

# Current Approaches to Health & Society

HS 302  
Spring 2023

## Professor

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Office Hours: T | TH 2:00-3:30PM  
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## Class

T | TH 11:00A-12:30PM  
UTC 3.110

## Course Description

Health care is one of the most important forces in American social life. Nearly 25 percent of the federal budget is devoted to health care. Medical bills are one of the leading causes of financial hardship and bankruptcies. Major health events, such as COVID-19, can fundamentally shape our social interactions, work lives, and political views. The purpose of this course is to provide students with an understanding of major issues and research topics in the field of American Health Politics and Policy as well as Health and Society more broadly. The course will first compare the US health care system to others across the globe. Once the major components of the US system have been assessed, the course will examine a series of specific health case studies and issues related to American health care. Students should leave class understanding of how the US health care system and health policy is distinctive globally, the major contributing factors that shape US health, and knowledge of contemporary debates in American health policy and politics.

## Readings and Materials

No textbooks are required. All materials will be made available on Canvas.

## Course Objectives

After successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Describe how the US health care system compares to peer countries.
2. Understand and articulate the ways in which the distribution of power in American society impacts health policies and health outcomes in the US.
3. Critically evaluate the US political system in terms of its effects on health outcomes.
4. Detail the major policies and political forces that shape health outcomes in the US.

## Assignments and Grading

- **Class Participation and Attendance (20% of final grade)**  
This class is participation heavy. You will be expected to attend class regularly, contribute to course discussions, and be active in course activities. In pursuit of these goals, you are allowed three “no-questions-asked” no-reasons-needed absences. To be clear, you may miss class up to three times without documentation for, seeking clearance from, or notifying me. After this, you will be docked points from your final course grade. There are two exceptions to this

policy: you may not miss the midterm or the final group project presentations. YOU MUST BE IN ATTENDANCE ON THESE DAYS.

- **Assignments (30% of final grade; 10% each)**
  - Assignment 1: Compare the US health care system/health outcomes to another country. Select at least five outcomes. What surprised you most?
  - Assignment 2: Select one of the following major health / social welfare programs in the US (Social Security; Medicare; Medicaid; SCHIP; SNAP; Veterans Health Administration). Briefly discuss when the policy / program was created / passed / reformed. Was the policy widely-supported or more partisan? Select one social group that you are interested in the US and discuss how this group been affected by the policy? If there is no research on the topic, note this and state why you think this is.
  - Assignment 3: Compare the Texas health care system/health outcomes to another US state. Select at least five outcomes. Select one social group that you are interested in the US (yes, you can keep the same group if you want); compare how the health of this group in Texas to the same group in your comparison state. Why do you think they are similar / dissimilar?
- **Midterm Exam (20% of final grade; March 9th)**
- **Group Project (30% of final grade)**
  - You will work in groups of 3-5 on a policy proposal project. The project will have two parts: a policy proposal report and an in-class presentation.
    - Policy Proposal Report (20%; draft due April 11th; Revised due April 27th )
      - Each group will prepare a 5-10 page (double-spaced) memo that identifies a social health / wellness problem, defines that major stakeholders and social groups impacted by the problem, and proposes a policy solution to the problem.
      - Further information to come later in the semester.
    - Policy Proposal Presentation (10%; due April 20<sup>th</sup>)
      - Each group will prepare and present in class a 5-minute presentation of their policy proposal.
      - Further information to come later in the semester.

### Grading Policy

Overall semester averages will earn the following letter grades. Grades will be assigned strictly according to this scale without automatic rounding.

A 94.0-100  
A- 90.0-93.9  
B+ 87.0-89.9  
B 84.0-86.9

B- 80.0-83.9  
C+ 77.0-79.9  
C 74.0-76.9  
C- 70.0-73.9

D+ 67.0-69.9  
D 64.0-66.9  
D- 60.0-63.9  
F 0-59

## Academic Integrity

“Using someone else’s work in your own writing without giving proper credit is considered plagiarism, a serious form of academic dishonesty that can result in severe penalties. Copying someone else’s work, buying a paper and submitting it as your own, copying and pasting text (even with changes), or borrowing images from an online source, are some examples of plagiarism. Even if you plagiarize accidentally, you can be held responsible and penalized.

Learning to cite sources appropriately is an important part of becoming a professional. When you are unsure about citation, you are encouraged to **ask your instructor** (who is already an expert in the discipline) what is appropriate in the context of your assignment. Consultants at The University Writing Center can also help you determine whether you are citing sources correctly—and they have helpful guides online for using direct quotations and paraphrasing. Reviewing those skills will help you feel confident that you are handling sources professionally in your writing.

You can read the University’s definition of plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty in Sec. 11–402 of the Student Conduct Code. For more information, visit the Dean of Students’ site.<sup>1</sup>

## Plagiarism Detection Software

“All assignments in this course may be processed by TurnItIn, a tool that compares submitted material to an archived database of published work to check for potential plagiarism. Other methods may also be used to determine if a paper is the student’s original work. Regardless of the results of any TurnItIn submission, the faculty member will make the final determination as to whether or not a paper has been plagiarized.”<sup>2</sup>

## Inclusivity

This class respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities. If there are circumstances that make our learning environment and activities difficult, if you have medical information that you need to share with me, or if you need specific arrangements in case the building needs to be evacuated, please let me know. I am committed to creating an effective learning environment for all students, but I can only do so if you discuss your needs with me as early as possible. I promise to maintain the confidentiality of these discussions and work to make our classroom a positive learning environment for all.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ugs.utexas.edu/flags/faculty-resources/teaching/syllabus>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ugs.utexas.edu/flags/faculty-resources/teaching/syllabus>

## Accommodations

The University of Texas provides, upon request, appropriate academic accommodations for students with disabilities. Please contact Services for Students with Disabilities for more information ([diversity.utexas.edu](http://diversity.utexas.edu)). If you are uncertain about your needs, please do not hesitate to speak with me.

## Course Schedule and Readings

Week 1: Introductions, Course Overview, What is Health? What is Health Policy? What Social/Political Factors Influence Health?

### UNIT 1 American Health Policy

Week 2: Measuring "Policy Effects" or How Do We Know When Policy/Politics Influences Health?

REQUIRED:

- Walt, Gill, Jeremy Shiffman, Helen Schneider, Susan F Murray, Ruairi Brugha, and Lucy Gilson. 2008. "Doing' Health Policy Analysis: Methodological and Conceptual Reflections and Challenges." *Health Policy and Planning* 23: 308-17.
- Irwin, Neil. 2017 What if Sociologists Had as Much Influence as Economists? The New York Times March 17  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/17/upshot/what-if-sociologists-had-as-much-influence-as-economists.html>
- ["How to Read a Social Science Journal Article."](#)

RECOMMENDED:

- Holland, Paul W. "Statistics and Causal Inference." *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 81.396 (1986): 945-960.

Week 3: How Does the US Health Care System Compare to the World?

REQUIRED:

- Taylor and Bradley. 2013. *The American Health Care Paradox*. Ch. 2.
- Schoen, C., Osborn, R., Squires, D., & Doty, M. M. (2013). Access, affordability, and insurance complexity are often worse in the United States compared to ten other countries. *Health Affairs*, 32(12), 2205-2215.

RECOMMENDED:

- Starr, Paul. *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*. Harvard University, 1982.
- Smeeding, T., & Thévenot, C. (2016). Addressing child poverty: How does the United States compare with other nations?. *Academic Pediatrics*, 16(3), S67-S75.

- MacDorman, M. F., & Mathews, T. J. (2010). Behind international rankings of infant mortality: how the United States compares with Europe. *International Journal of Health Services*, 40(4), 577-588.

#### Week 4: Why Does the US System Look This Way?

##### REQUIRED:

- Hacker. 1998. "The Historical Logic of National Health Insurance." [Studies in American Political Development](#).
- Smith 2016. *Power to Heal*. Selections.

##### RECOMMENDED:

- Navarro. 1992. *Why the United States Does Not Have a National Health Program*.
- Mettler. 1998. "Dividing Social Citizenship by Gender." [Studies in American Political Development](#).
- Pierson. 1996. "The New Politics of the Welfare State." [World Politics](#).

#### Week 5: What are the major health policies/programs in the US?

##### REQUIRED:

- Nolen et al. 2020. "How foundational moments in Medicaid's history reinforced rather than eliminated racial health disparities." [Health Affairs](#)
- Morgan and Campbell. 2011. *Delegated Welfare State*. Selections.
- Hacker and Pierson. 2018. "The Dog that Almost Barked." [JHPPL](#).

##### RECOMMENDED:

- Baicker, Katherine, Sarah L. Taubman, Heidi L. Allen, Mira Bernstein, Jonathan H. Gruber, Joseph P. Newhouse, Eric C. Schneider, Bill J. Wright, Alan M. Zaslavsky, and Amy N. Finkelstein 2013. "The Oregon Experiment — Effects of Medicaid on Clinical Outcomes." [New England Journal of Medicine](#) 368 (18): 1713-1722.
- Oberlander. 2003. *The Political Life of Medicare*.

#### Week 6: How does federal policy influence health?

##### REQUIRED:

- Sanger-Katz. 2020. "Surprise medical bills cost Americans millions. Congress finally banned most of them". [New York Times](#).
- Johnson. 2022. House Investigation Faults FDA, Biogen for Alzheimer's drug approval. [Washington Post](#).
- Cohen. 2020. "Trump administration shuttered pandemic monitoring program." [CNN](#).
- Lewis. 2018. *The Fifth Risk*. Pg. 81-126.

##### RECOMMENDED:

- Shah and Forman. 2020. "The Case for Independent CDC." [JAMA](#).

- Gotein. 2019. "The alarming scope of the President's emergency powers." [The Atlantic](#)
- Carpenter. 2004. "The Political Economy of FDA Drug Review." [Health Affairs](#).

#### Week 6: How does state and local policy shape health?

##### REQUIRED:

- Varney. 2014. "Why Obamacare Went South in Mississippi." [The Atlantic](#).
- Callaghan et al. 2019. "Immigrant health access in Texas." [BMC](#).
- Kreitzer et al. 2021. "Affordable but Inaccessible? Contraception Deserts in the US States." [JHPPL](#).

##### RECOMMENDED:

- Herd and Moynihan. 2020. "Administrative Burdens in Health Policy." [Journal of Health and Human Services](#).
- Montez et al. "US State Policies, Politics, and Life Expectancy." [The Milbank Quarterly](#).
- Michener. *Fragmented Democracy*.
- Mettler. *Submerged State*.
- Patterson. 2020. "The Politics of Pandemics" [State Politics and Policy Quarterly](#).

#### Week 7: Corporate Politics, Medical Science, and Health Policy

##### REQUIRED:

- Fuchs. 2021. "Sinema Rakes in Pharma Finance Cash." [Politico](#).
- Whitaker. 2020. "Money, Dinners, and Strip Clubs." [60 Minutes](#).
- Keefe. 2017. "The Family the Built An Empire of Pain." [The New Yorker](#).
- Gerber and Patashnik. 2006. "Sham Surgery."

##### RECOMMENDED:

- Hertel-Fernandez. 2019. Medicaid expansion chapter. *State Capture*. Ch. 6.
- Mello et al. "Pharmaceutical Companies' Role in State Vaccination Policies." [AJPH](#).
- Conway and Oreskes. 2010. *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*.

#### Week 8: Midterm Review (March 7) and Midterm Exam (March 9)

#### Week 9: Spring Break

## UNIT 2 The Mass Politics of Health in the US

### Week 10: Introduction to Group Projects and Social Movements and Health Policy

#### REQUIRED:

- Hoffman B, 2003. "Health Care Reform and Social Movements in the United States," [American Journal of Public Health](#).
- Brown, T. M., & Fee, E. (2014). Social movements in health. [Annu Rev Public Health](#), 35(1), 385-398.

#### RECOMMENDED:

- Smith 2016. *Power to Heal*.
- Keller and Packell. 2014. "Going for the Cure." [JHPPL](#).

### Week 11: Partisan Politics, Social Identities, Resentment and Health

#### REQUIRED:

- Strickland et al. 2011. "Motivated Reasoning and Public Opinion." [JHPPL](#).
- Tesler, 2012. "The Spillover of Racialization Into Health Care." [AJPS](#).
- Clinton et al. 2020. "Partisan Pandemic" [Science Advances](#).

#### RECOMMENDED:

- Jacobs and Mettler. 2011. "Why Public Opinion Changes." [JHPPL](#)
- Metzl. 2019. *Dying of Whiteness*.
- Palmer and Peterson. 2020. "Toxic Mask-ularity." [Politics & Gender](#).
- Druckman et al. 2021. "The Role of Race, Religion, and Partisanship in Misperceptions about COVID-19." [Group Process & Intergroup Relations](#).
- DeMora et al. 2020. "Reducing Mask Hesitancy Among White Evangelicals." [PNAS](#).

### Week 12: Social Marginalization, Poverty, Vulnerability and Health

#### REQUIRED:

- Harriet A. Washington. 2006. *Medical Apartheid*. Ch. 7.
- Kolak, Marynia, Jay Bhatt, Yoon Hong Park, Norma A. Padrón, and Ayrin Molefe. 2020. "Quantification of Neighborhood-Level Social Determinants of Health in the Continental United States." [JAMA Network Open](#) 3: e1919928-e28.
- Miller, Charlotte E., and Ramachandran S. Vasan. "The southern rural health and mortality penalty: a review of regional health inequities in the United States." [Social Science & Medicine](#) 268 (2021): 113443.

RECOMMENDED:

- Alsan and Wanamaker. 2018. "Tuskegee and the Health of Black Men." [\*The Quarterly Journal of Economics\*](#).
- del Pino, Sandra, Sol Beatriz Sánchez-Montoya, José Milton Guzmán, Oscar J. Mujica, Juan Gómez-Salgado, and Carlos Ruiz-Frutos. 2019. "Health Inequalities Amongst People of African Descent in the Americas, 2005–2017: A Systematic Review of the Literature." [\*International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health\*](#) 16: 3302.

**UNIT 3 Case Studies in American Health Policy and Politics**

Week 13: 1918 Influenza Pandemic, AIDS Outbreak, and the Opioid Epidemic

REQUIRED:

- Navarro. "Politics, Pushback, and Pandemics." [\*American Journal of Public Health\*](#).
- <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/documentary/aids/#:~:text=Through%20interviews%20with%20AIDS%20researchers,for%20The%20Age%20of%20AIDS.%5D>
- Case and Deaton. 2020. *Deaths of Despair*. Selections.

RECOMMENDED:

- Dionne. The Politics of Pandemic Othering. [\*International Organization\*](#).
- Pourat, Nadereh, E. Richard Brown, Natasha Razack, and William Kassler. 2002. "Medicaid Managed Care and Stds: Missed Opportunities to Control the Epidemic." [\*Health Affairs\*](#) 21: 228-39.
- Price. "Public Opinion Toward AIDS Policies: The Role of Misinformation and Attitudes Toward Homosexuals." [\*Public Opinion Quarterly\*](#).
- Shilts. 1987. *And the Band Played On*.
- Kim et al. 2020. "Treatment Versus Punishment." [\*JHPPL\*](#).
- Quinones. 2015. *Dreamland*.

Week 14: Wrap-up and Group Project Presentations (April 20)