

Healthy, Wealthy and Wise?

The Healthcare System in the World's Richest Country

Uris G22 | MWF 9:05-9:55

Email: DL679@Cornell.edu
Office: Uris 449 A

Office Hours:
TBD
(and by appointment)

Course Overview

In the United States, the structure of our healthcare system is continually one of the most contentious issues in the political discourse, and understandably so. Our healthcare system consumes an enormous portion of our resources, accounting for 17.2% of US GDP and around 25% of the Federal Government's budget. But the debate also has a strong, emotionally charged component. The healthcare system determines the fate of the most vulnerable members of our society, the sick, and forces us to wrestle with our mortality. Finally, the radically different views held by two opposing sides also contribute to the intensity of the debate. One side advocates for the efficiency of the market and the importance of individual responsibility, the other for the importance of a social safety net and the limits of competition.

But the healthcare system isn't just a policy question; it impacts each of us individually. Visiting doctors, dealing with insurance, seeing the 1.45% Medicare deduction on every paycheck – the healthcare system is ever-present. However, as inescapable as it is, the healthcare system is also often incomprehensible. This course will introduce you to the basics of the US healthcare system, along with basic economic ideas. It will help you understand both the United States health care system and your own health care choices.

Course Rationale

This course will not turn you into a healthcare expert and will not make you an economist. Instead, it will introduce you to the basic structure of our health care system through the lens of economics. The focus will be on developing your ability to clearly think, analyze and write. It will push you to understand diverse viewpoints and to find your own perspective and your own voice. Each of you have unique experiences from which to draw on and you will be prompted to connect those experiences to the material. You will gain experience articulating and defending your beliefs: both informally through in-class discussions, and in a more structured manner in assignments such as writing an op-ed or policy brief. This course seeks to empower you to join the conversation by decomposing and restating the arguments of others while contributing your own ideas. Finally, this course will prepare you to be an active, informed and engaged citizen. Our country needs people who can listen well, understand, intelligently formulate and articulate their own opinions and truly engaging with others who have differing opinions. I hope this course gives you tools that you can use for the rest of college and beyond.

Learning Objectives

This course to help you develop the following:

- Comprehend the basics of the US healthcare and the healthcare debate
- Understand, analyze and dissect the opinions and arguments of others
- Develop, articulate and defend your own voice and opinions

Course Readings & Assignments

The course readings will be posted on blackboard. The articles will either be posted, or they will come from one of two of these course books available in the Cornell bookstore:

- Brasfield, James M. *Health Policy: The Decade Ahead*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2011.
- Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. *"They Say / I Say": The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. Third edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014.

The content and readings for the course will be fairly front-loaded, with classes focused on those topics through discussion and some lecture. We will be doing a relatively quick overview of the healthcare system so you can begin writing informed pieces early in the semester.

There will be five main essays in this course. The first two will be smaller essays. The last three will be larger assignments which will be revised and edited throughout the majority of the semester. Here is an overview of the larger assignments:

- **An Op/ed piece.** Op Eds tend to be fairly conversational, focused on one issue and they advocate a particular policy proposal or position. While they are supported by facts, they are not a research paper
- **A broad persuasive paper.** In this paper, you will broadly argue a position and attempt convince your reader to adopt it. This is not a research paper, but you are expected to ground your arguments in the readings from the class. You will need to acknowledge and address the competing arguments.
- **A Policy Brief.** This brief will be focused on a small, student chosen topic. It will be based on research and include a review of the literature

There will also be shorter writing assignments that will either be completed in class or as preparation for class.

While readings will still be assigned during the second half of the course, the focus will be on the three larger essays. The in-class focus will be on workshops, rhetorical exercises, student led discussions and debates. The last weeks of class will be dedicated to short presentations based on your policy briefs.

Grading & Expectations

Your grade in this class is made up of four main components (explained below):

- **75%:** Writing portfolio
- **5%:** Small writing assignments
- **15%:** Class participation
- **5%:** Final presentation

Writing portfolio: You will create an online portfolio of your work. This portfolio will include your major essays, both first drafts and revisions, minor, ungraded writing assignments and your reflections on the writing process, your development and this course. This portfolio will make up the bulk of your grade (75%). Your portfolio grade will *not* simply be a summation of the grades I assign for your papers and drafts. The assigned grades are indicators of your current level, but the grade for your portfolio will depend on your ability to demonstrate proficiency in the above learning objectives. As a commitment device, the deadlines for drafts are firm, and for each day late I will drop your grade by 2%.

Small Writing Assignments: You will have a handful of small writing assignments, both in class and as preparation for class. Completing these on time will account for 5% of your grade.

Class Participation & Contributions: Learning in this class is a cooperative exercise. Your contributions to discussions and your preparedness impacts not only you, but your fellow classmates. I take participation seriously, therefore, 15% of your grade is based on how well you help your fellow students learn. I expect that you will consistently attend class, and be an active participant. Therefore, having more than two unexcused absences will negatively impact your grade. In order to ensure that all students can focus for the 50 minutes we are together, smartphones, tablets or computers during class are not to be used. Finally, each student will help facilitate one discussion, which will factor into this portion of the grade.

Final Presentation: The last writing assignment is a policy issue brief. You will briefly present your arguments from your policy brief to the class.

Regrades: As grades on drafts are for informative purposes only, there will be no regrades. You will have the opportunity to rewrite some of your work. If you do not understand my comments or what you need to do to improve your writing, please stop by my office hours.

Failing: To ease fears about failing: if you have no more than two unexcused absences and contribute to class discussions, turn in all the assignments on time, put effort into all revisions, responding to my comments and suggestions you will receive at least a B-.

Academic Integrity

Cornell has a strict policy on academic integrity, which you can read (<http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/aic.cfm>). While collaboration and discussion is encouraged, there is a distinction between that and plagiarism. Discussion is ok. Copying is not. When you submit work in this class you are certifying that the ideas and words are your own. All sources must be properly cited.

Accommodations & Concerns

I am committed to helping all students work through obstacles to achieve their learning objectives. If you feel you may need an accommodation based on a disability or any other circumstance, please contact me privately as soon as possible to discuss your specific needs. To guarantee full accommodation, please notify me no later than the second week of classes. I would also encourage you to get in touch with Cornell's Student Disability Services (<http://sds.cornell.edu/>). They serve to coordinate and facilitate accommodations.

If you have other concerns, please let me know as soon as possible. It is my goal to help you learn and be successful in this class and beyond. Send me an email, stop by my office, put an anonymous note in my mailbox – I will take your comments seriously.

Course Calendar

Week	Mon Date	In-Class Focus	Essays				
			1	2	3	4	5
1	Aug 22*	Course Introduction	█				
2	Aug 29	Overview: The US in Context The Basics of Health Insurance	█	█			
3	Sep 5*	Economics in 1 week Health Disparities		█			
4	Sep 12	Medicare – Caring for the Elderly Medicaid – Aiding the Poor		█	█		
5	Sep 19	The Affordable Care Act			█		
6	Sep 26	Healthcare in Other Countries			█	█	
7	Oct 3	Reform Ideas			█	█	
8	Oct 10*	Catch Up			█	█	█
9	Oct 17	Writing Exercises & Workshops			█	█	█
10	Oct 24				█	█	█
11	Oct 31				█	█	█
12	Nov 7				█	█	█
13	Nov 14				█	█	█
14	Nov 21*	Presentations				█	█
15	Nov 28	Presentations					█
x	Dec 5&12	N/A: Revise papers	█	█	█	█	█

***No class during breaks:**

- Classes start Aug 23
- Sep 5 Labor day
- Oct 10,11 Fall Break
- Oct 14 Class to be Rescheduled
- Nov 23-25 Thanksgiving