

American Health Policy – Political Science #282 / 382

[In the shared curriculum, this course counts for analysis of values and US diversity]

Illinois Wesleyan University

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About the content of the course:

This course examines the politics surrounding health policy and health inequality in the United States. The course is designed to help students understand the values that condition how Americans seek, consume, and pay for health services, and how various parts of health care policy are made. Students will also gain an understanding of how health policy debates are situated in the larger contexts of government budgeting, public health promotion campaigns, and partisan conflict. We will examine how federal and state governments, private employers, and individuals are implicated in the numerous financing systems our country has, and we will study some of the real-world consequences for tens of millions of people lacking regular access to health services. We will also consider how structural factors – including built environments, poverty, and racism – profoundly affect Americans' health outcomes. We will place the U.S. in international context as we briefly study the health systems of some of the world's other developed nations. We will examine the Affordable Care Act, how and why it was designed as it was, and the successes and failures of its implementation since 2010. Students will also have opportunities to discuss these issues with health professionals who will visit our class. Small-group work will allow students to identify problems with the nation's current health systems and propose practical solutions.

About the workload:

Weekly readings cover both the mechanics of how health care systems work, how patients and providers tend to use (and over-use) those systems, how organized interests pressure the federal and state governments to provide particular policies and funding, how the public learns (or not) about health care policy, and other topics. Students will make a few presentations to class. They will also write one short policy proposal, in addition to staging one organized debate and taking a pair of exams and four quizzes. Toward the end of the semester small groups will develop and present proposed solutions to key health policy problems facing the nation. This project will require significant work outside of class, so you will need to find some available time to work with your small group. Regular and thoughtful class participation is expected and rewarded.

You will find on our Canvas page a list of study guides. You should think carefully about these, as they will give you a good indicator of the topic material that will appear on exams and quizzes. You will take the quizzes remotely, and they will always occur on a Thursday afternoon / evening (though not every Thursday). You will take exams in class. Taking an exam at a time other than the regularly scheduled time requires advance approval from me. There are no make-up opportunities in the event you forget to take a quiz. The spreadsheet I maintain will be the authoritative record of grades. A blank copy of this spreadsheet is available on our Canvas page

in case you would like to plug in your grades as the semester progresses. Canvas will also track your grades, though we may discover its limits regarding things like extra credit.

For students who enrolled at the 300 level, you will be expected to complete all of the core work for the course, and you will also help lead class discussion a couple of times. Grades for these turns will become part of your course participation grade. You will also produce a short research paper, which will serve as preparation for your policy proposal. See due dates below.

About grades and academic integrity:

Your overall course grade consists of the following components:

Peer evaluation – international comparison	5%
Peer evaluation – debate	5%
4 quizzes (5% each)	20%
Policy problem identification	5%
Individual policy proposal	25%
Mid-term exam	15%
Final exam	20%
Class participation	5%

Final course grades will be assigned on the following basis: 90-100% = A/A-; 80-89% = B+/B/B-; 70-79% = C+/C/C-; 60-69% = D; below 60% = F. Taking a grade of incomplete in this course is very strongly discouraged. Under no circumstances will a student be granted a grade of incomplete without discussing the matter with me well in advance of the end of the semester.

Regular attendance is expected and necessary if you are to do well in this class. Each unexcused absence beyond the first will result in a 1 percentage point reduction in your overall grade. Excused absences – such as for illness, varsity athletics, and music performances – are perfectly understandable but require timely documentation. While I will accept late assignments, such lateness will cost you 5 percentage points per day late, starting with the day the assignments are due. In the event you find yourself in this situation, email the assignment to me as soon as possible so as to stop the penalty clock.

I am aware that academic dishonesty has become common at some institutions. While I am sure that very few, if any, Illinois Wesleyan students would cheat on class assignments, the university's policy and my policy on academic dishonesty bear repeating. Academic dishonesty fundamentally undermines the mission of the university and cheapens our collective enterprise. Students caught cheating on an exam or engaging in plagiarism on written assignments will receive a failing grade for the course. This includes working on quizzes or exams with others, which is not something you are permitted to do. You may not use artificial intelligence to generate written work. In cases of academic dishonesty I will also file a formal complaint with the administration. Per the university's academic dishonesty policy, the administration will move to expel from the university any student who is the object of two such substantiated complaints. See the university catalog for further explanation.

About the course readings:

The following texts are required reading and are highly recommended for purchase:

Grace Budrys, *Our Unsystematic Health Care System*, 5th edition, Rowman & Littlefield, 2024

Greg Shaw, *The Dysfunctional Politics of the Affordable Care Act*, Boomsbury Publishers (paperback edition, 2024)

All other readings listed below appear on our Canvas page, along with various resources.

Topics	
Week of:	Readings
M: Introduction and course overview	
W: A right to health care?	Beauchamp, "Public Health as Social Justice" Epstein, <i>Mortal Peril</i> , chapt. 4 (pp. 81-82, 89-105)
F: Class visit: Mollie Ward, director of Spiritual Care, Carle BroMenn Medical Center	
M: Labor Day	Budrys, chapt. 1
WF: Cost, quality, access & equality	"Mirror, Mirror 2021" (Commonwealth Fund report) Gawande, "The Cost Conundrum" Delaronde, "Ten Years After ..."
M: Class visit: Jessica McKnight, Director McLean Co. Health Department	Executive summary, Community Health Needs Assessment, McLean County Braveman & Gottlieb, "The Social Determinants of Health: ..."
WF: Health policy in an international context	Budrys, chapt. 8

Quiz #1: Thursday, Canvas, 4:00pm – 11:59pm. You will have one attempt and are limited to 25 minutes (expect approximately 10 questions covering all material through Monday the 9th)

See this document by Harris (World Economic Forum, 2020):

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/10/covid-19-healthcare-health-service-vaccine-health-insurance-pandemic/>

After class on Wednesday, meet with your group to develop a brief presentation. Pick a developed country that we did not discuss in class. Develop several slides describing the administration, payments, revenue sources, delivery mechanisms, and an overview of health outcomes for the nation's population. Follow the template in Canvas. Aim for about 8-10 slides.

MW: Small group presentations: 4 groups, 15 minutes per presentation, use the peer-evaluation form in Canvas

F: History of health politics in the U.S.

Budrys, chapt. 2 (pp. 15-22)

MW: History of health politics in the U.S.

Oberlander, chapt. 1 & 2

F: Consequences of inequality

Ansell, *The Death Gap*, ch. 2

Quiz #2: Thursday, Canvas, 4:00pm – 11:59pm. You will have one attempt and are limited to 25 minutes (expect approximately 10 questions covering all material since the first quiz)

M: Medicare basics

Oberlander, chapt. 6, 7

W: Medicaid basics

Budrys, chapt. 4

Build 2 teams for our first debate: Should the U.S. have a national health care system that guarantees basic coverage for all? (we will settle ahead of time on a format for the debate)

F: Class visit: Amanda Smith, VP of Ambulatory & Hospital Operations, Chief Nursing Officer, Carle BroMenn Medical Center

M: Other thoughts on Medicare and Medicaid; review for mid-term exam

W: **Mid-term exam** – In-class, Canvas, multiple choice, expect approximately 20 questions.

You will have 50 minutes to complete the exam. Bring a laptop or tablet.

F: fall break day

MW: How does commercial health insurance work?

Budrys, chapt. 3

Shaw, chapt. 3 & 5

KFF, summary of employer-sponsored Insurance (2024) [link in Canvas, skim this]

F: Debate – Should the U.S. have a national health system that guarantees basic coverage for all? (use the peer evaluation form in Canvas for grading)

MWF: Confronting costs: the market metaphor

Herzlinger, *Market-Driven Health Care*, chapt. 1

Makary, *The Price We Pay*, chapt. 1

The Oregon health insurance experiment (link in Canvas)

MWF: The creation of the ACA

Shaw, chapt. 1

Budrys, chapt. 7

McDonough, chapt. 2

Quiz #3: Thursday, 4:00pm – 11:59pm, Canvas. You will have one attempt and are limited to 25 minutes (expect approximately 10 questions covering all material the mid-term exam through Friday the 25th)

MW: A decade of experience w/ the ACA

Klein, *Overcoming Obamacare*, chaps.
1, 2, 3 & 7

Shaw, chaps. 2 & 4

Pros / cons document (link in Canvas)

House, chapt. 9

F: Class visit: Colleen Kannaday, President at Carle BroMenn Medical Center

- After class on Friday, begin work with your team (we will form 4 teams). Identify 2 specific problems with the ACA or health policy more generally. Your group will focus mainly on problem identification. Proposed solutions will come next, via your individual work. You and your group will present the problems during the week of November _____. Further instructions to follow.

M: ACA successes and shortcomings

W: Public learning about the ACA: Kaiser Family Foundation tracking of public knowledge

F: Class visit: speaker on hospital finance

Quiz #4: Thursday, Canvas, 4:00pm – 11:59pm. You will have one attempt and are limited to 25 minutes (expect approximately 10 questions covering all material since we began our discussion of the ACA)

M: Social determinants and longevity
in US counties

Budrys, chapt. 9

WF: Small group presentations: 4 small groups each present 2 significant problems with the ACA. Your presentations need to demonstrate an understanding both the causes and consequences of the problem. Give us a slide presentation that runs about 15 minutes. Be prepared for Q&A.

M: **Second exam** – Canvas-based, you will have 50 minutes to respond to approximately 20 questions. The exam focuses on material covered since the first exam. Bring a laptop or tablet.

WF: No class due to Thanksgiving

M: The rural health penalty in the US

W & F: Student presentations of policy proposal

Your individual policy solution paper is due by 4pm on Friday, December 6th. See rubric in Canvas, and follow it closely. Deliver your paper to my office.