Course Overview

This course provides senior BSPH students with an introduction to the politics of public health and health care policy in the United States.

Politics is about competing ideas and philosophies regarding the appropriate balance between government, markets, individual liberty, and societal responsibilities, and choices between different goals and policy instruments. It is about what priorities the government should pursue and what it should not do. Politics is about constituencies, interests, money, budgets, taxes, subsidies, spending, influence, lobbying, distribution and redistribution of resources, regulation and deregulation, who gets what in the policymaking process and from legislatures and executive agencies.

Politics is also about the exercise of power, conflict, cooperation, compromise and negotiation, authority, elections, rules and procedures, and institutions. And politics is about partisanship, public opinion, messaging, rhetoric, persuasion, strategies, and expertise. Politics can be visible
and involve explicit choices that have immediate results; it can also be invisible. Policymakers’ decisions can produce unanticipated consequences and long-term impacts.

Those working in or studying public health and health policy sometimes think of their work as apolitical, with the task a fundamentally technical one of identifying the most efficient, effective health-promoting policies for adoption. That is indeed an important task. Yet policymaking in health care and public health is inherently political. Health policies and public health measures reflect different values, impose various obligations, pursue different priorities, result in varying forms of redistribution, advantage and disadvantage competing interests, and give authority to different institutions. Such policies are often contested, controversial, and the subject of political struggle.

Policymaking is about choosing from different options. How should we reduce an undesirable health behavior or outcome? Criminalize it? Regulate and restrict? Tax? Subsidize alternatives? Educate the public? Values, priorities, and politics are embedded in such policy choices. How do we choose? Why do public officials respond effectively, ineffectively, or not at all to public health problems? What does history tell us?

What (and who) influences the health policy choices we make? How do race and socioeconomic as well as political inequalities figure into public health and health policymaking? How do American political institutions shape policymaking? What is the impact of partisan polarization? Do interest groups always win? How much influence can patients, consumers, and communities have? What influence does public opinion exert? How much of a difference does it make how policy issues are framed? What political and socioeconomic forces shaped public health and health policy in the past and how do those forces matter today?

This course is about the intersections between politics, public health, and health policymaking. We will explore how American political institutions, interests, and ideologies shape public health and health care policy. We will focus on the roles that the presidency, Congress, courts, interest groups, public opinion and media play in health policymaking. We will also explore concepts such as stigma, issue framing, federalism, policy feedback, and partisan polarization.

We will illuminate and illustrate the political dynamics of health policy and public health through contemporary issues, including opioids, health equity/disparities, and health care reform. We will encounter these issues repeatedly, through readings, class debates and discussion, and assignments. Our goals are to gain a better understanding of crucial issues in public health and health policy, to appreciate different policy options and their impacts, and to explore how politics shapes these issues and public health/health policy responses. We will also draw on examples from other areas of public health and health policy, including tobacco control, HIV/AIDS, vaccines, and prescription drugs.

The course is divided into two units. The first focuses on public health, race, inequalities, and the opioid epidemic. The second unit focuses on health care politics and reform.
Learning Objectives and HPM Competencies

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<tr>
<th>Course Learning Objective</th>
<th>HPM Competencies</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Analyze how political forces, including interests, institutions, ideas, and public opinion, shape public health, health care policy, and our health care system</td>
<td>Research, Analysis &amp; Problem Solving Skills  Health Industry Knowledge</td>
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<td>2. Explain why the U.S. health care system is so difficult to reform</td>
<td>Research, Analysis &amp; Problem Solving Skills</td>
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<td>3. Write analytic research papers that examine contemporary issues in public health and health policy</td>
<td>Health Industry Knowledge  Research, Analysis &amp; Problem Solving Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Design, prepare, and produce oral presentation as part of a group project/debate on issue in health reform</td>
<td>Communication &amp; Teamwork Skills  Research, Analysis &amp; Problem Solving Skills</td>
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Resources

Course readings for each session are posted on the course Sakai site, are linked directly in the syllabus, and available on E-reserves under Sakai.

There should be no problem with the direct links in the syllabus for articles in e-journals that UNC carries, but with book chapters and other journal articles, it’s a different story. Depending on whether you are accessing the system on campus or at home, you may have to go through e-reserves above or the UNC library to access those articles. Please let me know about any problems that you encounter opening material and links immediately. From time to time I will also post other course materials—additional readings, assignments, web links to materials, and so on—on Sakai.

Requirements and Expectations

Participation

I believe in a highly interactive form of teaching. This class emphasizes active learning and regular class discussions and does not use Power Point as a form of lecture notes. Student participation is vital to the course’s success. I encourage you to ask questions and get involved in class discussions and our group exercises, you have much to learn from each other and I have
much to learn from you. While I hope and expect that you will participate regularly in class discussions, there is no participation grade for the class. The class size makes it impossible for me to fairly assign such a grade.

Our discussions will often revolve around and take off from course readings, and it is critical that you read and reflect on these selections before each class. You should focus on the main concepts and arguments in each article, and not get bogged down trying to memorize the endless details we will encounter. Instead, you should think about the authors’ major themes, what they are arguing and the implications of those arguments, whether the analysis, evidence and arguments are persuasive, and what alternative explanations or arguments might look like. Even if we do not discuss every reading in class, you are responsible for reading and understanding the main points of assigned articles.

Each week I will send you a series of questions to think about as you read the materials in preparation for class—these questions will help guide you through that week’s materials and the stage for our in-class discussions. I expect you to think about, be able to answer, and come prepared to discuss these questions in class.

We will often study issues that are controversial—disagreement and debate are absolutely acceptable and indeed essential to learning. At all times you should be respectful of others’ views, ready to listen to different perspectives, open to changing your mind, and tolerant of opinions that may diverge from your own beliefs.

I have tried to make the reading load as manageable and compelling as possible. I have high expectations regarding your engagement with the readings. Some of the material we will cover may be confusing or unfamiliar and some of it is certainly provocative. I encourage you to voice your comments on the readings and raise questions during class, email me or drop by my office to further discuss the course (or anything else on your mind).

There is nothing that kills discussion and communal learning more than surfing the web during class. Please use computers only for taking notes; surfing the web during class is prohibited. Texting during class is also prohibited.

**Debates**

During the semester, the class will engage in five debates on key, controversial issues in public health and health care policy. These debates will enable us to understand these issues in depth, expose us to different political and ideological perspectives, and give you an opportunity to hone your research and presentation skills.

The class will divide up into 10 groups of about 4 students each, with each group taking one side of our debate topics. Each group will then present a 15-minute presentation with Power Point, followed by a chance to respond to the other side and to questions from the rest of the
class. Presentations will be graded on the basis of their organization, clarity, content, flow, persuasiveness, delivery and strength of their research foundation.

These debates will occur at defined times throughout the semester. Every group member is required to participate in planning their group’s presentation. Additionally, every group member is required to participate equally in the debate, including the presentation and question/answer time. It is the group’s responsibility to ensure that no one person dominates the discussion. More details on the debates are available under the syllabus and resources tabs, where I have posted a debate guide.

The entire group must meet together with the course TA before you are scheduled to present to go over a rough draft of your group’s presentation, ensure you are on the right track, and discuss any issues or questions. Each group will also turn in their PPT to the TA and instructor when they present.

Our debate topics this semester are:

1. Should North Carolina adopt work requirements for its Medicaid program?
2. Should the US ban the sale of combusted cigarettes?
3. Should North Carolina legalize physician-assisted suicide?
4. Should the VA embrace privatization?
5. Should Congress block grant Medicaid?

Attendance

UNC’s official attendance policy is that “Regular class attendance is a student obligation, and a student is responsible for all the work, including tests and written work, of all class meetings. No right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings except for excused absences for authorized University activities or religious observances required by the student’s faith. If a student misses three consecutive class meetings, or misses more classes than the course instructor deems advisable, the course instructor may report the facts to the student’s academic dean.”

Attendance at all course sessions is required. Because this course meets only once a week, missing one session is equivalent to missing an entire week or two 75-minute sessions of another class. We will be doing many group activities and engaging in collective conversations together about the material. In order to participate in those conversations and activities, learn from each other, and help us create a better class, you need to attend in person. You are responsible for ensuring that you understand any material that we go over in class for a session you did not attend, and should consult with other students, the TA, and me to make sure you grasp that material.

Attendance is 10% of your grade. If you attend all sessions, you will receive all 10 points. You can miss one class session for an unexcused absence without any penalty. If you miss only one class for an unexcused absence, you will still receive all 10 points. If you miss 2 classes for
unexcused absences, you will lose 3 points off the attendance component of your grade (i.e., you would score 7/10). If you miss 3 classes for unexcused absences, you will lose 6 points (for a grade of 4/10). If you miss 4 classes for unexcused absences, you will lose all 10 points for attendance (0/10). If you miss 5 or more classes for unexcused absences, you will lose all 10 points for attendance and incur an additional 10 point penalty, meaning that your final course grade will be lowered by 20 points.

You should notify the course instructor two weeks in advance for excused absences for religious observances as required by UNC policy. Excused absences from class for additional valid reasons (e.g., illness or family emergency) may also be granted. A student should present his or her explanation for any absences in writing to the course instructor in advance if the reason for the absence could be foreseen, or as soon as possible thereafter if the reason for the absence could not be foreseen.

A student may appeal a course instructor’s denial of a request that an absence be excused if the request to be excused from class and the reasons for the request are presented to the course instructor in writing within the time limits above. The appeal is to be made to the course instructor’s immediate academic supervisor.

Students who are members of regularly organized and authorized University activities and who may be out of town taking part in some scheduled event are to be excused during the approved period of absence. Notification of such an absence must be sent by the responsible University official to the course instructor before the date(s) of the scheduled absence.

Exams and Papers

There will be two papers and one final. The papers will be around 7-10 pages maximum in length. They should be succinctly written, cogently argued, carefully edited, professionally presented, and well organized; we will talk much more in detail about the papers when they are assigned. Papers will be graded on the basis of substantive content, research effort, and writing quality.

When you submit your paper, be sure that it has a title page with your PID. Your name should not appear anywhere on the paper so we can grade anonymously. Papers must be turned in via Sakai on the designated date by the time set out in the assignment. Late papers will be penalized 10 points for each additional day after the due date. If there is an unexpected event, such as illness, or another compelling reason why you cannot turn in the paper on time, you must speak with me beforehand to get an extension.
Evaluation / Grading

Your grade will be determined as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>% of Grade</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Debate Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper 1</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>March 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 2</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>April 17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>May 6</td>
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The grading scale for the class is:

- **A** 93-100
- **A-** 90-92
- **B+** 87-89
- **B** 83-86
- **B-** 80-82
- **C+** 77-79
- **C** 73-76
- **C-** 70-72
- **D+** 67-69
- **D** 63-66
- **D-** 60-62
- **F** 0-59

Recognizing, Valuing, and Encouraging Diversity

Promoting and valuing diversity in the classroom enriches learning and broadens everyone’s perspectives. Inclusion and tolerance can lead to respect for others and their opinions and is critical to maximizing the learning that we expect in this program. This may challenge our own closely held ideas and personal comfort zones. The results, however, create a sense of community and promote excellence in the learning environment. Diversity includes consideration of (1) the variety of life experiences others have had, and (2) factors related to “diversity of presence,” including, among others, age, economic circumstances, ethnic identification, disability, gender, geographic origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, social position. This class will follow principles of inclusion, respect, tolerance, and acceptance that support the values of diversity.
Disability Accommodation

UNC-CH supports all reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability, or a pregnancy complication resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities.

All accommodations are coordinated through the UNC Office of Accessibility Resources & Services (ARS), http://accessibility.unc.edu; phone 919-962-8300 or email accessibility@unc.edu. Students must document/register their need for accommodations with ARS before any accommodations can be implemented.

Counseling and Psychological Services

CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Go to their website: https://caps.unc.edu or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

UNC Honor Code

HPM Statement

The principles of academic honesty, integrity, and responsible citizenship govern the performance of all academic work and student conduct at the University as they have during the long life of this institution. Your acceptance of enrollment in the University presupposes a commitment to the principles embodied in the Code of Student Conduct and a respect for this most significant Carolina tradition. Your reward is in the practice of these principles.

Your participation in this course comes with the expectation that your work will be completed in full observance of the Honor Code. Academic dishonesty in any form is unacceptable, because any breach in academic integrity, however small, strikes destructively at the University's life and work.

If you have any questions about your responsibility or the responsibility of faculty members under the Honor Code, please consult with someone in either the Office of the Student Attorney General (966-4084) or the Office of the Dean of Students (966-4042).

Read “The Instrument of Student Judicial Governance” (http://instrument.unc.edu).

Plagiarism

UNC rules about plagiarism are available here: http://guides.lib.unc.edu/plagiarism-citing. Please take the time to carefully read these rules. See also the tutorial available from the UNC library: http://www2.lib.unc.edu/instruct/plagiarism/
Knowing how to write a research/analysis paper that is original writing while drawing on previous research and existing sources is an important skill to develop. When the paper is assigned we will go over how to write a research paper, proper research methods, what constitutes plagiarism, proper citation form and standards, the difference between plagiarism and paraphrasing, and other related issues. These principles are crucial for you to learn given the temptations inherent in a web-based age of cut and paste. Students who plagiarize often don’t think they are doing anything wrong—that is why it is vital that you read and understand the rules regarding plagiarism and the standards for academic research outlined in the links above. Please feel free to discuss any questions about these rules with me.

Your papers for this course must be original work. You cannot use someone else’s paper or copy material without attribution from another source. Nor can you use a paper that you have written or are writing for another course. Papers in this course have the status of exams—you are to complete all work yourself and you are not to receive help from others with writing your paper.

A special note on paraphrasing: it is not writing to copy someone else’s words/paragraphs/pages at length and simply alter an occasional word to pass it off as your own work. Avoid repeated and extensive use of this type of “close” paraphrasing, which amounts to plagiarism even if you are citing the source.

**Course Evaluation**

HPM participates in the UNC-CH’s online course evaluation system, enabled at the end of the semester by Scantron Class Climate. Your responses will be anonymous, with feedback provided in the aggregate. Open-ended comments will be shared with instructors, but not identified with individual students. Your participation in course evaluation is an expectation, since providing constructive feedback is a professional obligation. Feedback is critical, moreover, to improving the quality of our courses, as well as for instructor assessment. Students are notified when the evaluation is available online, towards the end of each semester.
Schedule of Sessions

January 14  Introduction: The Opioid Crisis
https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/06/05/the-addicts-next-door

January 28  Stigma and Issue Framing
https://read.dukeupress.edu/jhppl/article/22/4/993/39445/Enemies-of-the-People-The-Moral-Dimension-to


February 4  Race and Racism I
https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/3372911/brandt_racism.pdf?sequence=1


https://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/113/16/4296.full.pdf
February 11  
Race and Racism II


February 18  
Socioeconomic and Political Inequalities


Debate 1: Medicaid work requirements

February 25  
Incarceration and Health

*Guest Lecturer: Dr. Lauren Brinkley-Rubinstein


Debate 2: Banning combusted cigarettes
March 4  Prevention and the Politics of Public Health

https://read.dukeupress.edu/jhppl/article/37/2/181/13459/Chronic-Disease-and-the-Shifting-Focus-of-Public


March 18  Addressing the Opioid Epidemic

*Guest lecture: Kay Sanford

March 25  Why Is Health Care Reform So Hard in the United States?

Read only pages 1923-1932.  https://www.unc.edu/sakai/


Debate 3: Physician-assisted suicide

April 1  Obamacare: Promise, Performance, and Politics

https://read.dukeupress.edu/jhppl/article/36/3/419/13370/The-Elements-of-Surprise-How-Health-Reform

**Debate 4: Privatizing the VA**

April 8

**Repealing and Replacing the Affordable Care Act**


**Debate 5: Block granting Medicaid**

April 15

**Polarization and Partisanship**


April 22

**The Future of Health Care Reform**

Readings TBA as the future becomes more present

May 6

**Final Exam  4-7PM**

*Final exam location TBD*