Professor John Billings  
Mondays – 4:55-6:35  
Room: 567 Waverly

Course Description
This course is an introduction to major health policy issues and examines the role of government in the health care system. An important focus of the course is an assessment of the role of policy analysis in the formation and implementation of national and local health policy. Because much of government health policy relates to or is implemented through payment systems, several sessions involve some discussion of the policy implications of how government pays for care, with a more detailed review of the economics of payment systems available in Health Economics and Payment Systems (P11.1832). The role of the legal system with respect to adverse medical outcomes, economic rights, and individual rights is also discussed. Proposals for health policy reform at the national and local level are examined throughout the course, as well as Medicare and Medicaid reforms currently being implemented or considered.

Course Requirements/Grading
Two papers are required for the course (both ≤ 8 pages), each accounting for 40% of the final grade. Class discussion and debate are integral to the course and will account for 20% of the final grade. Papers can be submitted in class or via email. There is no midterm or final exam.

Students are expected to have studied the assigned readings. The readings for the course are primarily journal articles that will be posted in the Assigned Readings section of Blackboard®. There is no textbook for the course, and the books required for the second paper are readily available at area bookstores or on the web (e.g., amazon.com, barnesandnoble.com, etc.). Copies of PowerPoint materials used in class will be posted in the Session Notes section on the Blackboard®.site at least 24 hours in advance of the class.

If you have questions about the reading materials or you need other help, please contact my administrative assistant, Iveliz Vazquez [295 Lafayette Street - 3rd Floor - 212-998-7402 - iveliz.vazquez@nyu.edu].

Office Hours
By appointment (212-998-7455) - john.billings@nyu.edu  
295 Lafayette Street - 3010
Session 1 – 9/14/09: Square One: The role of government in health/health care

- Description of course content, goals, and requirements
- A discussion of the role of policy analysis in public policy formation and the impact of public policy on the health system
- Objectives of government in health and health care, discussion of limitations of government, and some examples
- Discussion of implications for policy

Required reading:


Session 2 – 9/21/09: Square 2: How health care is organized/financed/paid for

- Brief overview of how health care is organized, financed, and paid for
- A little bit about insurance and “managed” care
- Discussion of the implications for policy

Required reading:

Buff-up on your basic micro-economics by reviewing this:
http://william-king.www.drexel.edu/top/prin/txt/SDch/Ch3ToC.html

Take a look at this:
http://woodrow.mpls.frb.fed.us/pubs/fedgaz/02-05/supply.cfm?js=0

Suggested reading on how the health care delivery system is organized:


Session 3 – 9/28/09: No Class
Session 4 – 10/05/09: Square 3: Medical practice and health policy

- Review of the enormous variation in medical practice
- Discussion of causes of variation
- Discussion of the implications for policy

Required reading:


A. Gawande, “The Cost Conundrum,” *New Yorker*, June 1, 2009

Sessions 5-6 – 10/12/09 and 10/19/09: Medicare: The basics and Issues for reform

- A discussion of the role and objectives of government in health
- Description of who and what is covered by Medicare
- Review of how Medicare pays for health care
- Description of the recent expansion Medicare to provide coverage for prescription drugs

Required reading:


Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, *Prescription Drug Coverage for Medicare Beneficiaries: A Summary of the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and*
Modernization Act of 2003 (December 10, 2003)

Also take a look at:  http://www.kff.org/medicare/rxdrugcalculator.cfm

Optional reading:

Sessions 6-7 – 10/19/09 and 10/26/09: Medicaid: The basics and issues for reform
- History and financing of Medicaid
- Description of who and what is covered by Medicaid
- Discussion of recent reforms/Issues for reform/Role of managed care

Required reading:
See also: http://www.cms.hhs.gov/publications/overview-medicare-medicaid/default4.asp

Sessions 8-9 – 11/2/09 and 11/9/09: The major challenges confronting the health “system”: Disparities, Uninsurance, and Costs
- Overview of disparities in health services, utilization, and outcomes
- Discussion of the factors that are contributing to these disparities
- Description of the size and characteristics of the uninsured population
- Review of the causes of uninsurance
- Description of the dynamics of current cost increases
- Review of the causes and implications of cost increase
- Discussion of the implications of these challenges for policy makers and providers and for the current health reform initiative
Required Reading:


Session 10 – 11/16/09: Prior efforts to respond to these challenges: The role of the states, the Clinton Health Plan, and other federal initiatives

- Overview of policies/programs at the federal, state, and local level to reduce disparities, expand coverage, and control costs
- Discussion of the strengths and limits of state/local initiatives
- Discussion of the Clinton health plan, what problems it might have solved or created, and why it failed
- Implications for current reform initiatives

Required Reading:


Session 11 – 11/23/09: Health Reform 2009
- Overview of health reform initiatives from Obama and Congress
- Discussion policy, politics, and power

Required Reading:

Handouts

Session 12 – 11/30/09: Role of Patients – Making informed decisions
- Patient’s rights to refuse/withdraw treatment
- What information do patients need to make health care decisions (choice of treatment, doctor/hospital, health plan, etc.)
- What’s the best way to get information to patients

Required reading:

M. Morgan, R Deber, H. Llewellyn-Thomas, “Randomized Controlled Trial of an Interactive Videodisc Decision Aid for Patients with Ischemic Heart Disease,” Journal of General Internal Medicine 15 No. 10 (2000): 685-693


Session 13 – 12/7/09: Medical errors – Medical malpractice
- Brief overview of current malpractice law
- Description of what is known about medical errors
- Analysis of the effectiveness of the legal system and malpractice law in assuring quality and compensating victims of harm
- Discussion of current “crisis” and proposals for reform
Required reading:
Institute of Medicine, “Report Brief - To Err is Human: Building a Safer Health System” - http://www.nap.edu/catalog/9728.html

Session 14 – 12/14/09: More policy issues concerning the pharmaceutical industry

- Overview of the major policy issues concerning the pharmaceutical industry
- Discussion of the factors that are contributing to these emergence of these issues now
- Discussion of the role of government with respect to the pharmaceutical industry

Required Reading:

Optional reading:
REQUIRED PAPERS

Paper 0.5 – Personal Resume (Pass/Fail) – Provide a very brief resume/vita/something that describes who you are, employment experience (if any), and career goals (if any) and attach a recent photo of yourself (try Xeroxing you ID if you can’t do any better).

**Due Date:** Session 2 – 9/21/09

Paper 2 – The Dartmouth Atlas Memo (40% of final grade) - ≤ 8 pages – Take a look at the Dartmouth Atlas of 2008 [http://www.dartmouthatlas.org/data/download.shtml](http://www.dartmouthatlas.org/data/download.shtml) or go online to the Dartmouth Atlas Benchmarking site where you can look at specific hospitals or communities across the country [http://cecsweb.dartmouth.edu/atlas08/datatools/bench_s1.php](http://cecsweb.dartmouth.edu/atlas08/datatools/bench_s1.php). Pick an example of variation in utilization that you believe is unwarranted and describe the factors that are likely to contribute to the differences among areas (or hospitals). Then pick one contributing factor and make some suggestions about what might be done to reduce variation. Be specific and detailed in your suggestions, including who ought to do what to whom. Be realistic, don’t make suggestions that are cannot be implemented because of technical, financial, or political considerations. This is not a research paper, but footnote sources of ideas you use for the causes of variation (or the suggested solutions if the ideas come from a specific source).

**Due Date:** 10/26/09 – 11:59pm (submit electronically or drop off in class/my mail box)

Paper 3 – Book Memo (40% of final grade) - ≤ 8 pages – You are a newly hired policy staff person for some senator, the governor of any state, a health commissioner, the president of the National Association of Community Health Centers, CEO of a large health insurance plan/managed care plan, or some other health organization of your choice (domestic or international). Your boss walks by your cubicle and plops down one of the books listed below and asks you to read it and tell her/him i) what it says, ii) why it is important, and iii) what it means to your organization/constituency. Select a book from the list below and write a brief memo (remembering your boss has a very short attention span and will stop reading if it goes beyond 7-8 pages). Make sure you identify your hypothetical employer.

- Adrian Nicole LeBlanc – *Random Family: Love, Drugs, Trouble, and Coming of Age in the Bronx.*
- Tracy Kidder – *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World.*
- Paul Farmer – *Pathologies of Power: Health, Health Rights, and the New War on the Poor.*
- William Easterly - *The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good.*
- Anne Fadiman – *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down.*
- John M. Barry – *The Great Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague in History*
- Sherwin Nulin – *How We Die*.
- Laurie Kaye Abraham – *Mama Might Be Better Off Dead: The Failure of Health Care in Urban America*.
- Sheldon Krimsky – *Science in the Private Interest: Has the Lure of Profits Corrupted Biomedical Research*.
- Jerry Avorn – *Powerful Medicines: The Benefits, Risks, and Costs of Prescription Drugs*.
- Andrew Solomon – *The Noonday Demon*.
- Richard Deyo and Donald Patrick – *Hope or Hype: The Obsession with Medical Advances and the High Cost of False Promises*.
- Jerome Groopman – *How Doctors Think*.
- John Abramson – *Overdosed America: The Broken Promise of American Medicine*.
- Ray Moynihan/Alan Cassels – *Selling Sickness*.

**Due Date:** 12/14/09 – 11:59pm (submit electronically or drop off in class/my mail box)