

Political Science 383/483
Health Policy and Politics in the U.S.
Professor Joseph White
Fall, 2009
MWF 10:30 a.m. – 11:20 a.m.
NORD 400
Syllabus, August 7, 2009

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The Topic:

The U.S. health care system is the object of a bit of political attention at the moment. There are good reasons.

Health care in the United States is expected to consume 17 percent of the national economy in 2009, and the share is rising quickly. In contrast, the country with the second-most-expensive system, Switzerland, will spend around 11 percent of its economy. In return for our extra spending, Americans manage to leave at least 45 million of our people without health insurance at any given time – so nearly 20 percent of all working-age Americans. All other comparable countries insure about 99%, or more, of citizens. Studies show that, in the United States, potential years of life that could have been saved by good medical treatment are lost at a greater rate than in any other advanced industrial country.

Access to, costs of, and results of medical care are of fundamental interest to all Americans, even or especially those who are too young or too frail to know what their interests are. In other countries, governments have policies to guarantee access, control costs, and – they hope – guarantee good care (the last one is much harder than the first two). In the United States, governments are involved with health care in more ways than anyone can count. Yet the performance of our system on these basic aspects of life clearly leaves a lot to be desired.

These facts help explain why President Obama has made health care reform the signature issue of his presidency. But they do not tell us why the U.S. political

system has reached this point – why all previous efforts failed. Nor do they tell us why, as I was drafting this syllabus, it seemed highly likely that the Obama effort, also, would fail. Nor do they tell us what policies would succeed, or even what “health care policy” could or should involve. Those are the topics of this course.

Outline of the Course and its Objectives:

This course can only begin to introduce you to a huge field. As with any policy field, its dynamics include an interaction among experts, organized interests, politicians, and other public officials in a **policy community**. You may yourself become part of the health policy community as you pursue your careers and other interests. The participants in any policy community interact with each other while continually watching for or trying to mobilize interventions by others who are not usually involved in that policy but could be decisive if they got involved in a conflict. These others include, especially, the general public and leaders of the major political institutions. Therefore, in order to understand health policy one needs to understand both the dynamics within that community and the dynamics of those other institutions.

Course Requirements and Grading:

All students in this class will be expected to do the reading and participate in class discussions. **Graded assignments for POSC 383 will include two short papers** (a total of ten pages), **a midterm exam, and a final exam**. By the rules of the College of Arts and Sciences, graduate students are expected to do more work than undergraduates. Therefore, **POSC 483 students will also do two more short papers** (nine pages total).

The midterm exam will be in class on October 7. The final exam will be held in the scheduled exam period, from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. on December 8.

Assignments for all students

The first short paper is designed to get you started on raising questions about the topic. It will be **due on August 31**. This paper **should be about four pages (1100 words) in length, and no less than 900 words**. The assignment is to identify one key issue in the health care reform debate. What are the sides?

What are their arguments? What would you need to know to choose? You should use sources such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *CNN*, and other mainstream news outlets in order to choose your issue and find information about it. You are not by any means expected to totally understand the issue you choose! Instead, I will be looking to see if you have identified a real issue and the publicly-stated sides; and whether you have looked at the claims enough to identify reasonable questions about the issue.

The second short paper, due on November 2, is designed to encourage the class to engage with the range of positions, stakes, and supposed information sources within the reform debate. This paper **should be about six pages (1650 words) in length, and no less than 1350 words**. Your task will be to choose a “think tank” or some other organization that takes stands on health policy issues and produces analyses or statements to support those stands. Write a paper in which you describe the contribution it would claim to be making to the health care reform debate. This could mean promoting certain policy positions, but it could also mean claiming to inform the debate with neutral studies of issues. If the latter, the organization may still be focusing on some issues or concerns rather than others, so what is its particular focus? If it is taking positions, to what extent do those positions seem like they could be changed by argument from the other side(s)? To what extent do they seem likely to be based on either material self-interest, professional training, overall political ideology, or other bases of “deep core” beliefs? A list of just some of the potential organization on which you can report, with their websites, is at the end of this syllabus.

Grades for POSC 383 students will be calculated as follows: 10% for the first paper, 30% for the midterm exam, 25% for the second paper, 35% for the final exam, and a possible adjustment based on class participation.

Assignments for POSC 483 students:

The **first POSC 483 extra assignment will be due on Sept 11**, to accompany the class discussion of Jim Morone’s chapter on values in the health policy debate. The assignment will be to write a short paper and also contribute to discussion by talking about supplemental readings. Those readings are Mildred Blaxter, “Whose Fault Is It? Peoples’ Own Conceptions of the Reasons for Health Inequalities.” *Social Science and Medicine* 1997, Vol. 44, No. 6, 747–756; and

Howard M. Leichter, "'Evil Habits' and 'Personal Choices': Assigning Responsibility for Health in the 20th Century." *The Milbank Quarterly* 2003, Vol. 81, No. 4, 603–626. POSC 483 students will write a four–page (minimum 1000 word) paper in which they analyze how these articles fit or do not fit with the arguments made by Morone.

The second POSC 483 extra assignment will be due on Oct 26, to accompany the section on the politics of health care reform. POSC 483 students should read one book on the failure of President Clinton's health reform effort, and write a **book review** of no less than 1500 words. In that review they should summarize the book's main contributions (or intended contributions) to understanding of the politics of health care reform. They should write the review as if they expected it to be shared with their classmates, to help inform their classmates about the topic. I may well ask students about their books during the discussions of the various explanations in the assigned texts. Among the books on which students could report are: Jacob S. Hacker, *The Road to Nowhere: The Genesis of President Clinton's Plan for Health Security* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Haynes Johnson and David S. Broder, *The System: The American Way of Politics at the Breaking Point* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1996); Rick Mayes, *Universal Coverage: The Elusive Quest for National Health Insurance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004); Jill Quadagno, *One Nation Uninsured: Why the U.S. Has No National Health Insurance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Theda Skocpol, *Boomerang: Health Care Reform and the Turn Against Government* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996).

Grades for POSC 483 students will be calculated as follows: 10% for the initial (August 31) paper; 10% for the first extra assignment; 20% for the midterm; 15% for the book review assignment; 15% for the second (Nov 2) paper; 30% for the final exam; and a possible adjustment based on class participation.

For both POSC 383 and 483 students, **class participation will be counted as an adjustment to the rest of the grade.** 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, I will deduct up to 1/3 of a grade from the student's final grade. Deduction is particularly likely for missing a substantial portion of classes. If a student's participation is particularly strong, I could raise the final

grade calculation by as much as 1/3 of a grade (e.g., a B+ would become an A-, so recorded as an A).

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

Schedule of Assignments and Readings

There is one required text. Other required readings either will be placed on electronic reserve, or are downloadable from public sites on the internet. As a number of the required articles are written by me, I feel there is no copyright issue, and will post those on the course blackboard site. Some of the reserve readings are taken from an excellent health policy reader, and I recommend that students who are likely to pursue the topic beyond this course consider purchasing that book.

Required: Thomas S. Bodenheimer and Kevin Grumbach. 2009. *Understanding Health Policy: A Clinical Approach 5th ed.* (Lange Medical Books)

Recommended: James A. Morone, Theodore J. Litman, and Leonard S. Robins. 2008. *Health Politics and Policy 4th ed.* (Delmar Cengage Learning)

Students would also benefit from following the health care reform debate, for example in the *New York Times* on-line.

Section 1: Introduction

In this section we will take a first look at basic aspects of a health care system, including how the money is collected, how it is paid to providers, and how the delivery of care is organized. You will also take your own first look at the issues in the current policy debate.

Aug 24: Introduction and explanation of the course.

Aug 26: Health Care Finance and Access. Bodenheimer and Grumbach. Preface, Chapters 1-3, "Introduction," "Paying for Health Care," and "Access to Health Care," pp. v-vii, 1-30.

Aug 28: Bodenheimer and Grumbach, Chapter 15, “National Health Insurance,” pp.181–191. Joseph White, “National Health Care/Insurance Systems” (from course Blackboard site).

Aug 31: Discussion of first papers.

First Short Paper Due

Sept 2: Bodenheimer and Grumbach, Chapter 4, “Reimbursing Health Care Providers,” pp. 31–41; Paul B. Ginsburg and Joy M. Grossman, “When the Price Isn’t Right: How Inadvertent Payment Incentives Drive Medical Care.” *Health Affairs Web Supplement* (9 August 2005), 9 pp. (e-reserve).

Sept 4: **NO CLASS:** Instructor will be at American Political Science Association Annual Meeting

Sept 7: **NO CLASS:** Labor Day

Sept 9: Bodenheimer and Grumbach, Chapters 5–6, “How Health Care is Organized I & II,” pp. 43–69.

Section II. Values and History

Health care policy-making certainly involves a great deal of raw material self-interest. Care-givers seek to maximize their incomes; payers seek to limit their expenses; and any policies to ensure coverage must force some people to subsidize others. Yet even attitudes about one’s self-interest are shaped by values and ideologies, such as your beliefs about how the world works. In this section we look at the different core beliefs that motivate much of the disagreements. We do so both to help understand the politics and to encourage you to reflect on what you believe.

Sept 11: James A. Morone, “Morality, Politics, and Health Policy.” From David Mechanic et al. eds., *Policy Challenges in Modern Health Care* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), pp. 13–25. (e-reserve)

First POSC 483 Extra Assignment Due Today

Sept 14: Deborah Stone, “Values in Health Policy: Understanding Fairness and Efficiency.” From *Health Politics and Policy 4th ed.*, pp. 24–36. (e-reserve)
Mark V. Pauly. 1998. Trading Cost, Quality, and Coverage of the Uninsured: What Will We Demand and What Will We Supply? From Stuart Altman, Uwe E. Reinhardt, and Alexandra E. Shields eds., *The Future U.S. Healthcare System: Who Will Care For the Poor and Uninsured?* (Chicago: Health Administration Press, 1999), pp. 353–373 (e-reserve)

Sept 16: Donald Light. “American Health Care: How It Became Inefficient, Inequitable, and Costly.” Chapter 10 in *Health Politics and Policy 4th ed.*, pp. 223 – 248. (e-reserve)

Section III. Policy Processes and Policy Communities

The typical introductory course on American politics describes the system in terms of institutions with authority to make decisions, such as Congress and the Presidency; and institutions that mobilize people to influence decisions, such as political parties, interest groups, and the media. All these are important to health policy, but a focus on institutions is not sufficient for understanding policy-making. We need to think, especially, about how problems are defined and “solutions” designed and promoted. Students of public policy have developed various ways to think about those processes. “Experts” see the world through their own frames, so provide only partial information; yet they also worry about how to communicate their “truth.” The readings in this section provide examples of these different views and their limits. The section ends with the midterm exam, which will review key concepts from the first three sections of the course.

Sept 18: Joseph White, “Models of the Policy Process.” (Blackboard)

Sept 21: John McDonough, “Agendas and Children’s Health Care,” from *Experiencing Politics: A Legislator’s Stories of Government and Health Care* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 237–284. (e-reserves)

Sept 23: Joseph White, “Health Care Reform: What’s the Problem?” (Blackboard).

Sept 25: Evan Melhado, "Economists, Public Provision, and the Market: Changing Values in the Policy Debate" *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* 23(2), April 1998, pp. 216–263 (e-reserves)

POSC 383 and POSC 483 students should inform Professor White in writing, by today, of their topic choice for the second paper.

Sept 28: Donald M. Berwick, "The John Eisenberg Lecture: Health Services Research as a Citizen in Improvement." *Health Services Research* 40:2 (April 2005), pp. 317–336 (e-reserves)

Sept 30: "Health Policy Roundtable: Producing and Adapting Research Syntheses for Use by Health System Managers and Public Policymakers." *Health Services Research* 41:3, Part I (June 2006) pp. 905–17. (e-reserves)

Oct 2: Ruth E. Malone, "Whither the Almshouse? Overutilization and the Role of the Emergency Department." *Journal of Health Policy, Politics and Law* 23(5), October 1998, pp. 795–831. (e-reserves)

POSC 483 students should inform Professor White by today of their book choice for the second extra POSC 483 assignment.

Oct 5: Joseph White, "American Health Care in International Perspective." Chapter 19 in *Health Politics and Policy 4th ed.*, pp. 416 – 430. (blackboard)
Study Guide for the exam will be handed out.

Oct 7: First Exam, in Class

Section IV: Costs, and Public Insurance

The hottest issue, at least ostensibly, in the 2009 debate has involved proposals for a voluntary "public plan" to compete with private insurers. Advocates of the "public plan" have argued it is necessary to control costs. Opponents have argued it would be "big government" and other bad things while sort of admitting it would control costs better than private insurance would (so, they claim, be unfair to private insurers). But much of the public discussion of costs has not focused on the public plan at all. In this section we will look a bit at

cost control methods, and a bit more at the public insurance that accounts for a large share of U.S. healthcare costs already.

Oct 9: Guest Lecture by Professor Robert H. Binstock on the “fiscal burden” of programs for the elderly and the argument that care for the elderly should be rationed.

Oct 12: Bodenheimer and Grumbach, Chapter 8, “Painful vs. Painless Cost Control,” and Chapter 9, “Mechanisms for Controlling Costs”, pp. 87–109.

Some chapters by Professor White on health care cost control will be posted on the blackboard site as optional reading, and will be the basis for some lecturing during this week.

Oct 14: U.S. Congressional Budget Office, *Key Issues in Analyzing Major Health Insurance Proposals* (December 2008). Chapter 5, “Factors Affecting the Supply and Prices of Health Care Services,” pp. 99–116. (downloadable from <http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/99xx/doc9924/12-18-KeyIssues.pdf>)

Bodenheimer and Grumbach, Chapter 7, “The Health Care Workforce and the Education of Health Professionals,” pp. 71– 86.

Oct 16: U.S. Congressional Budget Office, *Key Issues in Analyzing Major Health Insurance Proposals* (December 2008). Chapter 7, “Changes in Health Habits and Medical Practices,” pp. 131–154. (downloadable from <http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/99xx/doc9924/12-18-KeyIssues.pdf>)

Oct 19: No Class, Fall Break

Oct 21: Jonathan Oberlander. “Medicare: The Great Transformation.” Chapter 14 in *Health Policy and Politics 4th ed.*, pp. 310 – 327. (e-reserve)

Oct 23: Colleen Grogan. “Medicaid: Health Care for You and Me?” Chapter 15 in *Health Policy and Politics 4th ed.*, pp. 329 – 354. (e-reserve)

Section V: The Politics of National Health Insurance – Previous Rounds

By this point in the course the NHI fight may be over. More likely, it will be nearing its climax, which, judging from previous iterations, will mean a

headlong retreat by the Democrats towards some face-saving fallback position. We will see! But, to help us understand whatever is going on at the time, we turn at this point to some more directly political analyses of past events.

Oct 26: Allen Schick, "How a Bill Did Not Become a Law," in Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein eds., *Intensive Care: How Congress Shapes Health Policy*. (American Enterprise Institute and The Brookings Institution, 1995), pp. 227–272. (e-reserves)

POSC 483 Book Review Assignment Due Today.

Oct 28: Sven Steinmo and Jon Watts, "It's the Institutions Stupid! Why Comprehensive National Health Insurance Always Fails in America," *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* 20:2 (1995), pp. 329–372. (e-reserves)

Joseph White, "The Horses and the Jumps: Comments on the Health Care Reform Steeplechase," *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* 20:2 (1995), pp. 373–383. (Blackboard)

Oct 30: David Blumenthal and James Morone, "Presidents." Chapter 5 in *Health Policy and Politics 4th ed.*, pp. 95 – 126. (e-reserves)

Nov 2: Discussion of the papers that are due today

Assignment on one organization's participation in the health care reform debate is due today.

Nov 4: Frank J. Thompson and James Fossett, "Federalism," Chapter 7 in *Health Policy and Politics 4th ed.*, pp. 153 – 172. (e-reserves)

Section VI: Quality and Other Things That Might Seem Less Controversial

To this point the course will have focused on matters on which there is a clear partisan divide, because they raise obvious questions of ideology (the roles of government, markets, personal and collective responsibility) and of self-interest (who gets the bill, and who earns how much). But there is much more to health policy, and so we turn to other issues that will seem less controversial. In practice, however, they turn out to be about as difficult for government to address. Professor White's "Three Meanings of Capacity" article gives his

understanding of why these other issues are difficult, but first we will consider some of those issues.

Nov 6: Bodenheimer and Grumbach, Chapter 12, “Long-Term Care,” pp. 139–146.

Nov 9: Joseph White, “Three Meanings of Capacity: Or, Why the Federal Government Is Most Likely to Lead on Insurance Access Issues.” *Journal of Health Policy, Politics and Law* 28:2–3 (2003), pp. 217–244. (blackboard)

Nov 11: Bodenheimer and Grumbach, Chapter 13, “Medical Ethics and Rationing of Health Care,” pp. 147–162; New York Times article on drug companies paying ghostwriters to author medical journal studies (handout); Joseph White, “Health Care at the End of Life” (ms., 11 pp.). (blackboard).

Nov 13: Bodenheimer and Grumbach, Chapter 10, “Quality of Health Care,” pp. 111–128.

Nov 16: Michael L. Millenson., “Still Demanding Medical Excellence,” and Lucian L. Leape, “Preventing Medical Errors.” Both from David Mechanic et al. eds., *Policy Challenges in Modern Health Care* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), pp. 151–77. (e-reserves)

Nov 18: Bodenheimer and Grumbach, Chapter 11, “Prevention of Illness,” pp. 129–138.

Nov 20: Anne Gifford, senior capstone paper on preventing lead poisoning in Cleveland. (Blackboard)

Nov 23: Carol Kane and David Emmons. 2007. “The Impact of Liability Pressure and Caps on Damages on the Healthcare Market: An Update of Recent Literature.” AMA Policy Research Perspectives, American Medical Association, Chicago. Downloadable from <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama1/pub/upload/mm/363/prp2007-1.pdf> 10 pages

Marc A. Rodwin, Hak J. Chang, Melissa M. Ozaeta, and Richard J. Omar. 2008. Malpractice Premiums In Massachusetts, A High-Risk State: 1975 – 2005. *Health Affairs* 27(3): 835 – 844. (e-reserve)

Teresa M. Waters et al. 2007. Impact of State Tort Reforms on Physician Malpractice Payments. *Health Affairs* 26(2): 500–509. (e-reserve)

Nov 25: Optional Class Discussion

Nov 27: No Class: Thanksgiving Break

Nov 30: Martin A. Levin. “The Day After an AIDS Vaccine is Discovered: Management Matters,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 12(3) Summer 1993, pp. 438–55. (e-reserves).

Dec 2: Review, possibly some readings on current events

Dec 4: Bodenheimer and Grumbach, Chapter 16, “Conflict and Change in America’s Health Care System,” and Chapter 17, “Conclusion: Tensions and Challenges,” pp. 193–208.

Study Guide for final exam will be distributed today.

December 8 Final EXAM, 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Possible Topics for Second Paper Assignment:

There are many, many organizations you could choose. Here is a list of just a few.

American Medical Association. <http://www.ama-assn.org/>

American College of Physicians. <http://www.acponline.org/>

American College of Healthcare Executives <http://www.ache.org/>

Academy Health <http://academyhealth.org/>

America’s Health Insurance Plans <http://www.ahip.org/>

American College of Surgeons <http://www.facs.org/>

American Academy of Family Physicians <http://www.aafp.org/online/en/home.html>

American Hospital Association <http://www.aha.org>

PhRMA <http://www.phrma.org>

Cato Institute <http://www.cato.org>

Brookings Institution <http://www.brookings.edu>

Heritage Foundation <http://www.heritage.org>

American Enterprise Institute <http://www.aei.org>

New America Foundation <http://www.newamerica.net/>
Institute for America's Future <http://www.ourfuture.org>
Center for American Progress <http://www.americanprogress.org/>
Citizens for a Sound Economy <http://www.freedomworks.org/>
Kaiser Family Foundation <http://www.kff.org/>
Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured <http://www.kff.org/about/kcmu.cfm>
Commonwealth Fund <http://www.commonwealthfund.org/>
U.S. Chamber of Commerce <http://www.uschamber.com/default>
Business Roundtable <http://www.businessroundtable.org/>
National Federation of Independent Business <http://www.nfib.com/>
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation <http://www.rwjf.org/>
AARP <http://www.aarp.org/>
AFL-CIO <http://www.aflcio.org/>
The Century Foundation <http://www.tcf.org>
National Quality Forum <http://www.qualityforum.org/>
Institute of Medicine <http://www.iom.edu>
Committee for Economic Development <http://www.ced.org/>
National Coalition on Health Care <http://www.nchc.org>
National Academy of Social Insurance <http://www.nasi.org>
National Health Policy Forum <http://www.nhpf.org/>
Alliance for Health Reform <http://www.allhealth.org/>
Concord Coalition <http://www.concordcoalition.org/>
Hudson Institute <http://www.hudson.org/>
National Center for Policy Analysis <http://www.ncpa.org>
Progressive Policy Institute <http://www.ppionline.org/>
Rand corporation <http://www.rand.org>
Urban Institute <http://www.urban.org>