some
require a phrase or sentence response. Questions focus on evaluating your awareness and
understanding of the basic theories, concepts, hypotheses, and findings discussed in both
**readings and lectures.** No short-answer questions necessitating an "opinion" to be defended will be included.

**Paper**

This paper will be a response to the three questions below. The purpose of the paper is to apply concepts and theories discussed in the course. This paper will be a case study of someone you know, using course concepts and findings to help explain their emotional or psychological problems, or alternatively, to help explain why they do not have problems given a high-risk life history. The anonymity of the person should be protected. Your current knowledge of the person and their life circumstances must be sufficient to write the paper.

In the course of the paper, you will answer the following three questions:

1. **Give a short history of the problem, or circumstances that could have led to a problem, including important circumstances that must be included to answer questions #2 and #3. Discuss the specific content of the problem, relating it to known criteria for disorder or distress. Also briefly discuss, if appropriate, issues of duration of symptoms, timing in the life course, and severity. This question must be answered in one page or less.**

2. **Comment on the specific risk for these problems suggested by findings on the social distribution of mental health from the course. Does your case fit these findings or not, and if not, suggest a reason? Answer this part in preferably 1 to but no more than 2 pages. You can discuss other risk factors beyond those discussed in the course if you cite supporting literature.**

3. **Discuss the role of social statuses, stress exposures and coping resources in explaining the development of their problem and whether the problem has diminished or grown over time (if applicable). It is important here that you focus only on what you argue are the “crucial” stressors or coping resource problems that explain why the problem occurred when it occurred, and how it was maintained over time. If you choose to analyze someone who has avoided mental health problems despite stress, present why you think the stressors they have experienced are important and how their coping resources helped avoid problems. Answer this question in 3 to 4 pages.**

**Comments**

If you choose not to write a paper, you have the alternative of posting comments on a private “Journals” section of Blackboard on 6 of 9 selected readings. The readings you can select from are highlighted in the reading list.

Comments are broadly defined as either analytical questions or a commentary about the interpretation of ideas or findings in the paper that raise critical issues about the paper, connect it with other readings, or explain its role as an important contribution to the literature. These comments should mention the parts of the paper that led to the comment you make, but you also need to be clear that you have read the entire paper. Each comment you submit should be about half to three-quarters of a page single-spaced.
Decisions about Required Work

• If you do at least two comments before the test, you are choosing that method of fulfilling the requirements for the course.

• If you do one only, you can choose to continue with comments or do the paper.

• If you do no comments before the test, you can still do comments --but there are only six to choose from at that point and so you will do all six. This will be declared by a “sign-up” for the paper after the test.

• If have submitted one or no comments by that point, and you do not sign up for the paper, then you have chosen the comments.

Due Dates for Work:

You will have to declare whether you intend to write a paper or submit commentaries by the week before the first test. Provisional due dates for required work are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Weights</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Term test</td>
<td>October 15</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Either: Paper Or: 6 Comments on readings</td>
<td>November 26</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Two pop quizzes in class</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Final exam</td>
<td>exam period</td>
<td>40%</td>
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Please note: Late term work will be given a 10% reduction in the grade immediately. This means that the paper/ comment will be graded on the basis of .90 of its original weight in the course. This increases to 20% if the paper is late more than 4 days. Papers will not be accepted if they are more than a week late. Your grade will be zero on that part of the course. There are no late comments: any comment posted late will not be graded.

Blackboard

Blackboard will be used in this course primarily for three purposes: 1) I will post required readings beyond the textbook there; 2) You will post comments about readings on the discussion board; and 3) I will post most lecture Power Point materials there.

Textbook (required)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Section / Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 10</td>
<td>1. Sociological Approach</td>
<td>Thoits</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Wheaton</td>
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<td>September 17</td>
<td>2.1 and 2.2 Definition and Measurement</td>
<td>Wakefield</td>
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<td>Mirowsky and Ross</td>
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<td>Wheaton</td>
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<td>September 24</td>
<td>3.1 Patterns</td>
<td>Kessler (all 3)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3.2 Social Class</td>
<td>Eaton</td>
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<td>October 1</td>
<td>3.3 Gender</td>
<td>Rosenfield and Smith</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Mirowsky and Ross</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3.4 Marital Status</td>
<td>Williams et al.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Simon</td>
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<td>October 8</td>
<td>3.5 Race, Immigration</td>
<td>Williams</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Montazer and Wheaton</td>
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<td>October 15</td>
<td>Term Test</td>
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<td>October 22</td>
<td>4.1 and 4.2 Stress Models</td>
<td>Pearlin</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Wheaton and Montazer</td>
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<td>October 29</td>
<td>4.2 and 4.3 Stress and Coping</td>
<td>Turner and Brown</td>
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<td>Mirowsky and Ross</td>
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<td>Ross and Mirowsky</td>
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<td>November 5</td>
<td>5.1 Life Consequences</td>
<td>Breslau</td>
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<td>Kessler</td>
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<td>Forthofer</td>
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<td>November 12</td>
<td>5.2 Neighbourhoods</td>
<td>Aneshensel</td>
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<td>Turner</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Leventhal</td>
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<td>November 19</td>
<td>5.3 The Life Course</td>
<td>Mirowsky and Ross</td>
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<td>Elder and Liker</td>
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<td>November 26</td>
<td>5.4 Terrorism and Macro-Stress</td>
<td>Johnson and Hobfoll</td>
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<td>Kessler</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Wheaton and Montazer</td>
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**Student Accommodations**

Please see me if you have a disability or other need that requires accommodation or classroom modification. I will be glad to help you in whatever way I can.

**Missed Deadlines**

Medical Issues: Please note that requests for medically based exemptions for the assignment deadline must be accompanied by a U. of T. medical form, signed in legible handwriting and completely filled out with address and CPSO registration number. The original form must be given to me in person, within 7 business days, with the opportunity for me to make a Xerox copy.

Forms that are scanned or Xeroxed will not be accepted. The U. of T medical form is available from [www.healthservice.utoronto.ca/pdfs/medcert.htm](http://www.healthservice.utoronto.ca/pdfs/medcert.htm)

**Academic Integrity**

Students are expected to know and adhere to the University's principles of academic integrity. Any act of plagiarism or other unethical behavior will be addressed in accordance with University guidelines. Students should be aware that turning in an old paper, or large parts thereof, for credit in a second course, is considered an academic offense. Please see the "Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters" ([http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm](http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm)) for specific information on academic integrity at the U of T.

**Appointments**

I do not hold specific office hours. Instead, you can phone the number on the first page and arrange an appointment at any time, or email me to set up an appointment. I am in my office on most days.
TOPICS/READING LIST

1. THE SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF MENTAL HEALTH.


2. DEFINITION AND MEASUREMENT OF MENTAL DISORDER AND DISTRESS

2.1 Definition and Measurement of Mental Disorder.


2.2 Psychological Distress and its Relation to Disorder.


3. THE SOCIAL DISTRIBUTION OF MENTAL HEALTH

3.1 Epidemiological Patterns


3.2 Social Class.


3.3 Gender


3.4 Family Structure and Marital Status


3.5 Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration


4. EXPLANATIONS OF SOCIAL DIFFERENCES

4.1 The Stress Process Model

4.2 Stress Models

4.3 Coping Resources and Coping Behavior.


5. SPECIAL TOPICS

5.1 Life Consequences Of Mental Health Problems


5.2 Neighbourhoods as Social Contexts


Leventhal, Tama, et al., 2003. “Moving to Opportunity: an Experimental Study of

5.3 The Life Course


5.4 Terrorism and Macro-Stress

