

POLI 306 – Health Politics and Policies - Spring 2020

Mondays & Wednesdays, 9:30-10:45 AM, CCC 321

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Office Hours: Tues. 2-3 PM, Weds. 11 AM-12 NOON, and by appointment

Course Description

This course examines the U.S. Health Care system, including its structure, main components and actors, the policies and laws that govern it, how it functions, and background on how the system developed historically. The focus will be on understanding how the system functions and its impact on health outcomes. The U.S. spends more on health care in absolute terms, per capita, and as a percentage of GDP than any other country in the world. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, “health spending per person in the U.S. was \$10,224 in 2017, which was 28% higher than Switzerland, the next highest per capita spender.”¹ Health care spending represents a major and growing share of our economy. How best to meet our population’s health care needs and to do so in a way that is economically sustainable are questions that continue to be the subject of contentious political debate in this country. We will examine these debates. Finally, we will compare the U.S. health care system to those of other industrialized democracies in order to better understand other options and paths.

This course is designed to serve the needs of students with a general interest in U.S. policy and politics, as well as students planning to pursue careers in the health care professions. It aims to provide students with a grounding and solid understanding of the U.S.’s unique and complex health care system.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- 1) Be able to explain how the U.S. health care system is organized, including how it is paid for, who has access, including key components such as Medicare, Medicaid, HMOs, etc.
- 2) Learn about the historical development of the U.S. health care system, including the passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010.
- 3) Consider the impact of the Affordable Care Act on access, cost, and financing of health care.
- 4) Compare the U.S. health care system to those of other comparable countries.
- 5) Develop their own views about proposals for reforming or altering the U.S. health care system.

Course Requirements and Grading

Your grade will be based on your performance in the following areas:

Attendance, Participation, & Brief Assignments	20%
Mid-term Exam #1	25%
Mid-term Exam #2	25%
Final Exam	30%
TOTAL	100%

¹ Peterson-Kaiser Health System Tracker, <https://www.healthsystemtracker.org/chart-collection/health-spending-u-s-compare-countries/#item-start>. Accessed Jan. 22, 2019.

Required Texts

- Thomas Bodenheimer and Kevin Grumbach. 2016. *Understanding Health Policy: A Clinical Approach, 7th Edition*. McGraw Hill. (Available through Text Rental)
- All other assigned readings are available on Canvas in the e-Reserve module.

Attendance, Participation, & Brief Assignments

Class sessions will combine both lecture and discussion. Attendance and participation are crucial parts of this course and count towards 20% of your grade. I expect students to attend all class sessions and film screenings and to come prepared to discuss the readings assigned for that day. More than 2 unexcused absences will result in a lowering of this portion of your grade, and **more than 6 unexcused absences (3 weeks) will result in a failing grade for Attendance and Participation, possibly even forfeiture of any points for part of your grade.** In addition to regular attendance, active participation in class discussions is important. I will keep a record of student attendance and participation and will refer to it when I calculate this portion of your grade. I will use Kahoot to take attendance, periodically quiz students, and solicit class views on topics under discussion. Generally, I do not use quiz scores to calculate final grades, but instead use them for review.

I may occasionally assign a brief homework assignment or a quiz for credit. Any such assignment would be counted as part of your Attendance and Participation grade. Instructions will be provided, as well as specification about how much any homework assignment or quiz would be worth out of the 20 percentage points for Attendance and Participation.

Exams

There will be 3 exams, all of which will be in-class with the dates as listed on the course schedule (see below). Exams will cover material from the readings, lecture, and movies. I will provide you with study guides at least one week before each exam.

Current Events

Health policy has continued to be a central issue in U.S. elections for more than a decade and a topic frequently covered in the press. Students are expected to keep up with national news and to read publications with excellent coverage of national politics. I recommend the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, and *The Guardian* (London). I also recommend listening to National Public Radio's (NPR) news programs, which are a great way to keep up with both domestic and international news, even when you don't have time to read the newspaper. You can hear NPR news on Wisconsin Public Radio (WPR), which has two local radio stations: The Ideas Network at 99.1 FM and News and Classical at 90.9 FM. You can also listen live and access podcasts of previous shows at www.wpr.org. There are many terrific podcasts that can help you learn about and keep up with the news, both domestic and international. One that I recommend for delving deeper into top news stories is "The Daily", which is produced by the *New York Times* and is available for free on various podcast platforms.

Communications and Technology

There is a **Canvas** site set up for this class, which you should access regularly and get accustomed to using. There you will find the syllabus and other materials as they become available. I will post announcements on Canvas, as well as lecture power points.

Classroom Etiquette

- Mobile devices should only be used during class to take notes and answer Kahoot questions. Please do not use your phone or laptop to text, watch content, or surf the web while class is in session. Students who abuse this policy will lose the privilege of using their electronic devices in class.
- Please refrain from eating in class. Bringing a drink is fine.
- Arriving late or leaving the room during class is disruptive. Please make every effort to be on time and do not leave in the middle of class. If you must leave early for some reason, please be kind enough to let me know before class begins.

Academic Integrity

All students are expected to abide by the guidelines for academic integrity contained in the UW System Administrative Code. As a student it behooves you to be well acquainted with these guidelines and to understand clearly what constitutes plagiarism, as violations can result in severe consequences. For the purposes of this class, the basic rule is to do your own work on exams, quizzes, and short writing assignments. I take cheating seriously and will take action if an incident comes to my attention. Please let me know if you are aware of cheating taking place during quizzes or exams.

Class Schedule and Reading Assignments

Week 1: Introductions

1/22 – Introduction to the course - *No assigned readings*

Week 2: Paying for Health Care in the U.S.

1/27 – Who pays for health care?

Readings: Bodenheimer and Grumbach, Ch. 1 – “Introduction: The Paradox of Excess and Deprivation”, & Ch. 2 – “Paying for Healthcare”

1/29 – Paying Providers

Readings:

- Bodenheimer and Grumbach, Ch. 4 – “Paying Health Care Providers”
- Elisabeth Rosenthal. “Paying Till it Hurts: American Way of Birth, Costliest in the World.” *New York Times*, June 30, 2013. (e-Reserves)

Week 3: Access

2/3 – The Causes and Impact of Lack of Access to Health Care

Readings:

- Bodenheimer and Grumbach, Ch. 3 – “Access to Health Care”
- Michael Sainato. “The Americans dying because they can’t afford medical care.” *Guardian*, January 7, 2020. (e-Reserves)
- Noam Levey. “Soaring insurance deductibles and high drug prices hit sick Americans with a ‘double whammy’”. *Los Angeles Times*, June 6, 2019. (e-Reserves)

2/5 – In-class viewing and discussion of “The Waiting Room”, 2012. *Running time: 62 minutes.*

Week 4: Organization of Health Care

2/10 – Organization

Readings:

- Bodenheimer and Grumbach. Ch. 5 – “How Healthcare is Organized – 1: Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Care”
- Nicolas Kristoff. “Opinion: Why Infants May be More Likely to Die in America Than Cuba.” *New York Times*, Jan. 18, 2019. (e-Reserves)

2/12 – Delivery System Organization, including HMOs

Readings:

- Bodenheimer & Grumbach, Ch. 6 – “How Healthcare is Organized – II: Health Delivery Systems”
- Reed Abelson. “When Hospitals Merge to Save Money, Patients Often Pay More.” *New York Times*, November 14, 2018. (e-Reserves)

Week 5: The Health Care Workforce & Long-Term Care

2/17 – The Health Care Workforce

Reading: Bodenheimer and Grumbach, Ch. 7 – “The Healthcare Workforce and the Education of Health Professionals”

2/19 – Long-Term Care

Reading: Bodenheimer and Grumbach, Ch. 12 – “Long-Term Care”

Week 6: Midterm Exam #1

2/24 - Exam review

2/26 – **MIDTERM EXAM #1**

Week 7: The Origins of Medicare and the Civil Rights Movement

3/2 – In-class screening of “Power to Heal: Medicare and the Civil Rights Revolution.” *Running time:* 56 minutes.

Reading: Jeneen Interlandi. “1619 Project: Why doesn’t the United States have universal healthcare? It has everything to do with race.” *New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2019. (e-Reserves)

3/4 – Discussion of film and reading

Week 8: Medicare

Reading: Barr. Chapter 6, “Medicare”. (e-Reserves)

3/9 – Overview of Medicare

3/11 – Dilemmas of Medicare and its future

March 14-22 – Spring Break – Enjoy!!!