Course Syllabus

Public Health in the Context of Contemporary Brazil
IPBH 3000 (3 Credits / 45 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
Brazil: Public Health, Race, and Human Rights

PLEASE NOTE: This syllabus is representative of a typical term. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description
The United Nations decrees that quality healthcare is a human right. The WHO also states that health is a state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. In this seminar, which combines both in-class and out-of-class work, students will analyze public health challenges and advances in Brazil. They will study the social determinants of health as well as the impact of larger structural forces on public healthcare in the Brazilian community context. Students will consider how individual health and larger community well-being are influenced by factors such as age, gender, culture, education, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, environment and social class.

To understand these issues, students will study the Brazilian national healthcare system, the Sistema Único de Saúde, along with alternative healthcare practices, focusing in particular on the northeast region of Brazil. Students will observe firsthand the functioning of the healthcare system at the local and primary levels, and also consider the response of NGO’s, community organizations and other institutions to gain a wide and nuanced understanding of how Brazilians pursue pursuit of health and well-being. While students will engage these questions broadly, they will also focus specifically on Afro-Brazilian and other marginalized populations. They will study how these populations conceptualize health and well-being, the connection between healing and spiritual beliefs, and specific health concerns and challenges faced in these communities.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of this course, students will be able to:
- Critically analyze the cultural and social determinants of health and well-being in Brazil with specific reference to populations in the Northeast region, Afro-Brazilian groups and other marginalized populations.
- Discuss the Brazilian public healthcare system as it is designed and as it plays out in practice in diverse communities.
- Evaluate the role of NGOs and other alternative healthcare options to promote the well-being of diverse populations.
- Discuss how Afro-Brazilian healing traditions and spiritual beliefs intersect with the 21st century Brazilian public health model in theory and practice.
Language of Instruction
This course is conducted in English and Portuguese.

Course Modules

Module 1
In this module, students begin their study of public health by learning about the larger context of Brazil, namely, political, economic, social and cultural aspects.
- Introduction to Brazilian history through health. Health in periods of pre-conquest, colonial, slavery and rebellion, independence and twentieth century.
- 21st Century: How healthy is Brazil today? Ways to approach this question and how the course will proceed. Overview of Brazil’s current health status and basic epidemiology concepts.
- Introduction to cultural, political, racial and social determinants of health.

Module 2
Students take on the study of the Sistema Único de Saúde and begin a deeper consideration of how people from diverse populations struggle to access this system and why.
- Historical overview of the Brazilian Primary Healthcare program (O Sistema Único de Saúde (SUS). The program’s development, current advances and challenges.
- Structural issues related to healthcare provision and access. Urban versus rural settings.
- The effects of different social determinants on well-being, how access to sufficient and high-quality care can vary.

Module 3
In this module, we turn to the many ways in which communities and individuals search for alternative healthcare options, studying how this becomes politicized and asking what role education may play in improving the well-being of different populations.
- Alternative ways to seek healthcare and well-being, a look at NGOs and other answers.
- Health and the political world.
- Education as a route towards improved well-being.

Module 4
This module focuses specifically on Afro-Brazilian communities. Students will inquire into both the social and cultural contexts around well-being and healthcare in these communities.
- What does it mean to be well? Spiritual and religious conceptualizations of well-being in Afro-Brazilian communities.
- Access to different models of care: Afro-Brazilian communities and healthcare struggles. The role of Candomblé in healing, including mental and physical well-being.
- Cultural, political, racial and social determinants of health, continued.

Required readings
Our key text will be:
Required Readings


Educational Excursions

Excursions typically include:
- Salvador: health centers, community organizations and NGOs
- Salvador: Climério de Oliveira Maternity Hospital
- Ilha de Maré
- Terreiro de Candomblé: Afro-Brazilian religious center
- Cachoeira and Alercim in the Recôncovo region of Bahia
- Remanso: Quilombo community in the Chapada Diamantina region
- NGOs, community organizations, & MST settlements

Evaluations and Grading Criteria

Description of assignments:
Course evaluation includes a final take-home essay exam, a community project, participation in classes, activities and a group presentation.
- Short essay/take-home questions. Students will respond to 3 short essays related to the lectures and site visits.
- Discussion Group Presentations. In small groups, each student will be responsible for leading a discussion during the semester.
- Community Project. Details to be provided onsite.
- Final Essay exam. Students will write a synthesis and reflection paper referencing the lectures, readings and field activities.
- Participation. Includes class participation in all learning sites, discussion of readings and involvement in field activities.

Assessment:
Short essay take-home questions 25%
Discussion Group Presentation 20%
Community Project 20%
Final Essay Exam 25%
Participation 10%
Grading Scale
94-100%  A
90-93%  A-
87-89%  B+
84-86%  B
80-83%  B-
77-79%  C+
74-76%  C
70-73%  C-
67-69%  D+
64-66%  D
below 64  F

Expectations and Policies
- **Assignments:** Timely completion of all assignments is expected. Late hand-ins will be penalized. All assignments are evaluated according to organization, analytical quality, depth of understanding, argumentation, and presentation of evidence.
- **Excursions:** Many of the visits will be to underprivileged areas, challenging students to understand how historical oppression and public policies affect the lives of peoples today. Students are expected to be respectful, to engage local community members, and to listen actively to all participants.
- **Readings:** Not all readings will be directly addressed in every class; however, students are responsible for all of the required readings, and should be prepared to discuss them at group de-briefs and in classes, regardless. The readings will help place the classes in context, engage lecturers, generate questions for class discussions, and deepen student knowledge of particular issues discussed in class.

Please see the SIT Study Abroad Student Handbook for policies on academic integrity, ethics, academic warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment, and the academic appeals process.

Please note, the syllabus, course content, lecturers, and readings may modified by the Academic Director in order to better suit the needs of the course and its participants. Should any change of class topics or lecturers may be necessary, student will be promptly notified.