Professor John Billings  
Mondays and Wednesdays: 3:30-4:45  
Room: 203 Mercer (194 Mercer Street)

Course Description

This course is an introduction for undergraduate students to the major policy issues affecting health and health care 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, state, and local health policy. Because much of government health policy relates to or is implemented through payment systems, there is substantial discussion of the policy implications of how government finances and pays for health care. 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, with an emphasis on Medicare and Medicaid reforms currently being implemented or considered, as well efforts to respond to disparities in health outcomes for vulnerable populations.

Course Requirements/Grading

Two short papers are required, and there is a mid-term and end-of-term exam. The first paper is 25% of the final grade, the second paper 15%, the mid-term exam 25%, and the end of term exam 25%. Class participation and debate are integral to the course and will account for 10% of the final grade.

Students are expected to have studied assigned readings and be prepared to discuss them in class. The readings for the course are primarily journal articles that will be posted in the Assigned Readings section of NYU Classes and are also available directly from the Bobst Library ejournal site. There is also one required text book: Thomas Bodenheimer and Kevin Grumbach - Understanding Health Policy – Sixth Edition, New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012. The book is readily available from Amazon.com or BarnesandNoble.com, or can be obtained at Barnes and Noble on 18th Street and Broadway. Some readings from guest lecturers that are not copyright protected will be handed out in class or will be posted on NYU Classes site. Copies of PowerPoint/overhead materials used in class will be posted on the NYU Classes site at least 24 hours in advance of the class.

Office Hours

By appointment (212-998-7455) - john.billings@nyu.edu  
295 Lafayette Street – 2nd Floor
Session 1 - 1/27/14 - Course introduction + Discussion of role of government in 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
- Brief history of federal government role in health

Required reading:


Session 2 - 1/29/14 - How health care is organized for in the U.S.

- Brief overview of how health care is organized
- Discussion of the implications for policy

Required reading:

Session 3 - 2/03/14 - Economics 101 - Market Failure

Guest Lecturer: Sherry Glied – Dean, Wagner School of Public Service

- Introduction of the concept of “market failure”
- Discussion of the implications for health care and health care policy

Required reading:
S. Glied, “Health Insurance and Market Failure since Arrow”, Columbia University

Session 4 - 2/05/14 - How health care is financed and paid for in the U.S.

- Brief overview of how health care financed, and paid for
- “Managed” care
- Discussion of the implications for policy
Required reading:

**Sessions 5-6 - 2/10/14, 2/12/14 - 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/01cc99333c3e2f10d557f64a8&dpi=3&config=jstor](http://www.jstor.org/browse/00211753/ap010310?frame=noframe&userID=807af334@nyu.edu/01cc99333c3e2f10d557f64a8&dpi=3&config=jstor)

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

**Presidents Day - 2/17/10 – No Class**

**Session 7-8 - 2/19/14, 2/24/14 – Medicare: The basics and Issues for reform**
- 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
- Issues for Reform

Required reading:


Also take a look at:


**Optional reading:**


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Sessions 8-9 - 2/24/14, 2/26/14 - 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:**


B. Sommers, K. Baicker, and A. Epstein, Mortality and Access to Care among Adults after State Medicaid Expansions,” *NEJM* 2012;367:1025-34.


See also: Medicaid: A Primer 2013 - http://kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/medicaid-a-primer/
Session 10 - 3/03/14 – The major challenges confronting the health “system”: Part 1 - Racial/ethnic/socio-economic disparities

- Overview of disparities in health services, utilization, and outcomes
- Discussion of the factors that are contributing to these disparities
- Discussion of the implications for policy makers and providers

Required Reading:


Session 11 - 3/05/14 – The major challenges confronting the health “system”: Part 2 – The Uninsured

- Description of the size and characteristics of the uninsured population
- Review of the causes of uninsurance
- Discussion of the implications for health care and health care policy

Required reading:


Session 12 - 3/10/14 – The major challenges confronting the health “system”: Part 3 – Controlling health care costs

- Description of the dynamics of current cost increases
- Review of the causes and implications of cost increase
- Discussion of policy options and current politics in Presidential campaigns

Required reading:


**Session 13 - 3/12/14 – 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:**


**Spring Break**

**Session 14 – 3/24/09: Health Reform 2009/14**
- Overview of health reform initiatives from Obama and Congress
- Discussion of policy, politics, and power

**Required Reading:**


**Session 15 - 3/26/14 – Mid-Term Exam – [Posted on Blackboard at 3:30, submit electronically by 4:45*]

* Alternative arrangements can be made if you have a conflicting class immediately before or after Topics in Health Policy class

**Session 16 - 3/31/14 - 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:**


**Session 17-18 - 4/02/09, 4/07/09 – 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 19 - 4/09/14 – Long Term Care –Key Policy Issues**

Guest Lecturer: James Knickman – New York State Health Foundation

- Description of key policy issues affecting long term care
- Examination of the expected impact of “baby boomers” on long term care

**Required reading:**


Session 20 - 4/14/14 – Impact of Tobacco Policy Initiatives – Triumphs and Challenges

Guest Lecturer: Cheryl Healton – Dean
NYU Global Institute of Public Health

- Policy initiative to reduce tobacco use
- What has worked and continuing challenges

Required reading:
TBA

Session 21 - 4/16/14 – Management Matters

Guest Lecturer: Anthony Kovner – NYU Wagner School

- What is management and why it matters
- Challenges of managing innovation in health care
- Efforts to promote evidence based management

Required reading:


Session 22 - 4/21/14 – My life and times in health care

Guest lecturer: Neil Calman MD, Institute for Family Health

- Career paths and decisions points
- Challenges of directing federally qualified health centers

Session 23 - 4/23/14 – Meeting ACA’s community benefit requirements – Conducting community needs assessment

Guest lecturer: Sue Kaplan, JD, Director NYU Langone’s Community Service Plan

- Requirements of Affordable Care Act
- Policies on how to measure community contribution
- Community needs assessment and planning
Required reading:
TBA

Session 24 - 4/28/14 Global Health Policy Issues: How healthy (or sick) is the world (and why)?
Guest lecturer: Karen Grepin – NYU Wagner School
- What is the global burden of disease?
- What are the major patterns of distribution of disease in the world
- How is health defined and measured at the population level
- What are some of the normative implications of how we measure health

Required Reading:
TBA

Session 25 - 4/30/14 – Role of Patients – Public Policy and Obesity
Guest lecturer: Brian Elbel – NYU Wagner School and NYU School of Medicine
- Recent policy initiative to combat obesity
- What is working and not working?

Required Reading:

Session 26 - 4/30/14 – Role of Patients – End of life decisions
- Patient’s rights to refuse/withdraw treatment
- Advanced directives/proxies
- Physician assisted suicide

Required reading:
Session 27 - 5/0513 – Role of Patients – Making other health decisions

- Choice of treatment
- Choice of provider
- Choice of health plan

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


New York State Department of Health, Acute Cardiac Surgery in New York State: 2008-2010 (February, 2012):

Session 28 - 5/07/14 – End-of-Term Exam – [Posted on Blackboard at 3:30, submit electronically by 4:45*]

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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 your ID if you can’t do any better).

**Due Date:** 1/29/14 – 11:59pm (submit in class or use NYU Classes File Drop)

You may work in teams of up to 3 students on Papers 2 and 4. Teams must have a member from at least two different majors – if any member is “pre-med”, at least one other team member must be non-pre-med. There is no requirement that you work on a team. Submit one paper per team and list all of the members on the team.

**Paper 2 – The Dartmouth Atlas Memo** (25% of final grade) - ≤ 8 pages – Take a look at the Dartmouth Atlas of 2008 (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). 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. If appropriate, comment on the implications for national health reform. The goal is to pull together lots of things you have learned in the class so far. 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:** 2/24/14 – 11:59pm (submit in class or use NYU Classes File Drop)

**Paper 3 – Book Memo** (15% of final grade) - ≤ 5 pages – You are a newly hired policy staff person for Senator Charles Schumer, the governor of any state, a state/city 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 Sprit 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*

• 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.*

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

• Jerome 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:** 4/16/14 – 11:59pm (submit in class or use NYU Classes File Drop)