Health Care Policy
34:833:683
Department of Public Policy
Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy
Rutgers University
Fall, 2000
Mondays, 9:50 – 12:30
Room 112, Civic Square Building

Course Description

This course provides an overview of health care policy in the United States, a close examination of selected current policy topics, and exposure to “real world” health policymaking in New Jersey. Students are assumed to bring to the course with a good general understanding of public policy process and institutions, but limited knowledge of health care issues. The first part of the course will provide students with an intensive overview of the financing and organization of health care in the US, emphasizing federal and state roles. The next two parts of the course, respectively, will be devoted to current policy debates on health care coverage and medical care quality and patient safety. During the final part of the course, each student will be expected to prepare a paper and presentation on a health policy issue of interest to him or her.

Course Requirements

The class will be small and will involve a great deal of discussion as well as some lecture material. Therefore, attendance and class participation will account for 40% to 50% (see Assignment #4 below) of the course grade. Students will also be evaluated based on two short papers/policy memoranda and presentations to the class and visiting policymakers, as follows.

Assignment #1. Policy Option Memorandum to the NJ Senior Assistant Commissioner for Health Planning and Regulation. This memo will summarize options that the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services might pursue to improve patient safety and health care quality in the state. Maximum 5 pages, double space, no less than 11-point type. 20% of the grade. Details of the assignment will be provided in class. DUE NOV. 17.

Assignment #2. Paper on a health policy issue of each student’s choosing. This paper should address a major health policy concern. It should describe the problem to be addressed, identify policy options, and discuss the technical (e.g., summarize evidence from existing evaluation studies) and political feasibility of those options (e.g., review polling evidence). The paper will be a maximum of 10 pages, double space, no less than 11-point type. 20% of the grade. Details of the assignment will be provided in class. DUE DEC. 4.

Assignment #3. Each student will brief the class and lead a discussion on the subject of assignment #2 above. In turn, members of the class will be assigned roles (e.g., member of the legislature, gubernatorial staff, lobbyist, etc.) for the class discussion. 10% of the grade. Details of the assignment will be provided in class. DEC. 4 OR 11.

September 7, 2000
Final Exam. Three or four essay questions based on assigned readings. Students who demonstrate knowledge of assigned readings during class discussion will be exempted from the final exam. 10% of the grade. DEC. 18.

Office Hours – By Appointment
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Part 1: Overview
Session 1: Introduction and Discussion of the Role of Government in Health (9/11)
- Description of course content and requirements
- Roles of federal, state, and local government in health care
- Overview of health care financing

Required reading:


McDonough J. Tracking the Demise of State Hospital Rate Setting Health Affairs, Jan./Feb., 1997; 16:142-149.

Suggested reading:

Rodwin, VG. Comparative Analysis of Health Systems: An International Perspective; Chapter 5, Kovner and Jonas.

Session 2: Medicare, Medicaid, and the State Child Health Insurance Program (9/18)
- History and financing
- Who and what are covered
- Payment policies
- Issues for reform

Required reading:

Thorpe K, and JR Knickman. Financing Health Care; Chapter 3, Kovner and Jonas.
Medicare Payment Advisory Commission, Chapter 1: Medicare Beneficiaries and Prescription Drug Coverage, in Report to Congress: Selected Medicare Issues, June 2000.


Suggested reading:


Session 3: Disparities in Health and Access to Care (9/25)

- Determinants of health
- Role of access to care and health care coverage in health
- Racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities in health
- Public policies to address disparities

Required reading:

Billings J. Access to Health Care Services; Chapter 14, Kovner and Jonas.

ADDITIONAL READING TBA

Session 4: Managed Care and Health Care Costs (10/2)

- Varieties of managed care, and what matters or not
- Does managed care safe money?
- Managed care in public coverage programs
- Role of government in regulating managed care and protecting consumers

Required reading:


Thorpe K. Health Care Cost Containment; Chapter 15, Kovner and Jonas.

Kovner A. Health Maintenance Organizations and Managed Care; Chapter 10, Kovner and Jonas.

ADDITIONAL READING TBA

Suggested reading:


**Part 2: Health Care Coverage and the Uninsured**

**Session 5: Decline of Employer Coverage and Rise of the Uninsured (10/9)**

- Trends in employer-sponsored health insurance and the uninsured
- Employers that do and do not offer coverage
- Who is uninsured?
- Is New Jersey different?
- Why has the number of uninsured grown?

Required reading:


Billings J. Access to Health Care Services; Chapter 14, Kovner and Jonas.


**Session 6: Federalism in Health Care I: The Federal Perspective (10/16)**

- Roles of the states and the national government in coverage reform
- The Clinton health plan, what problems would it have solved, why did it fail?
- Incremental reforms at the national level (SCHIP, HIPAA)

Required reading:

Brecher C. The Government's Role in Health Care; Chapter 11, Kovner and Jonas.


Session 7: Federalism in Health Care II: The State Perspective (10/23)
- What have states accomplished?
- Barriers to state action

Required reading:


Session 8: Case Study: NJFamilyCare (10/30)
- Recent history of coverage expansion in New Jersey
- The NJFamilyCare design and reasons for design decisions
- The politics of enacting NJFamilyCare
- Remaining questions about reducing the uninsured in New Jersey

Guest Speaker:
Brian Baxter
Deputy Chief of Policy
Office of the Governor
State of New Jersey

Required reading:
Description of NJFamilyCare (TBD)

Part 3: Quality of Care and Patient Safety
Session 9: Medical Practice Variation and Health Policy (11/6)
- Policy goals
- Factors influencing utilization, cost, and outcomes
- Causes of variation in medical practice

Guest Speaker:
Professor John Billings
Wagner Graduate School of Public Service
New York University

Required reading:


**Session 10: Role of Government in Improving Quality of Care and Patient Safety** (11/13)

- Extent of the quality/patient safety problem
- Role of the executive branch (regulation, report cards, licensure, etc.)
- Role of the judicial branch (medical malpractice and the tort system)
- The technical challenge: Risk Adjustment

**Required reading:**


**Suggested reading:**


**NOTE: Assignment #1 DUE on Friday November 17**
Session 11: Case Study: Quality Improvement in the VA Diabetes Program (11/20)
- The VA Diabetes Quality Improvement Program
- Is the VA experience generalizable?
- Is the diabetes experience generalizable?

Guest Speaker:
Leonard Pogach, MD
Director, National Diabetes Program
Dept. of Veterans Affairs Health Care System

Required reading:
To Be Determined

Session 12: Case Study: NJ Initiatives to Improve Quality of Care and Patient Safety (11/27)
- Class Briefing for the Senior Assistant Commissioner, NJ DHSS
- What are the best avenues for NJ policy?

Guest Speaker
Required reading:
Marilyn Dahl
Senior Assistant Commissioner for Health Planning and Regulation
NJ Dept. of Health and Senior Services

Required Readings:
(HANDOUTS)

NOTE: Assignment #2 DUE on Monday, December 4

Part 4: Student Presentations (Assignment #3)
Sessions 13 and 14 (12/4 and 11)

Final Exam (12/18)