New York University
Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service
P11.2836 – Current Issues in Health Policy
Spring, 2013- Version 1.2

Professor John Billings
Mondays – 4:55-6:35
Room: 520 Silver

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
Three relatively short papers are required for the course (one ≤ 8 pages and two ≤ 6 pages) accounting for 85% of the final grade (35%, 25%, 25%). Class discussion and debate are integral to the course and will account for 15% 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 Resources/Assigned Readings section of NYU Classes. There is no text book 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 Resources/Session Notes section on the NYU Classes 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, Craig Schott [295 Lafayette Street - 3rd Floor - 212-998-7477 – cs188@nyu.edu].

Office Hours
By appointment (212-998-7455) - john.billings@nyu.edu
295 Lafayette Street - 3010
Session 1 – 1/28/13: 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 – 2/04/13: 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:

Get a little health economics by reviewing this:

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

- or -


- or -

Session 3 – 2/11/13: 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:


D. Jones, “Visions of a Cure,” *Isis* (September 2000):91:504-541 – [http://www.jstor.org/browse/00211753/ap010310?frame=noframe&userID=807af334@nyu.edu/01cc99333c3c2f10d557f648a8&dpi=3&config=jstor](http://www.jstor.org/browse/00211753/ap010310?frame=noframe&userID=807af334@nyu.edu/01cc99333c3c2f10d557f648a8&dpi=3&config=jstor)

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

Session 4 – 2/18/13 – President’s Day – No class scheduled


- 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:


Also take a look at:


**Sessions 6-7 – 3/04/13 and 3/11/13: 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: Medicaid: A Primer 2010 - http://www.kff.org/medicaid/upload/7334-04.pdf

**Session 8 – 3/25/13: The major challenges confronting the health “system”: Part 1 - Disparities**

- Overview of disparities in health services, utilization, and outcomes
- Discussion of the factors that are contributing to these disparities

**Required Reading:**


**Session 9 – 4/01/13: The major challenges confronting the health “system”:**

**Part 2 - Uninsurance and Part 3 - Costs**

- 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:**


The Uninsured – A Primer - [http://www.kff.org/uninsured/upload/7451-06.pdf](http://www.kff.org/uninsured/upload/7451-06.pdf)


Session 10 – 4/08/13: 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 – 4/15/13: Health Reform 2010

- Overview of Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA)
- Discussion policy, politics, and power

Required Reading:


**Session 12 – 4/22/13: 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:**


**Session 13 – 4/29/13: 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 – 5/06/13: 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


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 – 2/4/13

Paper 1 – The Dartmouth Atlas Memo (35% of final grade) - ≤ 8 pages – Take a look at the website for the Dartmouth Atlas of Healthcare. There is an interactive site, where you can pick out specific utilization or resource use measures for specific areas or hospitals (http://www.dartmouthatlas.org/) and there is also an area of the site where you can download Excel or pdf files with the data (http://www.dartmouthatlas.org/downloads.aspx) – this latter site can be a little easier to navigate. Pick an example of variation in utilization that you believe is unwarranted - look at variation in utilization (admissions, days, visits, hospice use, etc.), not resource use (beds, FTEs, etc.). Describe the range of factors that are likely to contribute to the differences among areas (or hospitals), then pick one contributing factor that you think is important (or that you think something can be done about it) 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 cannot be implemented because of technical, financial, or political considerations. This is a conceptual piece and not a research paper, but footnote sources of ideas from others that you use for the causes of variation (or the suggested solutions if the ideas come from a specific source).

Due Date: 3/4/13 – 11:59pm (submit electronically or drop off in class/my mail box)

Paper 2 – Book Memo (25% of final grade) - ≤ 6 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 (or tickets to one of the films listed below) and asks you to read/see it and tell her/him i) what it’s about, ii) why it’s important, and iii) what it means to your organization/constituency. Select a book/film 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.
- Anne Fadiman – The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down.
- Sherwin Nulin – How We Die.
- Eric Klineberg – Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago; Going Solo: The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone
Sheldon Krimsky – *Science in the Private Interest: Has the Lure of Profits Corrupted Biomedical Research.*


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.*

Shannon Brownlee - *Overtreated: Why Too Much Medicine Is Making Us Sicker and Poorer*

Jerry Groopman – *How Doctors Think*

John Abramson - *Overdosed America: The Broken Promise of American Medicine*

Ray Moynihan/Alan Cassels – *Selling Sickness*

Atul Gawande – *Complications: A Surgeon’s Notes on an Imperfect Science or Better: A Surgeon’s Notes on Performance, or Better: A Surgeon's Notes on Performance, or The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things Right*

Rebecca Skloot – *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*

David Kessler – *The End of Overeating: Taking Control of the Insatiable American Appetite*

John Wennberg – *Tracking Medicine*

Otis Brawley – *How We Do Harm: A Doctor Breaks Ranks*

Eric Manheimer – *Twelve Patients: Life and Death at Bellevue Hospital*

Angela Coulter – *Engaging Patients in Healthcare*

Film: Michael Haneke – *Amour*

Film: Peter Nicks – *The Waiting Room*

**Due Date:** 4/8/13 – 11:59pm (submit electronically or drop off in class/my mail box)

**Paper 3 – Current Issues in Health Policy** (25% of final grade) - ≤ 6 pages – Read the paper. All semester. Pick two stories from sometime during the semester and discuss how each relates to some topic covered in class. Give a brief summary of each article and then discuss how it reinforces, amplifies, or contradicts something covered in class. If it is describing a problem in the health system, comment briefly on how the system is organized (not) and how we pay for things are likely to affect any solution. If it is describing some amazing breakthrough, discuss whether it is really very likely to actually have any impact (and why). Make it interesting (I have to read 40+ of these). Cite the date and source of the articles.

**Due Date:** 5/6/13 – 11:59pm (submit electronically or drop off in class/my mail box)