

**Political Science 296-1: Health Policy and Politics
Golisano 201**

[Professor Laurel Elder](#)

Office: Golisano 309

Course description: This course will examine the development of health policy in the United States and the distinctive structure of the US healthcare system. It will review the creation, implementation, and challenges facing major healthcare programs including Medicare, Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Veterans Healthcare, and the Affordable Care Act. The course will explore many challenges facing the U.S. healthcare system including rising costs, uninsured and underinsured Americans, and health disparities. The second half of the course will examine contemporary health policy issues and trends including maternal mortality, reproductive rights, trans healthcare, the right to die, the teen mental health crisis, the use of AI in healthcare, the healthcare workforce shortage, and the opioid crisis.

The course will engage three lenses when considering all issues: 1. a personal perspective, considering how the issues affect ourselves, those we love, and our communities; 2. A civic health lens, considering how individuals and groups can become informed and involved to affect health policy change, and 3. An intersectional lens to explore health policy and politics from the perspective of historically marginalized identities including race, ethnicity, gender, gender orientation, sexual orientation, class, and ability status.

Learning Outcomes

1. Students will enhance their ability to communicate health policy issues effectively, both in writing and through oral presentations and discussions (GEO1)
2. Students will demonstrate an understanding of the key concepts, theories, and historical developments in health policy and politics in the U.S.
3. Students will critically assess the factors shaping health policy in the US (GEO3)
4. Students will engage in respectful and constructive dialogues about a range of health policy topics considering diverse perspectives, political ideologies, and cultural influences (GEO4)
5. Students will recognize the importance of civic engagement in shaping health policy (GEO4)
6. Students will learn from alumni and professionals about health policy career paths (IO 4)

Required Readings

- Patel, Kant and Mark E. Rushefsky. 2020. *Healthcare Politics and Policy in America* 5th Edition. Routledge; New Jersey.
- Follow news about health policy and politics in national news sources (e.g. NY Times especially their [Health Section](#), Washington Post especially their section on [Health care policy](#), the [19th especially Health section](#)) and/or more specialized news sources such as [KFF.org](#); [Healthcare Dive](#); [Modern Healthcare](#), [Pew's Health Care Coverage](#). If you like podcasts I recommend: "[Trade Offs: Health care, Policy, People](#)," and [KFF Health News: What the Health?](#)

Student Responsibilities and Assignments:

Attendance:

- I take attendance every day at the start of class. You are expected to attend every class. Each absence,

as well as arriving to class late, lowers the attendance grade.

- If you miss class due to illness, travel, sports etc... you need to let Professor Elder know prior to class with appropriate documentation and submit typed work showing you have completed the readings for that day within less than 5 days in order to receive an excused absence.

Informed Participation and Professionalism:

- To receive an A you need to participate at least once per class session showing you have done the readings and considered the discussion questions and/or submit typed answers to the discussion questions prior to the start of class.
- You are also expected to behave professionally. This means being fully engaged in class. Texting, using ear buds, or having side conversations is not acceptable. Besides scheduled breaks, please do not leave the classroom during the class period unless it is an emergency. Also, please be respectful when disagreeing with the views of others.

Current Events Discussion Leader and Short Paper: In addition to following current events about health policy everyday, everyone will be assigned a day to be a current events discussion leader and write a short paper applying class concepts to a current event relating to health policy and politics.

Reading and Reflection Assignments: Reading and class material based assignments will help you engage with the readings, explore concepts, and prepare for the exams.

Exams: There will be two in class exams to assess your ability to synthesize and analyze the readings, class discussions, and current events. There will be quizzes to help familiarize you with the exam format.

Short Paper and Presentation: You will select from a list of contemporary health policy challenges and trends, write a paper on that topic using class materials, and share key points from your paper in class.

Summary of grade breakdown for this class:

Attendance 10%
Informed participation and Professionalism 10%
Current Events Discussion Leader and Paper 10%
Reading and Reflection Assignments 25%
Paper on Health Policy Challenge or Trend 10%
Quizzes 5%
Exam 1 15%
Exam 2 15%

Course Policies

This is a Writing Designated (WD) Class. Over the course of the class you will produce at least 10 pages of writing, with the opportunity to revise one of your written assignments.

Unplugged class: Students will not use computers or phones in class. Rather they will take notes the old fashioned way—pen/pencil and a notebook.

WGS and legal studies: this course counts towards the Women and Gender Studies minor and the legal studies minor, *as well as the public health and political science majors and minors*. If you want the course to count for legal studies and/or women and gender studies, you should let me know and focus papers on a related topic.

Policy on make-up and late work: I accept late work. Papers/assignments are marked down each day for being late

(late means any time after the start of class on the day they are due).

Academic honesty: You are expected to hand in only material that has been completed by yourself. Plagiarism includes using ChatGPT/AI programs without explicitly noting it and failure to cite information you got from another source in your papers. Cheating includes working with others on assignments that are supposed to be completed individually. Cases of cheating/plagiarism will be handled according to college policy

Citing Sources: All written work needs to have appropriate citations and complete bibliographies. Failing to cite properly will detract from your grade and can be considered academic dishonesty.

Learning Accommodations Policy: Hartwick College is committed to upholding and maintaining all aspects of the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. If a student with a disability wishes to request academic adjustments, they should contact the Director of AccessAbility Services at AccessAbilityServices@hartwick.edu. AccessAbility Services is located on the 5th floor of Yager Library in the Center for Student Success. Any information regarding a student's disability will remain confidential. Requests for academic adjustments should be made as early as possible.

Assistance: I am here to help you succeed. I will be available during my office hours and if these times are not convenient for you, we can schedule another time to meet.

Grading Scale: the following grading scale will be used for tests, papers and your overall grade in the course.

A 93-100
A- 90-92
B+ 87-89
B 83-86
B- 80-82
C+ 77-79
C 73-76
C- 70-72
D+ 67-69
D 63-66
D- 60-62
F 59 or lower

Overview of Topics, Readings, and Assignments for each class period.

Module 1

Online Introduction to the Course

- No in person class meeting; Students can use this day for travel.
- Day 1 assignment due on D2L by noon on January 2.

Healthcare News and Healthcare from an Intersectional Lens

- To prepare for class:
 - Read:
 - *Healthcare Politics and Policy in America*, Chapter 1 Healthcare Politics. - [Health Disparities by Race and Ethnicity](#)
 - Complete this assignment: [Submit typed answers to Chapter 1 questions on D2L by 9am.](#)
- In class:
 - Be prepared to share your answers to the Chapter 1 questions. This means you should print out a copy of your answers and bring them to class—or simply try to remember your answers.
 - Listen to *The Washington Post's* podcast [Why are so many Americans dying early?](#) (November 8, 2023. 26 minutes). Take notes and be prepared to answer [these questions.](#)

Healthcare in the US in Comparative Perspective

To prepare for class read:

- *Healthcare Politics and Policy in America*, Chapter 2 “Healthcare Policy in the US”
 - [Sen. Bernie Sanders renews push for Medicare for All to end ‘totally broken’ health-care system](#)
- In class:
 - Watch and discuss the 2021 [PBS Documentary \(58 minutes\) Critical Care: America versus the World](#): comparison of the US healthcare system with Britain, Switzerland, Australia, and Canada.
 - Take notes and be prepared to answer [these questions.](#)

What is the best Healthcare System for the US?

- For class
 - **Complete reflection assignment and submit on D2L:** Write a 1-2 page reflection on what type of health care system you think would be best for the U.S. and why. Bring in specifics from *Healthcare Politics and Policy in America*, Chapter 2 and this article [Sen. Bernie Sanders renews push for Medicare for All to end ‘totally broken’ health-care system](#), as well as class notes and the documentary *Critical Care*. You should reference all the class material but do not need to

formally cite it.

- In class
 - Discuss reflection assignment.
 - Watch: [From Broken to Better: Health Insurance Reform with Economist Amy Finkelstein](#) (28 minute interview with MIT Health Professor about her new book [We've Got you Covered](#) and discuss.
- If time permits start watching: [Obama's Deal: About the Role of Lobbyists and Compromises in passing the ACA](#)

Module 2

The Affordable Care Act

- To prepare for class:
 - Student for quiz #1.
 - Read/review *Healthcare Politics and Policy in America*, Chapter 3 “The Affordable Care Act: Stumbling Towards Universal Coverage?”
- In class
 - Take Quiz #1
 - Watch: [Obama's Deal: About the Role of Lobbyists and Compromises in passing the ACA](#). Take notes and be prepared to answer [these questions](#).

Healthcare for Children, the Poor, People with Disabilities, and the Elderly

-To prepare for class:

Read:

- *Healthcare Politics and Policy in America*, Chapter 4 Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program: Healthcare for the Poor and Disabled/ Low Income and PWD.
- *Healthcare Politics and Policy in America*, Chapter 5 Medicare: Healthcare for the Elderly

Assignment: Interview grandparents or older relatives about their experience with Medicare and write a reflection. Details on D2L.

- In class
 - Discuss readings and interview assignment
 - Watch: [The Story of Medicare: A Timeline](#) (6 minutes)
 - If time permits, start watching the 2021 Frontline Documentary [The Healthcare Divide](#) (55 minutes), *which focuses on US hospitals that service low income communities, often called safety net hospitals. These hospitals primarily serve the 70 million Americans on Medicaid and the 30 million Americans who have no health insurance.*

Healthcare for Children, the Poor, People with Disabilities, and the Elderly (continued)

For class read:

- *Healthcare Politics and Policy in America*, Chapter 6 - Healthcare for American Indians, Alaskan Natives, and Veterans, pp 214-232. (part of the chapter focuses on Healthcare for Veterans)
- *Healthcare Politics and Policy in America*, Chapter 7 - Falling through the Safety Net: The Disadvantaged

Assignment: Submit Career Research and Questions Assignment on D2L

In class:

10am-10:30am: [Travis Cos, PhD '02](#): Licensed Clinical Psychologist at Corporal Michael J Crescenzo Veterans Affairs Medical Center (Philadelphia) where he provides services for veterans and their families in integrated primary care and specializes in persisting pain. Previously, he worked in a similar role in a federally qualified health center in Philadelphia. Other roles have included research and program evaluation, adjunct teaching, and consulting with other professionals and health care systems on care delivery, integrated team work, and workforce development. *He may have also been Swoop, the Hartwick Hawk, for two years, but that has never been confirmed.*

Review Day

9:30 AM: [Cynthia Lockrow '01 Medical Social Worker at Department of Veterans Affairs](#) in New Mexico will discuss her career in the health field and offer reflections on US healthcare policy and politics. Cynthia Lockrow graduated from Hartwick in 2001 as a political science major and went on to get a Master in Social Work at the University of Albany in 2005. Cynthia has worked in several roles while in Upstate New York as a medical social worker. This includes hospice admissions, a homecare agency liaison encompassing marketing and intake, discharge planning and complex care coordination at a tertiary medical center, as well as medical oncology and primary care roles within the Veterans Health Administration in New York and now in New Mexico.

Review for Exam

In class Exam 1

Module 3

Rising Healthcare Costs and Spending

To prepare for class read: *Healthcare Politics and Policy in America*, Chapter 8 The Problem of Rising Healthcare Costs and Spending

In class listen to: [The Sunday Story: The Unbearable Weight of Medical Debt](#). December 10, 2023 (23 minutes)

Recommended watching: [Dialysis: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver \(HBO\)](#) 24 minutes.

Student Panel

No Regular Class. Attend a student panel on young people and democracy and lunch, 11-1, Shineman Chapel.

Birth control and Maternal Mortality in the US

Read the following short articles/chapter segments on birth control police. - *Healthcare Politics and Policy in America*, Chapter 9 “The Role of Biomedical Technology: The Beginning and End of Life” pp. 372-378, *sections on Contraception and emergency contraception*.

- [What to do if CVS, the nation's largest pharmacy, refuses to fill your birth control - Emergency Contraception](#)
- [Over-the-Counter Oral Contraceptive Pills](#)
- Recommended listening: [How the Birth Control Pill Got Over the Counter](#). July 18, 2023. *The Daily*. 30 minutes.

Read the following short articles/chapter segments on maternal mortality

- *Healthcare Politics and Policy in America*, pp. 268-269
- Veronica Gillispie-Bell. [Opinion: More Mothers are Dying, It Doesn't Have to Be this Way](#). *The New York Times*. July 16, 2023.
- [Maternal Mortality Is on the Rise: 8 Things To Know](#)

- [The US Maternal Mortality Crisis Continues to Worsen: An International Comparison.](#)

In class:

- Watch PBS NewsHour Clip [FDA Approves First Over the Counter Birth Control Pill, but Legal Challenges Expected](#), July 2023, 6 minutes.
- Watch segment from 60 minutes: [Inside the fight to slash the maternal mortality rate in the South](#) (13 minutes)

Abortion Policy in Post-Roe America

- Read:
 - *Healthcare Politics and Policy in America*, Chapter 9 pp.373-384
 - [Tracking Abortion Bans Across the Country](#)
 - [Despite State Bans, Legal Abortions Didn't Fall Nationwide in Year After Dobbs](#)
- In class
 - Watch PBS Newshour Segment, ["The state of abortion access in the U.S. a year post-Roe" 8 minutes.](#)
 - If time permits, listen to: The Daily Episode [The Woman Who Fought the Texas Abortion Ban](#) (31 minutes)
 - Discuss public opinion on abortion in post-Roe America
- Recommended further listening/watching:
 - [When a miscarriage becomes a crime](#) Slate Podcast What's Next.
 - KFF What the Health podcast "A Year without Roe"

Political Battles over The Right to Die and Gender Affirming Care The End of Life: The Right to Die and Physician-Assisted Suicide

- Read: *Healthcare Politics and Policy in America*, Chapter 9 pp 384-398. -
- Optional: (1 hour 20 minutes) [Frontline Documentary, The Suicide Plan](#)

Government Policy and Bans on Gender Affirming Care

- [Opinion: Banning gender affirming care impacts service members and families.](#) *Military Times*. August 22, 2023.
- [Fighting for Gender Affirming Care.](#) Harvard School of Public Health. - [Youth Access to Gender Affirming Care: The Federal and State Policy Landscape](#)

In class watch

- [Texas ban on youth gender-affirming care takes effect](#) PBS Newshour Clip: 09/01/2023 | 7m 34s |

Module 4

The Opioid Crisis

Read:

- *Healthcare Politics and Policy in America*, Chapter 10 Challenges Facing the Healthcare System pp. 407-420. The Opioid Crisis.
- [Millions in Opioid Settlement Funds Sit Untouched as Overdose Deaths Rise](#) December 13, 2023

In class

- Watch "[Dopesick Author Talks Purdue Pharma and the Opioid Crisis](#)" PBS Interview, 27 minutes. Interview with Beth Macy, best-selling author of *Dopesick* and *Raising Lazarus*.
- Watch: [As opioid settlement money starts to flow in, states debate how best to use it](#). 10 minute segment from PBS focusing on North Carolina.

The Mental Health Crisis Among U.S. Teens

Read:

- [A new portrait of American teenagers in crisis](#). The CDC's 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey offers a troubling window into high school students' physical, emotional and mental health. *Politico*. April 24, 2023.
- [The Surgeon General's New Mission: Adolescent Mental Health](#)
- [Surgeon General Issues New Advisory About Effects Social Media Use Has on Youth Mental Health](#)
- [Emergency Department Visits Involving Mental Health Conditions of Adolescents, January 2019–February 2023](#) CDC Report.

In class

- Watch: PBS NEWSHOUR [Mental health service shortage for teens creates challenges](#). (09/12/2023) 10m 13s
- **10:15: Dr. Kayla (Murphy) Nguyen '14**. Assistant Research Professor of Anatomy and Cell Biology at George Washington School of Medicine and Health Science will join us via zoom to discuss her career, her research, and her reflection on health and healthcare policy and politics in the United States.

Dr. Nguyen completed her Bachelor's degrees in Biology and in Political Science from Hartwick College in 2014 and went on to get her PhD in Biology at Drexel University. Her current research focuses on women and sex-specific mechanisms of chronic pain treatment. Chronic pain is estimated to affect 1 in 5 individuals and with greater prevalence among females. Current availability of non-opioid based therapeutics that

effectively treat pain are severely lacking and this is due to lack of knowledge regarding underlying mechanisms controlling pain in the context of both injury and disease.

Trends in Healthcare

Specialty Drugs and Gene Therapy: Ozempic and Gene Editing Treatment for Sickle Cell - *Healthcare Politics and Policy in America, Chapter 10, pp. 420-437*. Specialty Drugs/Pharmaceuticals and Gene Therapy

- [Weight loss drugs transforming healthcare, may help with addiction](#). Reuters. November 9, 2023.
- [New gene therapy for sickle cell disease has been a long time coming, but is it a complete game-changer?](#) UCLA Health, December 28, 2023.

The Healthcare Workforce Crisis

- Read *Healthcare Politics and Policy in America, Chapter 10, pp 437 -443*. - Watch: PBS Newshour [Pandemic Burnout Worsens Nursing Shortages in Hospitals across US](#). March 16, 2023, 8 minutes.
- [Doctors unionize as healthcare services are consolidated](#) PBS Newshour: 01/01/2024 | 7m
- Recommended Listen: [The Moral Crisis of America's Doctors: The Corporatization of healthcare has changed the practice of medicine causing many physicians to feel alienated from their work](#). (32 minutes) NY Times, the Daily.

AI and healthcare

- Read: [AI Adoption in U.S. Health Care Won't Be Easy](#). Harvard Business Review. - Read: [60% of Americans Would Be Uncomfortable With Providers Relying on AI in Their Own Health Care](#). Pew Research.
- Watch: [PBS newshour segment, The promises and potential pitfalls of AI's use in medicine \(05/20/2023 | 6m 35s\)](#)
- Watch: [PBS Newshour segment, How Artificial Intelligence is Helping in the Medical Field \(5/24/23| 5m 46s\)](#)

A look ahead and review for the exam

Read: *Healthcare Politics and Policy in America*, Chapter 11 Healthcare Policy and Politics in America: Moving Toward Reform?

Review for Exam 2

In class exam/Last Day of Class.

Other recommended readings/podcasts.

Listen to or recommend this interview with top healthcare administrators: [Three HHS Secretaries on What the Job is Really Like](#) (56 minute Interview)

Secretary Xavier Becerra and two of his predecessors, Kathleen Sebelius and Alex Azar, talk candidly about what it takes to run a department with more than 80,000

employees and a budget larger than those of many countries.