Course Information

Day and Time: Tuesday, 11:00 am -12:00 noon
Location: 1302 McGG
Instructor: Professor Sally Stearns
• Office: 1104C McGavran-Greenberg
• Office hours: Tuesdays, 12 noon – 1 pm or by appointment
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Course Overview

In the Federal Coordinating Council’s Report to Congress, comparative effectiveness research (CER) was defined as, “the conduct and synthesis of research comparing the benefits and harms of different interventions and strategies to prevent, diagnose, treat and monitor health conditions in ‘real world’ settings. The purpose of this research is to improve health outcomes by developing and disseminating evidence-based information to patients, clinicians, and other decision-makers, responding to their expressed needs about which interventions are most effective for which patients under specific circumstances.”

HPM 781 is designed provide students with an overview of substantive and methodological issues in CER and provide the foundation for advanced courses tailored to students’ individual interests. The seminar covers four areas: (1) Overview to CER; (2) Methods for CER; (3) Data for CER; and (4) CER and Policy. Applications of CER are used to illustrate these areas. By design, the course consists primarily of guest speakers from various UNC departments who conduct CER. The seminar schedule is provided in a separate document.

Course Learning Objectives and Competencies

HPM 781 is designed to help students develop competencies related to understanding, conducting, and interpreting CER. Upon successful completion of this course, students will enhance their skills related to core competencies for the HPM PhD or Master’s Program:

PhD Program Competencies

• Select appropriate research designs and methodologies (quantitative and qualitative) for health services/health policy research
• Understand and appropriately apply analytical strategies used in health services/health policy research.
• Identify the ethical implications of research studies and research methods
• Interpret, explain and critique the results of research
• Explain your own research to various audiences, e.g., policymakers, health care professionals, general public, journalists
• Learn about working on multidisciplinary teams

Master’s Program Competencies and Content Areas

• Analytical thinking
• System thinking
• Population health and status assessment
• Health policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation
• Statistical analysis and application
• Economic analysis and application to decision-making
• Strategy formulation and implementation
Course Requirements and Grades

Readings: The main “textbook” for the class is: Velentgas P, Dreyer NA, Nourjah P, Smith SR, Torchia MM, eds. Developing a Protocol for Observational Comparative Effectiveness Research: A User's Guide. AHRQ Publication No. 12(13)-EHC099. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality; January 2013. It is available on the web at: www.effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/Methods-OCER.cfm Guest speakers may also suggest additional readings. Supplementary readings or materials will also be indicated on the schedule or posted on Sakai. Students should skim readings prior to class if available; some guest lecturers may provide references for further study rather than readings to be done prior to class.

Attendance: Class attendance is required. Slides from speakers will be available on Sakai if the speaker agrees to have them posted. Students must make up any absence by attending two relevant CER seminars or presentations during that semester. At the end of the semester, students who have missed any classes should send an email with information on the substitute seminars (e.g., title, presenter, date/time) to sally.stearns@unc.edu. Seminars are regularly held throughout UNC and Duke; some specific opportunities include:

- Sheps Center for Health Services Research (http://www.schsr.unc.edu/)
- Lineberger Cancer Center (http://www.unclineberger.org/training/seminars/seminarlist.asp)
- Translational and Clinical Sciences Institute (http://tracs.unc.edu/)
- Triangle Health Economics Workshop (http://www.unc.edu/the/workshop.htm)
- Institute on Aging (http://www.aging.unc.edu)
- Carolina Population Center (http://www.cpc.unc.edu)

Class participation: Students are expected to participate in class discussions. Laptops should not be used because they are not needed and can be distracting to other students and the seminar speaker.

Class papers: Students will write two short (two page maximum) papers, tentatively summaries or critiques of CER reports from the AHRQ Effectiveness website. The first paper will be due by March 6th, and the second paper will be due by April 24th. There will not be any exams for this course.

Grades: Attendance will count for 40% of the grade, the first critique will count for 15%, the second critique will count for 35%, and class participation will count for 10%. While students vary considerably in terms of the level of class participation they find comfortable, students who never or extremely rarely participate in any discussion will not receive an H. Students with more than three absences will not earn an H. Any student with more than one outstanding absence will receive a temporary grade of IN (incomplete). All temporary IN grades must be changed to a permanent grade by the deadline specified by the Graduate School Handbook to avoid a permanent F grade.

UNC Honor Code

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 (919-966-4084) or the Office of the Dean of Students (919-966-4042).

Also, please read “The Instrument of Student Judicial Governance” (http://instrument.unc.edu) as this Instrument is in effect in this class. In accordance with this code, you are expected to submit assignments that represent your own work. According to the honor code published on this web site, “Plagiarism in the form of deliberate or reckless representation of another’s words, thoughts, or ideas as one’s own without attribution in connection with submission of academic work, whether graded or otherwise.” Plagiarism directly violates the letter and spirit of the honor code.

Updated 11/25/2014
You must give credit to authors of ideas that are not your own by appropriate citation. Notably, plagiarism is not restricted to copying a direct quote without citing the source, but also includes borrowing ideas without giving credit. If you are unsure whether or not to reference a paper, err on the side of citing the source. I treat the honor code seriously. For violations of the honor code, I will follow the protocol described on the web site listed above.

Course Evaluation

HPM participates in the UNC-CH’s online course evaluation system, currently enabled at the end of each semester by DigitalMeasures (though this system may be changing). 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.

Recognizing, Valuing and Encouraging Diversity

The importance of diversity is recognized in the mission statement of HPM. In the classroom, diversity strengthens the products, enriches the learning, and broadens the perspectives of all in the class. Diversity requires an atmosphere of inclusion and tolerance, which oftentimes challenges our own closely-held ideas, as well as our personal comfort zones. The results, however, create a sense of community and promote excellence in the learning environment. This class will follow principles of inclusion, respect, tolerance, and acceptance that support the values of diversity.

Diversity includes consideration of: (1) life experiences, including type, variety, uniqueness, duration, personal values, political viewpoints, and intensity; and (2) factors related to “diversity of presence,” including, among others, age, economic circumstances, ethnic identification, family educational attainment, disability, gender, geographic origin, maturity, race, religion, sexual orientation, social position, and veteran status.

This class will follow principles of inclusion, respect, tolerance, and acceptance that support the values of diversity.