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**THE AMERICAN HEALTH CARE SYSTEM: POLICY, POLITICS, AND REFORM  
BIOE 575 / HCMG 250 / HCMG 850**

*Mondays & Wednesdays from 4:30-5:50pm SHDH 351*

*Faculty*

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Under stress from COVID-19, this course provides students with a rigorous understanding of the current American health care system and how it is likely to evolve over the next decade. The course will focus on six topics: 1) the development of the current health care system; 2) challenges of health care costs, quality, and access; 3) lessons of previous attempts to reform the system including the Affordable Care Act (ACA); 4) analysis of current policies regarding provider payment, technology, and electronic health records and how various sectors (e.g. public health and hospitals) are evolving in the current system; 5) impact of COVID-19 on health care delivery and finance, and 6) future megatrends in American health care system. Throughout the course, lessons will integrate basic health economics, history, health policy, and politics to elucidate key principles for understanding the health care system. The course will also examine at least one other country's health system for

comparison. The course will end with a consideration of the long-term outlook for the structure of the US health system and potential reforms.

This course will consist of several interconnected segments. The first segment will provide an in-depth analysis of the U.S. health care system, which accounts for nearly a fifth of the American economy. This section will focus on the history, structure, and political salience of the health care sector. The second segment will consider the failures of this market, including the challenges posed by rapidly rising health care costs, low health insurance coverage, and uneven quality. In this segment we will also critically examine drug pricing policies and medical malpractice.

The third segment of the course will review the history of attempts to reform the US health care system, the politics of reform, and the story of how the ACA ultimately passed through Congress. We will dissect the key provisions of the ACA to illuminate the content and goals of the legislation and review the legal challenges it has faced. We will also compare the American health care system with systems in other developed countries, such as the Netherlands and France.

The fourth segment will focus on current policies and operations of the health care sector, examining physician and hospital payment reforms, the introduction and adoption of new technologies, the role of electronic health records, and the rise of telehealth and artificial intelligence in health care. In addition, we will examine how various actors, from insurance companies and hospitals to venture capitalists and startups are operating in the current system.

The fifth segment will focus on the impact of COVID-19 on health care financing and delivery. It will look at the impact of the loss of elective procedures on hospitals and the impact of closing offices on outpatient physician practices. It will also examine the impact on health insurance, such as the drop in the number of employer-sponsored insurance enrollees and the profits of insurers. We will also consider what financing and/or delivery system structural changes might arise from the pandemic.

The final segment of the course will consider the possible long-term outlook for the health care system in the United States, including the long-term impact of COVID-19, payment reform, transparency policies, and pushes for national single payer, or “Medicare for All.”

#### **COURSE MATERIALS**

*All information on this syllabus can be found on our Canvas site at*  
[www.canvas.upenn.edu](http://www.canvas.upenn.edu)

The Canvas site for this course will be hosted by the University-wide Canvas site, which is accessible to everyone with a PennKey and password. Our Canvas site contains all essential information and readings for this course.

#### *Required materials:*

This course relies heavily on Dr. Emanuel’s books, *Reinventing American Health Care* and *Prescription for the Future*. We encourage you to purchase these books, as many assigned readings will be drawn from it.

Other course materials include: policy documents from government agencies and nonprofit research organizations; articles from popular press outlets; and academic articles from health policy, health services, and medical journals. Copies of these materials will be made available to you through our Canvas website. Note that in some cases it may be necessary to access the electronic files from a University of Pennsylvania IP address (or through the Penn Libraries website).

We do not assign superfluous readings. *You should read and learn all assigned readings in advance of lectures.* Due to the amount of information covered in this course, the pace of lectures tends to be quick; in the past, students have found advanced preparation of readings essential to success.

Health policy is a constantly evolving field. As such, you would do well to keep up with current events, which we will often discuss during lectures. We recommend that you periodically read the following websites:

<https://www.nytimes.com/section/upshot>  
<https://theincidentaleconomist.com/wordpress>  
<http://www.kaiserhealthnews.org/>  
<http://kff.org/>

<http://healthaffairs.org/>  
[http://www.urban.org/health\\_policy/index.cfm](http://www.urban.org/health_policy/index.cfm)  
<http://www.cbo.gov/topics/health-care>  
<http://www.rwjf.org/en/topics/rwjf-topic-areas/health-policy.html>

## REQUIREMENTS & GRADES

### In-class Quizzes (15% of your overall grade)

- There will be nine quizzes.
- Missed quizzes are graded as zeros, and there are no makeup quizzes.
- We drop your two lowest grades in calculating your overall quiz average.
- Quizzes will cover the assigned readings and lectures from previous un-quizzed class sessions *and* the required readings due on the day of the quiz.
- Each quiz will be three questions, given at the start of class.
- If you arrive late to class, you may still take the quiz during class as long as you *quietly* ask a TA for a copy.
- The content of this course is set within American politics, history, and policy, so there may be small extra credit questions on quizzes related to history, politics, economics, and other facts and concepts you should know, but may not. We aim to educate you as broadly as possible. (Who was the first president to fly in an airplane? And the first president to publicly advocate for universal health coverage?)

### Midterm Exam (25% of your overall grade)

- One midterm exam that consists of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions.

### Homework Assignments (25% of your overall grade)

- Two double-spaced essays, one to two pages in length.

**Final Exam** (35% of your overall grade)

- Similar in structure to the midterm exam—multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions
- The final exam is cumulative

*Quizzes and exams can only be taken in class and cannot be made-up.*

Please do **not** schedule flights for the holidays that may conflict with exam dates. If you become aware of a genuine exam conflict, such as another final exam scheduled at the same time as ours, please make us aware of this as early as possible, so that we can work with you to make accommodations.

Of course, if you are hospitalized or if you encounter a significant and documented medical difficulty, we will consider potential accommodations for your situation. For instance, we may allow you to come in on a stretcher and will find some way to accommodate your IV pole to take the final exam.

**INTELLECTUAL INTEGRITY**

An ethicist—and some very ethical people—are teaching this course. We take the virtue of integrity very seriously. We want you to talk about the readings and about the larger topic of health policy with your fellow classmates, family, and friends. We all learn by engaging with the ideas and one of the best ways to engage is to discuss and argue about the ideas. Please do that. However, the work you submit for the quizzes, homework assignments, and examinations must be your work and your work alone. Any plagiarism or other form of cheating will be dealt with severely under the procedures of the University of Pennsylvania. (Too bad they got rid of the public stocks on Locust walk. How your instructors pine for days of Benjamin Franklin!)

**COURSE RULES**

*RULES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE BASED ON THE UNIVERSITY'S GUIDANCE REGARDING ON-CAMPUS CLASSES*

**#1 Attendance**

We expect you to attend every class. We are designing this course to be engaging and interactive. A significant portion of the learning will occur in the classroom as we discuss the lecture topics and readings. Missing those interactions will significantly diminish your understanding of health policy.

**#2 Do the Reading**

We expect you to do all the *required* readings before class. You should come prepared to discuss all required readings and engage fully in discussion. We randomly call on people in class to discuss various parts of the readings or extend the principles discussed in the readings to a novel scenario. We take class preparation very seriously.

**#3 Be Punctual**

We will begin each class promptly at 4:30pm. We will be ready and so should you. Consider our class meetings as you would any job or professional meeting. If you arrive late or leave early you will disrupt the flow of the class.

#### #4 No Cell Phones Except for Poll Everywhere

We work hard to prepare for class. We expect you to be prepared and to thoughtfully participate. We do not want the time disturbed by a ringing phone and we do not want people running out to answer their phones. It disrupts the class.

For in-person classes, laptops may be used for taking notes, if this is your preferred method. However, do not use them for other purposes, such as sending articles to nineteen friends, mindlessly scrolling through Facebook pictures of someone you knew in high school, playing with Instagram filters, and other distractions. You cannot multi-task and expect to fully engage with the class. This isn't us talking; it's science. If we find you engaging in any of these behaviors, you will be asked to leave the classroom.

Should class be online only, we ask that you only use your laptop to watch lectures and take notes. However, we recommend, on the basis of scientific data, that you treat online class as an in-person experience. Try to treat your laptop as a television screen and take notes by hand. We recognize that online classes will be a new experience for many students, but we will not allow class engagement to drop off.

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#### #5 No Texting, Tweeting, Facebooking, or other public commenting on this course.

We want this class to be about learning and engaging with difficult material. This class is not a public performance and you are not yet a reporter. You are a student in a learning environment. As teachers, we will sometimes be intentionally provocative and challenging. We want you, as students, to take intellectual risks, think creatively, and push your own limits. This requires an environment of safety and respect, which is not compatible with broadcasting what is going on in class to titillate interlopers.

While classes are recorded, these recordings are available only through the Canvas website. They may not be shared or distributed in any way. Recordings will be archived (i.e. unavailable) after the semester ends.

*By registering for this course, you are agreeing to abide by these rules.  
This is informed consent.*