The Topic:

Health care in the United States consumes 15 percent of the national economy, and the share is rising quickly. Access to, cost, and quality of medical services are of fundamental interest to all Americans, even or especially those who are too young or too frail to know what their interests are. Government is involved with health care in more ways than anyone can count.

These factors all make health policy important for its own sake. They also make evaluation of how health policy is made a good way to study politics. Instead of talking about institutions in isolation, this course studies politics by looking at what government actually does about public problems.

Therefore this course is designed especially for two groups of students. One is political science students. The other is those who might choose careers in public health, medicine, or related fields. It may have a bit too much politics for one group, and a bit too much health policy for the other. I hope each will conclude that both aspects of the course are important and interesting.

Outline of the Course and its Objectives:

In the first half of the course we will focus on health policy itself. We will work to understand the extremely complex system of health care finance and delivery in the United States, and the extensive range of issues that people can raise if they want to improve the system. As a matter of political theory, this part of the course should give students a sense of how hard a task politicians and bureaucrats face in trying to meet our demands to make the system better. For those who expect to work in the health care system in some way, this should give you a more realistic sense of what you will be getting into.

In the second half of the course we will focus on how health policy is made. The text for this half of the course uses a model of the policy-making process to show how institutions relate to each other and the opportunities and constraints faced by groups as they pursue their health policy goals. In addition to the two course textbooks, which provide a look at health care politics more generally, we will also emphasize specific
issues, such as cost control and why the United States does not have national health
insurance, and some analytic questions, such as the role of markets in health care.

Course Requirements:

The work for this course will include reading done by all students; two in-class
exams during the first half of the course; a final exam on December 12; and separate
reports on supplementary reading, due in class on December 1. Undergraduates will
be required to do one reading report, of a minimum of 2000 words. Students will also be
expected to participate in class discussion by reporting to the class about what they found
interesting (or dubious) in their supplementary reading. Graduate students will be
required to read two supplementary books, both on the same policy topic, and
complete a 3500 word report on those two books. They will also be required to lead
any class discussion of their topic.

Grades for undergraduates will be based 20% for each of the first two exams; 20% for
the reading report; and 30% for the final.

Grades for graduate students will be based 15% for each of the first two exams; on
the midterm, 30% for the reading report, and 30% for the final.

YOU WILL NOTE THAT THIS ONLY ADDS TO 90%. The balance will be
determined by class participation. HOWEVER: it is difficult to grade class
participation on an “A/B/C” basis. My expectations are that students attend the
class and participate in class discussion. If a student’s attendance and participation
are particularly scant, the 10% for participation will receive a lower than average
grade, so weight the person’s total grade downward. If a student’s attendance and
participation are particularly strong, it will be graded so as to weight the overall
grade upward. Of course, on an A/B/C/D/F system, 10% usually will not swing the
overall grade. But it will be better to attend and participate.

All assigned readings should be done prior to the class for which they are scheduled, as
they will be discussed on the indicated date.

Reading for all students will include two texts and a selection of articles. Some of
the articles can be downloaded directly from public websites. Others will be placed on
electronic and hardcopy reserve. In a few cases I may hand out copies.

There is virtually a third book (in volume) of articles that I have written. Those
will be placed on the course blackboard site as well as on e-reserves, but I could arrange
to create a reader of those articles if students so request, figuring that copyright on my
own work should not be an issue.

There are two required texts. Please note that you need the specific (4th) editions
of each text:


The supplementary texts from which students will choose their books for book reviews are listed at the end of this syllabus. Articles are listed below on the schedule of assignments.

Schedule of Assignments and Readings:

Section 1: Morality, Economics, Law and Professions

August 28: First class. Introduction and explanation of the course


Sept 1: No class; instructor will be at American Political Science Association meeting, presenting a paper on the politics of health services research.

Sept 4: No class, Labor Day


Section II: The Financing and Organization of American Health Care

Sept 11: Bodenheimer and Grumbach Chapters 1-3 and 15, pages 1-29 and 158-166.


*Students must select the book or books for their supplementary reading by this date.*


Sept 29: First Exam

### Section III: Medical Care, Health, and Quality

**October 2:** NO CLASS, Yom Kippur

**October 4:** Bodenheimer and Grumbach, Chapters 11-12, “The Prevention of Illness” and “The Quality of Health Care,” pp. 102-128;


Joseph White, “Health Care at the End of Life” ms.


October 20:  Second Exam

Section 4: The Health Care Policy Process

October 23:  NO CLASS, Fall Break.


November 1:  Catch-up discussion


Note: think about the reading from October 6, on quality of care, as you read this.


November 15: Sven Steinmo and Jon Watts, “It’s the Institutions Stupid! Why Comprehensive National Health Insurance Always Fails in America.”


November 22: No reading assigned; catch-up discussion focusing on Longest and on White’s “Three Meanings of Capacity” article.

**November 24: NO CLASS, Thanksgiving Break**


December 1: *Reading Reports Due Today*

Class discussion on supplementary readings.

December 4: Class discussion on supplementary readings.

December 6: Class discussion on supplementary readings.

December 8: Concluding lecture and discussion (may continue discussion of supplementary readings).

**Final Exam: DECEMBER 12: 9:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.**

**Suggested Books for Supplementary Reading Reports:**

The books on this list are definitely acceptable. Students may request permission to report on another book, but consent is at the discretion of the instructor.

**Topic 1: National Health Insurance.**


**Topic 2: Medicare**


**Topic 3: Politics and Public Health**


**Topic 5: History**


**Topic 6: Quality and Inequality**


**Topic 7: Efficiency**


