



Department of Public Health

**College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences
Belmont University
Fall 2025**

Course: Current Issues in Public Health
Course Credit: 3 hours
Course Day/Time: TR 9:30 am – 10:45 am
Class Location: JCM 408
Instructor: Name Frecia Gonzalez, DrPH, MPH
Office: Jack C Massey, Room 450
Office Phone: 615-460-5361
Office Hours: Monday – Wednesday 1 pm to 4 pm
[*Book time with Frecia Gonzalez*](#)
Email: frecia.gonzalez@belmont.edu

COURSE INFORMATION

Pre-Requisites: No Pre-Requisites Required.

Course Description:

This course examines existing and emerging public health issues in the United States and Tennessee, with particular attention to the structural, social, and environmental factors that shape health outcomes. Students will explore how historical and systemic inequities, including those related to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, and other identities, affect health disparities across communities.

Grounded in a Social Action Framework, the course moves beyond analysis to emphasize civic responsibility, evidence-based advocacy, and community engagement. Students will engage in service-learning and in hands-on projects, policy tracking, and the design of inclusive, culturally responsive interventions aimed at promoting health equity for all. Through collaborative learning and applied public health tools, students will develop the knowledge and skills to serve as agents of change in both local and national contexts.

This course may be taken at any time but may be particularly useful early in the curriculum for students interested in exploring career alternatives in core areas of public health practice and research.

Course Objectives:

At the completion of this course, the student will be able to:

1. **Describe and analyze** current public health issues in Tennessee and the larger United States.
2. **Explain the historical, political, and ethical foundations** of public health practice and how they shape modern solutions.
3. **Evaluate the role of structural and social determinants of health** in producing and sustaining health disparities across populations.
4. **Interpret and synthesize public health data** from multiple sources (e.g., surveillance systems, peer-reviewed literature, government reports) to support evidence-based decision-making.
5. **Communicate public health issues and solutions** clearly and accurately to both professional and non-specialist audiences, using oral presentations, written reports, and alternative media formats (e.g., infographics, social media, blogs, videos).
6. **Apply critical thinking and policy analysis skills** to evaluate current and proposed public health policies, including assessing their feasibility, impact, and alignment with public health ethics.
7. **Collaborate with peers and community key partners** to design and propose a socially just, evidence-based intervention that addresses a pressing public health issue.
8. **Develop, implement and present a social action campaign plan** that includes issue development, power building, tactics, and implementation strategies to advocate for public health change.

Essential BSPH Learning Outcomes:

This course addresses [undergraduate public health learning outcomes](#) in the four domains outlined by the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health:

1. Knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world as it relates to individual and population health
2. Intellectual and practical skills
3. Personal and social responsibility
4. Integrative and applied learning

Instructional Method:

Students are expected to be self-directed and responsible for their own learning. They are expected to prepare for class by using a variety of resources available within the University community. The instructional format will consist of a combination of seminar/discussion, presentations, reading, written/group assignments, review and use of library and electronic resources, online learning modules, and assessment. The course is designed to be hands on and engaging to practice in class knowledge with real world experience. Course materials will be available and maintained on the course-specific website.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Required Text:

Myers-Lipton, S. (2023). "CHANGE! A Student Guide to Social Action. (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge. ISBN: 978-1-032-41802-5

Other Resources:

Peer reviewed articles assigned to specific topic modules. See Course Schedule and Canvas Modules.

Participation:

Students are expected to attend and actively participate in all classes. Please come to class prepared to discuss assignments and course readings. If the university cancels classes, such as for severe weather, students will be expected to continue with readings as originally scheduled. Any assignments scheduled during those missed classes, such as an groups assignment, exam or paper, are due at the next class meeting unless otherwise notified by the instructor.

Classroom Etiquette:

Students may use a laptop or tablet for note taking or research during class. Use of technology for any other reason (social media, internet surfing, etc.) is strictly prohibited. Students may not use cell phones during class (for calling or texting). Out of respect for the professor and fellow students, please turn off or silence all cell phones and other electronic devices during class time. If behavior with cell phones or other devices becomes distracting during class, the student will be asked to leave.

Inclusivity, Respect, and Academic Freedom:

This course is designed to be an inclusive and respectful learning environment for all students. We recognize that public health issues often intersect with race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, identity, and other lived experiences. Our discussions will explore these topics through scholarly, evidence-based frameworks to better understand structural and social determinants of health, health disparities, and systemic inequities. You are encouraged to think critically, share your perspectives, and engage respectfully with differing viewpoints. Disagreement is a natural and valuable part of academic discourse and will not affect your grade, provided it is expressed in a constructive and respectful manner. All students are expected to follow our class ground rules:

1. Listen actively and allow others to finish speaking.
2. Engage with ideas, not personal identities.
3. Use evidence to support claims and cite sources when possible.
4. Maintain a respectful tone at all times.

Class Policies:

1. The instructor reserves the right to alter the course schedule, assignments, reports, grading scale, and evaluation methods depending on class performance or other circumstances.
2. Students who arrive more than ten (10) minutes late to class will receive an unexcused absence for that class period.
3. All correspondence will be through Belmont University email and Canvas. It is the student's responsibility to check their email and course site regularly.

4. Late assignments **will not be accepted** except in extreme circumstances or emergencies. If you are unable to complete an assignment, *you must notify me via phone or email before the assignment is due.*
5. All assignments must be submitted in Canvas unless otherwise noted. Assignments are due by 11:59 PM on the date specified on your calendar.
6. Specific formatting requirements for papers and assignments will be given for each assignment. Failure to adhere to these requirements will result in a deduction in the overall grade.
7. Cheating and plagiarism of any kind (including unauthorized use of ChatGPT or other AI) will not be tolerated in this course; suspicion of either of these offenses will result in a failing grade for the assignment or assessment given. The instructor reserves the right to report all instances of cheating or plagiarism to the university as appropriate or necessary.
8. Students may not audio or video record lectures (including AI transcripts) without express permission from the instructor.
9. If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact me via phone or email. I will respond to all emails within 24 hours during the week and 48 hours on weekends.

COURSE CONTENT AND EVALUATION

Course Assignments/Requirements:

1. **Quizzes-** There will be brief IN-CLASS quizzes (usually on Tuesday, unless there is no class and then it would be on Thursday) over the assigned reading(s) for that week. There will be **NO-MAKE UP QUIZZES**.
2. **Portfolios-** You will build a portfolio with your responses to specific questions assigned from the required text. See Canvas for instructions and specific questions from text.
3. **Participation-** Your participation grade contains 4 parts, each one about a quarter of your final participation grade:
 - a. Top 10 Public Health Issues in the United States (25 points)
 - b. Team Week Logs- each week, your group will choose a different person to be the meeting facilitator; this person will need to provide information about your team's progress and each person's role in your group (45 points)
 - c. Attendance and participation during class (10 points)
 - d. Self-reflection and Group-evaluations (20 points)
4. **Campaign Notebook-** Each group will submit a Campaign Notebook which will include asset mapping, photovoice, and a project report. In addition to each person's responses from the Portfolio assignments and self-reflections. See Canvas for instruction details.
5. **Final Presentation-** Each group will present on their topic campaign to the larger class and partners. Details regarding presentation expectation are in Canvas.

Grading/Evaluation:

Assignments

| | |
|---|---------|
| Quizzes (10 X 10 points each) | 100 pts |
| Portfolios (4 x 25 points each) | 100 pts |
| Participation (Team Weekly Logs, Attendance, self and group evaluations) | 100 pts |

Grading Scale

| | | | |
|----|----------|----|---------|
| A | 95 – 100 | C | 77 - 79 |
| A- | 92 - 94 | C- | 74 - 76 |
| B+ | 89 - 91 | D+ | 71 - 73 |

| | |
|---------------------------|---------|
| Campaign Notebook | 100 pts |
| Final Presentation | 50 pts |
| TOTAL | 450 pts |

| | | | |
|-----------|---------|----|----------|
| <i>B</i> | 86 - 88 | D | 68 - 70 |
| <i>B-</i> | 83 - 85 | D- | 65 - 67 |
| <i>C+</i> | 80 - 82 | F | Below 64 |

Class Schedule and Assignments:

| Date | Class Topic | Assignments |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Week 1: 8/17 – 8/23 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome & Review of Syllabus Introduction to health + Social Action | Canvas Board Post: Your 3 top public health issues due 8/28 by 11:59 pm |
| Week 2: 8/24 – 8/30 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethics and Public Health Issue Development <i>Readings: Chapter 1 (pgs. 1-19) of required text</i> | Ch. 1 (Quiz 1) Self-Reflection Worksheet due 9/2 by 11:59 pm |
| Week 3: 8/31 -9/6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food Availability, Obesity, and Chronic Disease Environmental Hazards and Regulatory Measures Setting the tone, Choosing an Issue and Building a Team/Selecting Service-Learning Site. <i>Readings: Chapter 2 (pgs. 20-27) of required text</i> | Ch.2 (Quiz 2) Portfolio 1(Ch.1 #1-8; Ch.2 #1-3) due 9/7 Start Team Weekly Log |
| Week 4: 9/7 – 9/13 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building Power as a Public Health Approach <i>Reading: Chapter 4 (pgs. 43-59) of required text</i> | Chapter 4 (Quiz 3) Asset Mapping (In-class) Team Weekly Log 1 DUE |
| Week 5: 9/14 -9/20 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies and Tactics Leveraging Community Assets and Overcoming Barriers <i>Reading: Chapter 7 (pgs. 81-98) of required text</i> Thursday: No Class due to TPHA | Chapter 7 (Quiz 4) Portfolio 2 (Ch.1 #9-10; Ch. 4 #1-4; Ch.7 #1-2, and 4) due 9/21 Campaign Demands and Targets Survey |
| Week 6: 9/21 – 9/27 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding Health and Social Advocacy Research Target Meetings (Negotiation) <i>Reading: Chapter 5 (pgs. 60-71) of required text</i> | Chapter 5 (Quiz 5) Photovoice Team Weekly Log 2 DUE |
| Week 7: 9/28 – 10/4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upstream Causes and Health Advocacy Review Group Meetings with Partners <i>Reading: Chapter 8 & 9 (pgs. 99-121) of required text</i> | Chapter 8 & 9 (Quiz 6) Upstream Causes Pathway (Worksheet B) Team Weekly Log 3 DUE |
| Week 8: 10/5 -10/11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Campaign Kickoff/Campaign Plan | Portfolio 3 (Ch. 2 #4-6; Ch. 4 #6-7; Ch. 5 #1-5; Ch.8 #4) due 10/12 Team Weekly Log 4 DUE |

| | | |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| Week 9: 10/12 – 10/18 | Tuesday: No Class due to Fall Break <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Campaign Evaluation (Notebook) | Chapter 10 (Quiz 7) |
| Week 10: 10/19 – 10/25 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Groups Dynamics <i>Reading: Chapter 6 (pgs. 72-80) of required text</i> | Chapter 6 (Quiz 8) Group Evaluation Team Weekly Log 5 DUE |
| Week 11: 10/26 – 11/1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change Theory <i>Reading: Chapter 3 (pgs. 28-42) of required text</i> | Chapter 3 (Quiz 9) Portfolio 4 (Ch. 3 #1-3; Ch. 5 #6-9/10-12; Ch. 6 #1) due 11/2 |
| Week 12: 11/2 – 11/8 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Campaign Activities | Team Weekly Log 6 DUE |
| Week 13: 11/9 – 11/15 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> From Start to Finish: Health Disparities Advocacy Projects- Public Health Reporting | Project Report (Worksheet A) |
| Week 14: 11/16 – 11/22 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group Check-in with Dr. G | Self-Reflection 2 |
| Week 15: 11/23 – 11/29 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-class working session Thursday: No Class due to Thanksgiving Holiday | Portfolio 4 (Ch. 3 #1-3; Ch. 5 #6-9/10-12; Ch.6 #1) due 11/23 |
| Week 16: 11/30 – 12/6 | Tuesday: Last Day of Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course Conclusion <i>Reading: Chapter 11 (pgs. 125-130) of required text.</i> | Chapter 11 (Quiz 10) |
| Week 17: 12/7 – 12/11 | Final's Week Fall'25 Summit on College Social Action | Project Presentations Peer Review/Feedback |

Final Exam (Presentations): Thursday, December 11th at 8 am

Ethics and Professional Preparation:

When applying public health concepts and other content learned during your undergraduate studies, you should be guided by the ethical standards of your field. It is your responsibility to consult the code of ethics that guides your profession and continue to seek out information on their application to your studies and practice. [American Public Health Association: Public Health Code of Ethics](#)

Course Evaluation:

Students are highly encouraged to complete the course evaluation surveys administered by the University at the end of the semester. This feedback allows us to improve course content and instruction while also ensuring the University maintains accreditation standards.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Classroom Attendance:

Belmont University is committed to the idea that regular class attendance is essential to successful scholastic achievement. Absence is excused only in cases of illness or other legitimate cause. Attendance is checked from the first-class meeting. Late registrants will have accrued some absences prior to formal registration in the course. In the case of excused absence from class, students have the right and responsibility to make up all class work missed.

Failure for Non-Attendance:

Should the number of absences other than Provost's Excused Absences exceed 20% of class meeting time (applicable to every term and part-of-term course) for a given student, the faculty member may assign the grade "FN" (failure for nonattendance) to that student.

Grade Appeals:

The first appeal on a disputed course engagement matter should be directly to the faculty member. Students may appeal a disputed course engagement matter to the chair of the faculty member's department (or to the appropriate dean's office should the faculty member be the department chair). The chair's decision will be final (or dean's decision, should the faculty member be the chair). Proper documentation must be provided in support of the appeal. If the appeal is approved, the chair or dean will communicate the reason for the approval and the remedy to the faculty member who will permit the student to make up missed coursework in a timely manner.

Accommodation of Disabilities

In compliance with [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act \(1973\)](#) of the Rehabilitation Act, Belmont University will make reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Students who need academic or other accommodations should contact the Office of the Dean of Students in the Beaman Student Life Center as soon as possible. For complete details, see the brochure, "Meeting the Needs of the Students with Disabilities," available in the Office of the Dean of Students.

Student Honor Pledge

A Bruin does not lie, cheat, or steal, and does not tolerate those acts.

Intellectual honesty is vital to an academic community and for my fair evaluation of your work. Dishonesty includes *but is not limited to*: giving or receiving aid during examinations, fabricating or falsifying information or sources, improper collaboration, submitting the same paper for different classes without discussion with the faculty member, and plagiarism. Plagiarism occurs when writers deliberately or unintentionally use another person's language, ideas, or materials and present them as their own without properly acknowledging and citing the source. All work submitted in this course must be your own, completed in accordance with the [Bruin Guide](#). You may not engage in unauthorized collaboration or utilize ChatGPT or other AI composition software without consulting with me. Students must obtain permission before using AI composition software (like ChatGPT) for any assignments in this course. Using these tools without my permission puts your academic integrity at risk. Faculty in the Department of Public Health reserve the right to use Turnitin® and other tools to screen for instances of academic dishonesty.

For additional information on topics/policies related to disabilities, accountability, student responsibilities, safety, etc. Please refer to the Bruin Guide.