Purpose of the Course

This course is designed to provide students with an overview of the US health care system. The various components of the health care system, important issues related to cost, quality and access will be analyzed. Our analysis will employ a public health perspective, which is an interdisciplinary approach bringing together aspects of various disciplines, including, but not limited to sociology, economics and political science. A number of important topics such as the Affordable Health Care Act (ACA), health workforce shortages, challenges of the aging of the population etc, will be reviewed in detail.

Course Objectives

PubHlth 129 carries two General Education designations, Social and Behavioral Sciences (SB) and Diversity within the U.S. (U). This course is designed to help students develop critical thinking skills as demonstrated in class room discussions and writing assignments.

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. demonstrate an understanding of health and its different aspects;
2. demonstrate knowledge of the different determinants of health;
3. demonstrate a basic knowledge of a health care system and its components;
4. describe the organization of the US health care system;
5. identify different stakeholders in the health care system;
6. understand how the interaction of social, economic and political forces shape health policies
7. identify the strengths and weakness of the US health care system; and
8. critically evaluate information on current issues on health care in the US
Textbook, Readings, and Resources

- **Required text book:**

  There are **NO** required textbooks for the class. Readings and Materials will be posted on the course MOODLE page

**However, these books are recommended:**


Attendance Policy

Students are required to attend each class session and arrive on time for class. In accordance with the University’s policy on class absences, excused absences include, but are not limited to, classes missed due to illness, family emergency, or religious observance. Students should inform the instructor in writing of any known conflicts with class meeting times (for example, due to religious observances or athletic events) during the first week of the semester. In the case of unanticipated absences (for example, illness or emergency), students should inform the instructor of the situation as soon as possible. Students will be expected to provide appropriate documentation to explain any excused absences. The instructor will make reasonable accommodations for excused absences, but students are responsible for all material covered, assignments distributed or collected, and announcements made during any classes missed. Repeated unexcused absences will adversely affect a student’s class participation grade.

Class Participation

Class participation includes asking questions about the course material, responding to classmates’ comments and questions, discussing questions posed by the instructor, and contributing to small-group activities. Students should complete the assigned readings and written assignments before the class session under which they are listed in order to be able to participate fully in class discussions and activities. Students are expected to be respectful of others’ perspectives, values, and learning time. Disruptive behavior, such as incivility or arriving late to class, will adversely affect a student’s class participation grade. USE CELL PHONES WILL NOT BE ALLOWED IN CLASS AND LAPTOPS ARE ONLY ALLOWED FOR NOTETAKING IF NECESSARY.

Written Assignments

Students will complete a series of written assignments, described below. Additional instructions for these assignments will be posted on MOODLE. All written assignments should be submitted
on MOODLE on the due date. E-mailed assignments will not be accepted. Students needing to miss a class can submit assignment in advance.

Reflection Papers (40%)
Students will write 4 reflection/response papers after each module. Reflection papers are based on class discussions, videos, readings and other relevant support literature on health care and the health care system in the US. A number of questions are provided at the end of each module, students are required to respond to any one of these questions. Each reflection paper will be a two-page, double spaced response and is worth 10 percent. Students should be prepared to discuss their assignments in class. Additional information will be provided in class.

Examination

Two mini examinations will be given during the course of the semester. These exams will be closed-book and in-class.
- Exam 1: March 3rd
- Exam 2: April 14th

Group Project - Design your reform to the American Health Care System

Students will be assigned to groups in the middle of the semester. Each group is required to come up with their own plan for the reform of the health care system. Suggestions of possible reforms plans include: 1) Go back to pre-Affordable Care Act reform; 2) Keep the Affordable Care Act; 3) Create a single payer system; 4) Make individuals responsible for their care through the provision of tax incentives etc. Each project should provide the following: 1) The need for health care reform; 2) Advantages and disadvantages of their reform plan and; 3) Why their plan is the best possible alternative. Additional instructions on this assignment will be provided. Each group will be present their plan to the class at the end of semester.

Course Grade

Final course grades will be calculated according to the following weights:

- Class Participation and Attendance 20%
- Reflection Papers 40%
- Two Examinations (10% each) 20%
- Group Project 20%

RAP Component

This is a RAP course. RAP courses are designed to:
1. Support students in achieving a smooth transition to college life. I will check in with the class about this periodically.
2. Ensure first year students are aware of the multitude of resources and opportunities that are available at UMass Amherst. I will introduce you to the Learning Resource Center, the Writing Center, and other resources referenced in the Student Resource Booklet.
3. Develop an awareness and appreciation for the specific skills (inquiry and analysis, problem solving, critical and creative thinking, etc.) that are found in all Gen Ed courses. I will elaborate on when and how our curriculum incorporates Gen Ed Skills and will invite you to reflect on them as well.

4. Promote the practice of thinking about, talking about, and making connections between classes and life experience in order to deepen engagement, understanding and ultimately increase the value of a college education. I will ask you to reflect on this in discussion and in writing over the semester.

5. Provide first-year students with structured guidance in the development/advancement of various skills necessary to be successful in their college experience and be prepared to be engaged members of a global community upon graduation. I will utilize material from the Student Resource Booklet to incorporate these topics as they come up in our course.

This is what you signed up for, so if at any point you feel this course is not meeting one or more of these goals, please let me know and I will work on fixing it. In addition to teaching Pubhlth 129, I want to foster a smooth transition to college for each of you.

**Conduct**

Academic honesty and classroom civility, as outlined in the *Code of Student Conduct*, are expected of all students. Students should familiarize themselves with the *Code of Student Conduct* and the university’s academic honesty policy, which can be found at:

http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/

Violations of the *Code of Student Conduct* include, but are not limited to, cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty. Definitions of these terms and examples are given in the *Code*. Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be handled according to the procedures outlined in the university’s policy.

**Disability Accommodation**

Students registered for accommodations due to a disability should inform the instructor during the first week of the semester to request accommodations for this class. Questions about eligibility or procedures for accommodations should be directed to the Disability Services office:

Disability Services
231 Whitmore Administration Building
(413) 545-0892 (V/TTY)
(413) 577-0122 (FAX)
ds@educ.umass.edu
http://www.umass.edu/disability/
# Module I: Health and Health Care

## Session 1 – Tuesday, January 19th

- Course overview

## Session 2 – Thursday, January 21st

- What is health?
  - Models of health and wellness
  - Measures of health


## Session 3 – Tuesday, January 26th

- Determinants of health
  - Social determinants of health
  - Population health model


## Session 4 – Thursday, January 28th

- Determinants of health
  - We will watch the an episode from the documentary: Unnatural Causes – Is inequality making us sick (Episode I: In sickness and in wealth)
Reflection Paper Questions for Module I: Choose one. Due February 4th, 2016

1. Explain how social inequality affects health outcomes. Identify and discuss how any 2 or more societal changes/social policies can improve health outcomes in the US (examples may include: improving schools, creating employment opportunities, or improving neighborhoods).

2. With the 2016 presidential elections drawing near, how should the next US President address issues of inequality in the country.

3. Provide a reflection on the documentary – Unnatural Causes: In Sickness and in Wealth, and provide suggestions to addressing some of the issues portrayed in the episode.

Module II: The Health Care System

Session 5 – Tuesday, February 2nd

- Value Systems and Health Policy
  - Social Justice
  - Market Justice


Session 6 – Thursday, February 4th

- The US Health Care System: An Overview


Written Assignment Due: Two paged reflection paper on Module I
Session 7 – Tuesday, February 9th

- Financing the Health Care System
  - Health Insurance
  - Managed Care


Session 8 – Thursday, February 11th

- Financing the Health Care System
  - Medicare
  - Medicaid

Readings: 1. Kaiser Family Foundation (2015) – A primer on Medicare: Key facts about the Medicare program and the people it covers. Available at:  

2. Kaiser Family Foundation (2014) – Medicare at a glance. Available at:  
http://kff.org/medicare/fact-sheet/medicare-at-a-glance-fact-sheet/


NO CLASS -Tuesday, February 16th (Monday Schedule Followed)

Reflection Paper Questions for Module II: Choose one. Due February 18th, 2016

1. Is health care a right or a privilege? Defend your position.

2. Based the Supreme Court decision on contraceptive coverage, should contraceptive coverage be part of employer sponsored health insurance? (See recent development in Wheaton College:  
3. Discuss how American values of “individualism” have shaped the healthcare system. Identify any advantages or disadvantages.

**Module III: Pre-Health Care Reform**

**Session 9 – Thursday, February 18th**

- The US Health Care System
  - We will watch the documentary: Michael Moore’s Sicko

Written Assignment Due: Two paged reflection paper on Module II

**Session 10 – Tuesday, February 23rd**

- Costs of Health Care

**Readings:**


**Session 11 – Thursday February 25th**

- Access and Quality of Health Care

**Readings:**

**Session 12 – Tuesday, March 1st**

- Health Care Systems in other countries
  - We will watch the documentary: Sick Around the World.
Session 13 – Thursday, March 3rd

- Exam I

Reflection Paper Questions for Module III: Choose one. Due March 10th

1. We discussed the different reimbursement mechanisms in class. Will Pay-for-Performance improve quality of care? Why or why not?

2. Identify and discuss two contributory factors to high costs in health care in the US. How would you address these factors to control increasing health costs?

3. Proposals to improve the performance of the US health care system include the adoption of a national health care system similar to the Canadian health care system. The argument is that a single-payer publicly-funded system would deliver better health outcomes and distribute health resources equitably. Do you agree or disagree with this proposal? Explain.

Module IV: Health Care Reform

Session 14 – Tuesday, March 8th

- History of Health Care Reform


Session 15 – Thursday, March 10th

- The Affordable Care Act (ACA) - Overview

Readings: 1. Jonas and Kovner’s supplement to the Affordable Care Act. Available at: http://www.springerpub.com/content/downloads/Kovner-Affordable-Care_Act_Ch.pdf
2. Short video - Health Reform Hits the Street. Available at:
   http://kff.org/health-reform/video/health-reform-hits-main-street

Written Assignment Due: Two paged reflection paper on Module III

Spring Break: March 12 – March 21, 2016
   No Class

Session 16 – Tuesday, March 22nd

- ACA – Access to Health Care

Readings:


3. Isidore, C (2015). “Nearly 90% of Americans Have Health Coverage”. CNN Money, August, 12. Available at:

   CNBC, July 31. Available at:

Session 17 – Thursday, March 24th

- ACA – Health Care Costs

Readings:


Session 18 – Tuesday, March 29th

- ACA – Quality of Care


Session 19 – Thursday, March 31st

- Scorecard – A review of the evidence: Is the ACA working?

Reflection Paper Questions for Module IV: Choose one. Due April 7th.

1. Is the Affordable Care Act Constitutional? Discuss

2. An argument opposing the Affordable Care Act is that young people will pay more in premiums which will be used to subsidize health care for older people. Young people, on average, are much healthier than older people, and consume less health care services. Should older people have access to health care at the expense of young people?

3. For some of the 2016 Presidential Aspirants, their policy agenda for healthcare is to repel the ACA. Do you agree or disagree with this? Defend your position.

Module V: Challenges Facing The HealthCare System
Session 20 – Tuesday, April 4th

- Workforce Shortages


Session 21 – Thursday, April 7th

- Chronic Diseases


Written Assignment Due: Two paged reflection paper on Module IV

Session 22 – Tuesday, April 12th

- Class Review

Session 23 – Thursday April 14th

- Exam II

Session 24 – Tuesday April 19th

- Group Presentations

Session 25 – Thursday April 21st

- Group Presentations