HSR 470: Federal Policy Making and Health Care Reform

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Course Location: Wieboldt Hall, 340 E. Superior Street, Chicago, IL 60611
Room 421 (except 3 weeks will be held in 417)

Course Description

Spring 2014 is an exciting time to study health policy. Implementation of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) is in full swing, Republicans continue to try to repeal the law, the Supreme Court will rule on at least one provision of the ACA, interest groups are trying to influence ACA-related regulations, and researchers are beginning to draw conclusions about the early impact of the law. The way in which health care is organized, financed, and delivered in the US is changing.

This course has three objectives: (1) to improve students’ knowledge of current health policy issues, (2) to introduce students to the policy making process and the roles of various policy actors, and (3) to prepare students to participate in the policy process. As future health care leaders, you are likely to receive invitations to participate on advisory panels, provide testimony for congressional and other hearings, comment on proposed regulations, and speak to the press about your work. The writing and oral communication style required for these activities is very different from writing peer-reviewed manuscripts or presenting research findings at academic conferences.

Most weeks, students will learn about one key actor in the policy making process through readings, a lecture, and a brief assignment. The assignments are designed to allow students to focus on a health policy issue or program of their choice. Discussions of the assignments will provide an opportunity for the class to learn about a variety of health policy issues and programs.

Objectives

By taking this course, students will be able to:

- Critically discuss and assess current health policy issues.
- Use various public data sources (e.g., congressional testimony, Federal Register) to track and research health policy.
- Describe the policy making process and the political, economic, and social forces that shape health policy.
- Articulate the roles of various policy actors (e.g., Congress, the bureaucracy, advocacy groups, health services researchers) in the formulation of policy.
- Articulate different ways to influence the policy process.
- Communicate complex issues effectively through testimony, regulatory comment letters, and conversations with congressional staff and reporters.
- Conduct a policy analysis.

**Course Structure**

Week 1 will begin with the course introduction followed by a discussion of policy typologies, policy analysis, and health care reform.

For all remaining weeks, class will generally take the following structure:

- 30 minutes: Current health policy topics. Two students will provide a brief, informal, 10-minute summary of a current health policy topic of their choice.
- 60 minutes: lecture. The instructor will lecture on the role of one actor (e.g., Congress, the states, health services researchers) in shaping, enacting, and/or implementing health policy. Current health policy examples will be used to illustrate theory.
- 10 minutes: break.
- 75 minutes: Discussion of class assignments or guest lecture. Most weeks three students will be assigned to give brief (approximately 15-minute), informal (i.e., PowerPoint not required) presentations summarizing the results of their assignments.
- 5 minutes: The last five minutes of class will be devoted to discussing the readings and assignment due the following week.

Students should expect to spend approximately 6 hours per week outside of class on readings and homework assignments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Lecture Topic</th>
<th>Discussion Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>April 2</td>
<td>Wieboldt 417</td>
<td>Course Introduction Policy Analysis &amp; The Policy Process</td>
<td>Passage of the Affordable Care Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>April 9</td>
<td>Wieboldt 421</td>
<td>The Presidency</td>
<td>Policy Analysis – Personal belief exemptions for vaccines</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 3    | April 16| Wieboldt 421 | Congress                                           | Guest Speaker: Adam Minehardt
Deputy Staff Director
Committee on Small Business
US House of Representatives
Communicating with members of Congress: congressional visits (i.e., lobbying) and congressional testimony |
<p>| 4    | April 23| Wieboldt 421 | The Bureaucracy                                    | Health care rules and regulations (e.g., CMS - Accountable Care Organizations, FDA - Access and Marketing of Cigarettes and Smokeless Tobacco Products to Youth) |
| 5    | April 30| Wieboldt 421 | The States                                         | State innovations in health policy                                               |</p>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>May 7</td>
<td>Wieboldt 417</td>
<td>Interest Groups</td>
<td>Top issues, strategies, and spending among health care advocacy/industry groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>May 14</td>
<td>Wieboldt 421</td>
<td>Health Services Research</td>
<td>Communicating research findings to policy makers</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>May 21</td>
<td>Wieboldt 421</td>
<td>Advisory Groups</td>
<td>Recommendations of health care advisory groups (e.g., Institute of Medicine, US Preventive Services Task Force, MedPAC) and their impact</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>June 4</td>
<td>Wieboldt 417</td>
<td>The Courts</td>
<td>Presentation of congressional testimony</td>
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**Course Requirements**

**Class Participation (20%)**

- **Weeks 2-10. Current health policy topics.** Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss a current health policy issue of interest to them. Students should be prepared to describe the issue, why it is “newsworthy” (e.g., congressional action taken, advisory report released, new regulation issued, new ideas expressed in a campaign speech, media attention), and the different points of view of supporters and opponents (as applicable). The instructor will provide an example during week 1. Students are encouraged to register for a daily or weekly health policy news listserv. Examples include listservs from Kaiser Health News, NEJM, Health Affairs, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and various professional societies.

  Each week, two students (who are identified in advance of class) will be asked to kick-off the discussion with an informal, 10-minute summary of a current health policy topic.

- **Weeks 1-10. General Class Discussion and Presentation of Assignments.** Each week students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings and assignments.

**Assignments (70%)**

- **Weeks 3 & 10: Congressional Testimony Assignment (15%).** The purpose of this assignment is to familiarize students with the writing style of congressional testimony and give students an opportunity to practice writing and presenting congressional testimony.

  **Part 1:** Go to a website of a congressional committee of your choice and find a hearing of interest to you. Download the testimony from at least two witnesses, one of whom should be a researcher/academic. For class on *April 16th*, be prepared to discuss specific ways in which congressional testimony differs from peer-reviewed articles.
Part 2: Select a health policy issue or program of issue to you. Develop congressional testimony as if you were invited as a witness at a hearing on the issue or program. Your testimony should be grounded in research, but also include your perspective on the issue. Congressional testimony is due to the instructor via e-mail by May 21. Approximately three students will be assigned to present their congressional testimony on June 4. Oral testimony will be limited to 5 minutes.

Part 3: By May 28th, each student will receive one written testimony to review. Students should develop two questions for the author of the testimony, and will ask the questions after the author presents his/her testimony on June 4th. One question should demonstrate support of the author’s point of view. One question should challenge the author’s point of view.

Examples of congressional testimony:

http://www.hschange.com/CONTENT/1235/

http://www.help.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Perlin.pdf

- Week 4: Federal Rulemaking Assignment (15%) – The purpose of this assignment is to familiarize students with the Federal Register and how to submit comments on new rules that will shape the way that health care is organized, delivered, financed, or regulated.

Part 1: For class on April 23rd, students should identify a final rule, the significance of the rule, the major concerns of the individuals and organizations who provided comment letters to the agency, and whether and how the agency addressed the concerns expressed in the comment letters. Students should summarize their findings in a 1-2 page, single-spaced memo due April 23rd. Approximately three students will be assigned to give an informal (i.e., no PowerPoint is necessary), 15-minute presentation of their findings. Other students should be prepared to discuss their findings, time permitting.

For class on the 23rd, students should also review at least two comment letters, and be prepared to discuss the structure, major components, and writing style.

Part 2: Write a mock comment letter to a federal agency regarding a proposed rule. The comment letter is due to the instructor via e-mail by June 4th. Two or three pages is appropriate. Note: Students may work in teams and submit a single comment letter.

A list of proposed (i.e, open for public comment) and final health care rules can be found at: http://www.healthcare.gov/law/resources/regulations/index.html

- Week 5: The States (10%). The purpose of this assignment is to familiarize students with health reform strategies adopted by states. Students will select a state health policy reform innovation and describe the rationale, how it was adopted (e.g., federal waivers, passage by state legislature), the funding structure, and (to the extent data are available) its impact. Students should summarize their findings in a 1-2 page, single-spaced memo due April 30th.
Approximately three students will be assigned to give an informal (i.e., no PowerPoint is necessary), 15-minute presentation of their findings. Other students should be prepared to discuss their findings, time permitting.

Examples of state innovations include Maryland’s hospital rate setting, Vermont’s single payer system, and Massachusetts’ health reforms.

- **Week 6: Interest Group Assignment (10%)** – Students select an interest group (e.g., AARP, AHIP, Coalition for Health Services Research, Emergency Nurses Association, Pharma) and investigate the group’s key issues, how they are pushing their agenda (i.e., mechanisms used to influence policy makers), key obstacles, and spending (consult the Center for Responsible Politics, www.opensecrets.org). In addition to investigating the interest group’s website and reviewing position statements and testimony, students should consult media reports to obtain more information on the group’s lobbying efforts. Students should summarize their findings in a 1-2 page, single-spaced memo due May 7. Approximately three students will be assigned to give an informal (i.e., no PowerPoint is necessary), 15-minute presentation of their findings. Other students should be prepared to discuss their findings, time permitting.

- **Week 7: HSR Assignment (10%)** – This HSR assignment, also called “NTETM – Non-Technical Explanation of Technical Material,” is designed to give students an opportunity to practice communicating complex information in simple terms. Tips will be provided by the guest speaker in Week 2.

For this assignment, students should identify a technical, feature health services research article (i.e., not a commentary) from a peer-reviewed journal and summarize it in a one-page, single-spaced memo. (Students are encouraged to select an article that they authored or co-authored.) The memo should describe the issue under investigation, the significance of the article, results, and implications for policy maker action. The “audience” is a bright, 25-year-old congressional staffer with a B.A. in political science and a cursory understanding of Medicare, Medicaid, and the organization and delivery of health services. Additionally, all students should come to class on May 14th prepared to provide a 2-minute verbal summary of the article, again targeted to the same audience.

Examples of brief memos that summarize technical, peer-reviewed articles can be found on the Commonwealth Fund’s website under “In the Literature”: http://www.commonwealthfund.org/Publications/View-All.aspx?publicationtype=In+the+Literature

- **Week 8: Advisory Group Assignment (10%)** – The purpose of this exercise is to familiarize students with various health care advisory groups/committees and their influence on policy. Students should identify an advisory group or committee of interest to them (e.g., MedPAC, the Independent Payment Advisory Board, an Institute of Medicine committee, U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, NIH State-of-the-Science panel) and investigate how individuals were selected to participate, what issue the group was asked to consider, how the group came to its recommendations, and the impact of the recommendations on policy. Students should summarize their findings in a 1-2 page, single-spaced memo due May 21st. Approximately three students will be assigned to give an informal (i.e., no PowerPoint is necessary), 15-minute
presentation of their findings. Other students should be prepared to discuss their findings, time permitting.

- Final Exam (10%)

  There will be a take-home, short-answer final exam.

Readings

Materials from peer-reviewed journals, government agencies, and policy organizations will be posted on Blackboard. All readings are required, unless stated otherwise.


Governing Health examines health care policy making from a long-term perspective, describing how Congress, the president, special interest groups, bureaucracy, and state governments help define health policy problems and find politically feasible solutions. This is a political science book, and provides a different perspective on health policy making for health services researchers.

An electronic version of Governing Health can be accessed on the Galter Library website. However, students will have to create an ebrary account, and the site only permits downloading of 60 pages at a time.

Although this book was published prior to passage of the Affordable Care Act, it provides a nice description of how various actors shape health policy.

March 29th: Course Introduction, Policy Analysis and the Policy Process, The Affordable Care Act

Objectives:
  - Review the course objectives, course structure, and assignments
  - Define health policy and discuss policy typologies
  - Understand the basic steps involved in a policy analysis
  - Review key elements of the ACA
  - Discuss the factors that led to the passage of the ACA


Optional: The Kaiser Family Foundation’s Summary of the Affordable Care Act: 


In class, we will watch and discuss Frontline’s, “Obama’s deal. Inside the backroom deals and hardball politics that got Obama his health care bill”, April 2010. This 50-minute film is applicable to several class
topics (Congress, interest groups, public opinion). It is a history of the health care reform bill and an example of how health policy is made.

**April 9: The Presidency**

Objectives:
- Discuss the role of the president in shaping health policy
- Identify the tools the president can use to shape health policy (e.g., executive orders, signing statements, the budget)
- Practice developing a policy analysis


Lantos, Jackson, and Harrison. Why We Should Eliminate Personal Belief Exemptions to Vaccine Mandates. JHPPL. 2012


**April 16: Congress**

Objectives:
- Discuss theory on the motivation of congressional committees and members of Congress
- Understand how to engage congressional policy makers and communicate effectively
- Discuss the writing style used to develop congressional testimony


Optional: Weissert and Weissart, Chapter 1, Congress, pp. 15 – 80. (You can skip the first few pages that provide a historical overview.)

*Congressional Testimony Assignment (Part I)*

**April 23: The Bureaucracy**

Objectives:
- Discuss bureaucratic power in the policy process
- Describe federal agencies’ roles in the implementation of federal health policy
- Discuss federal rulemaking and the Federal Register
- Gain practice writing comment letters on proposed federal rules


Rulemaking Assignment

**April 30: The States**

Objectives:
- Describe the relationship between the federal government and states in the formulation of health policy
- List the responsibilities of states under the Affordable Care Act and how states are responding
- Discuss examples of state innovations in health policy and how the federal government can learn from state efforts


Optional: Weisset and Weissart, Chapter 5, States and Health Care Reform, pp. 231-300.

*State health reform assignment*

**Interest Groups**

Objectives:
- Define an “iron triangle” and why it is important to health policy
- Discuss interest groups’ activities during the health reform debate
- Discuss the impact of health care reform on various interest groups
- Discuss key health care interest groups, their primary issues and goals, and their strategies for achieving their goals


Optional: Weisset and Weissart, Chapter 3, Interest Groups, pp. 126 - 182.


**Interest Group Assignment**

**Health Services Research**

Objectives:
- Discuss how research influences policy decision making
- List and describe examples of how HSR was used to shape health care reform
- Discuss some of the challenges associated with conducting research relevant to the policy process
- Discuss HSR articles that have made a notable impact on health care practice and policy


(OPTIONAL) Putting research to work: reporting and enhancing the impact of health services research. Health Serv Res. 36(2), June 2001.

**HSR Assignment**

**Advisory Groups**

Objectives:
- Discuss the purpose and role of health care advisory groups
- Describe the influence of the Federal Advisory Committee Act on the work of advisory groups
- Discuss how one can get appointed to an advisory group and the commitment involved
- Discuss the impact of advisory groups’ recommendations on health policy

*assets.opencrs.com/rpts/R40520_20110124.pdf*


**Advisory Group Assignment**
May 28th: Public Opinion and The Media

Objectives:
- Describe how the media influences public opinion and voting
- Discuss public opinion on health care and health care reform, and how public opinion may be contradictory
- Discuss evidence behind the common perception that the media has a liberal bias
- Describe the motivations of health care reporters
- Discuss the most effective ways of communicating your work to reporters

Jackie Judd, VP for Communications Kaiser Family Foundation. View this 15-minute video about communicating findings to the media and policy makers: http://www.kaiseredu.org/tutorials/media/player.html


Optional: Review the most recent Kaiser Family Foundation Tracking Poll: http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/trackingpoll.cfm

June 4: The Courts

Objectives:
- Gain familiarity with reading court decisions
- Discuss the Supreme Court’s decision in National Federation of Independent Business v. Sebelius

Congressional Testimony Assignment

Attendance

Students are permitted one unexcused absence per course. Two absences within a course will result in a B- or lower grade. In order to pass the course, students with more than two absences must propose and complete a suitable (at the discretion of the course director) learning activity to restore their grade. If a student anticipates more than two absences within a quarter, we highly recommend that the student not enroll in the course.

Grading

Grades will be assigned according to the following rubric:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Class Participation</th>
<th>Memos, Congressional Testimony, Comment Letter</th>
<th>Oral Presentation (Same as memo plus the following)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+/A/A-</td>
<td>• Contributes generously to the conversation but doesn’t dominate it</td>
<td>• Well-organized</td>
<td>• Very fluent and smooth presentation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Makes thoughtful contributions that advance the conversation</td>
<td>• Concise, yet includes necessary details</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Shows an interest in and respect for others’ contributions</td>
<td>• Insightful</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Critical thinking is evident (application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation)</td>
<td>• Well-researched</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Makes specific and appropriate connections to the lecture and readings, and provides relevant reference to background content</td>
<td>• Error free, good flow, elegant style</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Generally organized</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+/B/B-</td>
<td>• Contributes without prompting</td>
<td>• Generally organized</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Makes sufficient references to the readings and lectures in his/her comments</td>
<td>• Missing only minor details</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Shows a basic understanding of the material and some critical thinking.</td>
<td>• Mostly concise but occasionally adding irrelevant information</td>
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<td>• Shows interest in and respect for other’s views</td>
<td>• Very few grammar or syntax problems</td>
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<td>• Generally cohesive; shows preparation</td>
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<td>Grade</td>
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</table>
| C+/C/C- | - Offers straightforward information (e.g., straight from the lecture or reading), without elaboration  
- Contributes the minimum amount.  
- Critical thinking is minimally developed; minimal reference to the readings and lectures.  
- Student participates in discussion, but in a problematic way: talks too much, rambles, interrupts. |
|       | - Somewhat disorganized  
- Missing some key details  
- Some irrelevant information  
- Writing contains some editorial errors (organization, grammar, syntax) |
|       | - Maintains general flow with some choppiness and stumbling of words |
| D+/D/D- | - Demonstrates very infrequent involvement in discussion.  
- Critical thinking is absent.  
- Comments include little or no reference to the readings or lectures  
- Provides no new ideas, simply rehashes previous comments |
|       | - Information is unclear, incomplete, or very repetitive  
- Serious deficiencies in the information  
- Contains editorial errors (organization, grammar, syntax) that are not acceptable for a college-level assignment  
- Assignment is turned in very late |
|       | - Presentation is awkward and faltering |
| F     | - Does not contribute to discussion  
- Displays disrespect to students and/or faculty. |
|       | - Written assignments are incomplete or demonstrate a total lack of effort |
|       | - Shows no preparation |

**Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is fundamental to every facet of the scholarly process and is expected of every student in The Graduate School (TGS) in all academic undertakings. Integrity involves firm adherence to academic honesty and to ethical conduct consistent with values based on standards that respect the intellectual efforts of both oneself and others.

Ensuring integrity in academic work is a joint enterprise involving both faculty and students. Among the most important goals of graduate education are maintaining an environment of academic integrity and instilling in students a lifelong commitment to the academic honesty that is fundamental to good scholarship. These goals are best achieved as a result of effective dialogue between students and faculty mentors regarding academic integrity and by the examples of members of the academic community whose intellectual accomplishments demonstrate sensitivity to the nuances of ethical conduct in scholarly work.

Standards of academic integrity are violated when a student engages in actions including:

- cheating in the classroom or on examinations, including master's final examinations and Ph.D. qualifying examinations;
• the intentional and deliberate misuse of data in order to draw conclusions that may not be warranted by the evidence;
• fabrication of data;
• omission or concealment of conflicting data for the purpose of misleading other scholars;
• use of another's words, ideas, or creative productions without citation in either the text or in footnotes;
• paraphrasing or summarizing another's material in such a way as to misrepresent the author's intentions;
• and use of privileged material or unpublished work without permission.

Academic dishonesty is a serious matter for graduate students committed to intellectual pursuits, and will be adjudicated in accordance with procedures approved by the Graduate Faculty.
http://www.tgs.northwestern.edu/academics/academic-services/integrity/index.html

Course Evaluation

Northwestern University’s Course and Teacher Evaluation Council will notify students by email when the online course evaluation system opens, typically three weeks before the end of the quarter. Your completion of the online course evaluation is encouraged. Feedback from evaluations often informs changes to the content and format of future courses. Your evaluation of the course and faculty is completely anonymous; your identity cannot be linked with your responses. Your answers to the CTEC “Core questions” are reported throughout the University and will be available for future students to view through CAESAR.

Please note that the evaluation window closes permanently on Sunday, June 15, 2014. Please start your evaluation early to provide your full feedback.