

Health Care Policy and Politics

SOCY121-B

Spring 2008

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"Uh-oh, your coverage doesn't seem to include illness."

Instructor
Claudia Chaufan, MD, PhD

“Americans can always be counted on to do the right thing,
after they've exhausted all other possibilities”.

Winston Churchill

Instructor: Dr. Claudia Chaufan

Days, time and location: Porter Academy #249, Mondays 3.30 to 7 pm

Office hours: Fridays 2 to 4 pm, College Eight #228 or by appointment.

Contact info: WebCT email

Course description and goals

What are the functions of a health care system? How do we know when a health care performs its functions well? Why do societies need health care systems? Why not just allow individuals to buy health care as they buy any other goods or services, for instance, designer shoes or life insurance? How do other industrialized economies provide health care to their populations? How do we compare to them and why?

This course examines these and related questions. Our approach will be comparative and historical: this means that we will study how a variety of countries, with different cultures, institutional arrangements, and political histories have dealt with the attention of the sick and the protection of the health of their populations.

We will assume that health care policies and practices can be shared among nations and cultures, much like musical traditions, food preferences, or communication technologies can be shared. Thus we will analyze the health care international experience and apply what we learn to critically examine the current status of American health care and options for reform, as they are debated in the public sphere. Last, we will theorize about the implications of different policy choices for health care inequalities and for the goal of a just society.

Course organization

The course includes a range of activities such as lectures, discussions, analysis of mass media, viewing of video clips or films, and guest speakers. For some topics, we will use the “jigsaw classroom”, to be explained during our first meeting.

My expectations

I expect students to have excellent attendance, arrive on time, stay through the duration of meetings, read broadly, carefully and critically, complete the readings by the day they are assigned, and come prepared to ask questions about course topics and material and to contribute enthusiastically to discussions.

Course requirements

Requirements include excellent attendance, punctuality and participation, weekly discussion boards (only five out of ten possible weeks), a special discussion board (Shop4Insurance), a report on Medicare Part D, a group presentation on one proposal for reform, a final exam, and a analytic paper examining the health care system of a country of the student's choice (any country, except for the ones studied in class).

I will provide a detailed explanations or prompts for all assignments.

WebCT

WebCT is a key component of the course. I use WebCT email to make announcements and communicate with students. Bear in mind that if you miss class, you are fully responsible for keeping up with announcements and whatever material has been covered. Please connect your personal email account with WebCT e-mail ASAP.

Attendance policy

Attendance is mandatory. More than two unjustified absences (i.e., family or medical emergency, documented) can seriously impair your grade.

A word of warning

The course is reading intensive and much of the reading is very dry. On the bright side, I believe that once you understand how health care systems work generally, why ours has failed so miserably, and how it can be improved, you will feel very empowered, and capable of participating intelligently in the public debate of what is arguably the key domestic policy issue of our times.

Ground rules

Concerning discipline and academic integrity I follow university policy. Please refrain from bringing any distracting electronic device (laptops, I-pods, cell phones, etc) or turn them off and put them away while in class. Please ask me if you need special accommodations.

Food and beverages are allowed. Please be as inconspicuous as you can and clean after yourself.

Etiquette: I only reply to e-mails that address me by name – no need for formalities, however. Using my first name is fine.

Readings (*Available at Bay Tree Bookstore*)

Required

- A Second Opinion, Arnold S. Relman
- Reader, Volumes I and II.

Recommended

- Bleeding the Patient: The Consequences of Corporate Healthcare, David Himmelstein and Stephanie Woolhandler, with Ida Hellander
- The Corrosion of Medicine *and* Do Not Resuscitate, John Geyman
- The Truth About Drug Companies, Marcia Angell
- Food Politics, Marion Nestle
- Quote-of-the-day: <http://two.pairlist.net/mailman/listinfo/quote-of-the-day>

Course requirements (%)

- Participation (10)
- General discussion boards (10)
- Shop4Insurance discussion board (5)
- Medicare report (10)
- Group presentation (5)
- Final (30)
- Health care systems report (30)

Extra credit (%)

- Three surveys (1 point each, total of 3)
- *Sicko* review (2)

Notes: Readings are tentatively distributed. I will announce changes or updates but you are responsible for checking email for changes.

Schedule

Week 1:

Introduction to the course and general features of health care systems

Lecture::

- Introduction to course and to the jigsaw classroom
- Social policy and the welfare state 101
- Evaluating health care systems: goals and challenges
- Health care as a basic human need
- Two types of goods: market and social

Activities:

- News analysis: Is health care a “want” or a “need”?

Readings:

- How well do health care systems perform? World Health Report 2000, Ch1

Assignments:

- Beginning of session survey (extra credit, available until Friday 10 pm)
- Demo quiz (extra credit, available until Friday 10 pm)
- Discussion board (open until Friday 10pm)

Week 2

The International Standards

Lecture::

- Two types of insurance: liability and social
- Two aspects of health care systems: financing and delivery
- The International Standard

Activities:

- News analysis: What’s the problem with “the problem”?
- Brainstorm to decide research topic (Adopt a country’s health care system)

Readings:

- Competing Solutions, Joseph White (Ch. 1 and 2)
- Lifetime Medical Costs of Obesity: Prevention No Cure for Increasing Health Expenditure, van Baal, Polder, de Wit et al.

Assignments:

- Discussion board (open until Friday 10pm)

Week 3

Health care around the world

Lecture:

- Three models, one standard: Germany, Canada and the UK

- The new kid in town: Taiwan

Activities:

- Jigsaw: “Fit” Germany, Canada and UK in the International Standard
- What sort of “good” is health care in UK, Germany, Canada, and America?

Readings (jigsaw):

- Germany-HiT Summary
- Canada-HiT Summary
- United Kingdom-NHS and BBC papers
- Taiwan’s New National Health Insurance Program, Tsung-Mei Cheng

Assignments:

- Discussion board (open until Friday 10pm)

Week 4

Health care around the world

Lecture:

- A brief history of health care systems: Germany, Canada and the UK (from Bismark to Douglas to Beveridge)

Video:

- Sick Around the World, PBS

Readings:

- From Bismark to Beveridge, Henry Sigerist

Assignments:

- Discussion board (open until Friday 10pm)

Week 5:

Health care U.S. style

Lecture:

- American health care system: The best or just the most expensive?

Activities:

- Jigsaw: “Fit” the United States in the International Standard & readings on U.S. health care
- News Analysis: “Consumer-directed” health care

Readings (jigsaw):

- Overview of the Uninsured in the United States: An analysis of the 2005 Current Population Survey
- It’s the Price, Stupid: Why the United States is so different from other countries, Uwe Reinhardt
- Paying for National Health Insurance—And Not Getting It, Stephe Woolhandler and David Himmelstein
- Consumer Directed Healthcare: Except for the Healthy and the Wealthy It’s Unwise, Stephe Woolhandler and David Himmelstein
- Health Care Expenditures of Immigrants in the United States, Woolhandler et al.

Readings (recommended):

- Institute of Medicine, Reports (September 2001, May 2002, March 2003, June 2003)

Assignments:

- Special discussion board: “Shop for health insurance” (open until Friday 10pm)
- Discussion board (open until Friday 10pm)

Week 6
Health care U.S. style

Lecture:

- Health care U.S. style:
 - A history of the politics of U.S. health care policy

Activities

- Debriefing “Shop for health insurance”
- News analysis: Protecting patients’ rights: Hipaa and COBRA

Readings:

- A Second Opinion, Introduction, Preface, and Ch. 1, 2, 3 & 4

Assignments:

- Special discussion board: Sicko
- Discussion board (open until Friday 10pm)

Week 7
Health care U.S. style

Topic:

- Health care U.S. style: Health care and corporate America: Medicare Part D

Activities:

- Jigsaw: Medicare Part D readings
- News analysis: The “problem” of “computer illiterate” elderly

Video clip:

- Big bucks, big pharma: Marketing disease and pushing drugs

Readings (jigsaw):

- A Windfall From Shifts to Medicare, Milt Freudenheim
- Readings on Medicare, Dean Baker
- Medicare Part D: A smashing success, Neil Versel
- Medicare Part D: A smashing success? Claudia Chaufan

Assignments:

- Discussion board (open until Friday 10pm)
- Bring Medicare prompt to discuss in class

Week 8

Lecture:

- Health Care U.S. style: Health care and corporate America: Big Pharma

Activities:

- Medicare reports: debriefing
- Time to prepare for group presentations

Readings (jigsaw):

- The Truth About Drug Companies, Marcia Angell
- The Conservative Nanny State, Dean Baker (Introduction, Ch.1 and Ch. 2 – Doctors and Dishwashers, Bill Gates – Welfare Mom).

Assignments:

- Discussion board (open until Friday 10pm)
- Medicare report due

Week 9

Proposals for health care reform

Lecture:

- Single-payer proposals for reform (HR676 and SB840)

Video:

- SB 840

Activities (jigsaw):

- Students' presentations on presidential candidates' proposals
- Peer-review "Adopt-a-country" report

Readings:

- A Second Opinion, Ch. 5, 6 & 7
- Fact Sheet: SB840
- Fact Sheet: Lewin Report
- Fact Sheet: HR676
- Universal healthcare or universal nightmare? Claudia Chaufan

Assignments:

- Discussion board (open until Friday 10pm)

Week 10

Health care inequalities, social justice and human rights

Topics:

- Health care, social justice, and human rights
- Conclusions
- Potluck and happy summer holidays!

Activities:

- Is health care a human right?
- Students' (small group) presentations of final project

Readings:

- UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Assignments:

- Final (TBA)
- End-of-quarter survey (available until Friday 10 pm)
- Report on health care systems due (no exceptions)
- Review Section (Friday 2 to 4 pm)