This course is designed to help students understand how and why health policies reflect the political system in which they are developed and implemented.

**COURSE INSTRUCTOR**

Thomas R. Oliver, Ph.D., M.H.A.  
Professor of Population Health Sciences  
School of Medicine and Public Health  
University of Wisconsin—Madison  
610 Walnut Street, Room 760C WARF  
Madison, WI 53726-2397  
Phone: 608-262-6731  Fax: 608-263-2820  
Email: troliver@wisc.edu  
http://pophealth.wisc.edu/thomas-oliver

Faculty Affiliate  
Robert M. La Follette School of Public Affairs  
Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies  
University of Wisconsin—Madison

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

1. To analyze the current and historical role of government in health policy, primarily focusing on the United States.

2. To introduce important concepts, theories, and literature concerning the impact of politics on public policy and population health.

3. To explain the roles, resources, and strategies of key participants, both inside and outside of government, who influence health policy development and implementation.

4. To compare how political determinants influence different types of health policy issues (e.g., access to insurance and health services, cost containment, disease and injury prevention).

5. To translate knowledge of health politics and the policy process into more effective strategies for public health advocacy.

6. To improve skills in communication, leadership, and systems thinking through formal and informal analysis of key issues in health politics and policy.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

**Blog Posts and Discussions** (40 points)
Students will write considered reactions to key contemporary issues in health policy and politics via blog posts and a discussion board.

**Strategy Memos** (80 points)
Students will write short strategy memos to a key stakeholder on a public health issue of their choice to apply key concepts and analytical frameworks throughout the course.

**Case Study Project** (80 points)
Students will produce a case study of the politics of health policy development. The case study will apply concepts and analytical frameworks to explain the course of action on a policy issue selected by each student. Students will write an individual 12-15 page paper based on the case study project.

REQUIRED TEXT


All other required course readings are available as PDF files or links on the Canvas course website.

SUGGESTED SUPPLEMENTAL READING


In addition to the required course materials, good sources of information on health politics and policy issues include the *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law, Health Affairs, Milbank Quarterly, New England Journal of Medicine, Journal of the American Medical Association, BMJ*, and *American Journal of Public Health*.

There are also a number of periodicals that provide insight into the general policy making process and a variety of specific policy areas, including health. Among these are *Kaiser Health News, CQ Roll Call, National Journal, Washington Post* and *New York Times*. 
Finally, a large number of governmental agencies, foundations, and health care organizations operate websites with useful information about health policies and programs. A good starting point is THOMAS, operated by the U.S. Library of Congress, as well as the U.S. Government Accountability Office, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Conference of State Legislatures, National Governors Association, Kaiser Family Foundation, and AcademyHealth.

**COURSE SCHEDULE AND MATERIALS**

**Module 1**  
**Politics as a Core Determinant of Health**

**Materials:**


**American Politics and the Role of Government in Health Policy**


**Supplemental:**

Due 9/10
Blog Post: Argue why California—along with Mississippi and West Virginia—is right or wrong to eliminate non-medical exemptions to childhood immunizations. Will the new law be effective in increasing immunization rates and improving population health?


Due 9/17
Strategy Memo: Choose a public health issue (other than vaccines) and identify the strongest rationale for government involvement—e.g., police powers, spillover effects, protecting constitutional rights, promoting general welfare. Why is this an issue that cannot or should not be resolved by private parties?

Module 2 Federalism and Intergovernmental Relations


Due 9/24
Blog Post:

How did intergovernmental relations help produce the contamination of the drinking water in Flint, Michigan and the inadequate response to such a seemingly obvious public health threat?


Due 10/1
Strategy Memo:

Analyze a selected public health issue and provide an assessment of whether advocates should pursue a “top-down” or a “bottom-up” strategy for policy change. If state-level action is needed or desired, would state preemption of local policies help or hurt your cause?
Module 3  

Political Mobilization and the Policy Agenda

Materials:  


https://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_haidt_on_the_moral_mind?language=en


Supplemental:

http://www.npr.org/sections/money/2013/06/07/189184092/how-to-sell-coke-to-people-who-have-never-had-a-sip


https://genvideos.org/watch?v=Merchants_of_Doubt_2014#video=7F7erBsp2hDjFy_igF0YNWmoDGaDOLGrXyQZ3THz-Xk

Due 10/8
Blog Post:

How does the current opioid epidemic differ from drug addiction and abuse in recent history, in terms of social construction of the target population and notions of personal responsibility? How do differences in framing the problem affect agenda setting—both the likelihood of government action to address the problem and the nature of likely solutions (from prevention to treatment to law enforcement)?


Due 10/15
Strategy Memo:

Choose a public health issue that, in your judgment, has not been adequately addressed—or alternatively, how it has been addressed poses a threat to public health. Compare it to an issue that has received considerable attention and action. Examine how the two issues have been defined or framed, what organized interests are actively involved, and any other factors that might explain the disparity in political mobilization and agenda setting. Based on your analysis, recommend steps that advocates could take to boost the prospects for constructive policy change by reframing the issue or altering the “scope of conflict” to create a more favorable mix of supporters and opponents.

Module 4

Legislative and Executive Roles in Health Policy

Materials:


Due 10/22
Blog Post: Comment on the surprising twists and turns of the legislative process leading to adoption of the Affordable Care Act and its companion legislation in 2010. In your judgment, what are the chief institutional obstacles to producing effective health policy?

Due 10/29
Strategy Memo: For an issue of your choice, recommend important steps to creating the smoothest path possible through the legislative process. Would you begin with the president, or in Congress? Which house of Congress, and which committee(s), would have jurisdiction over your proposal? Which house would be most receptive to your proposal? Which potential sponsors would be most effective, and why? Is your proposal something that would likely require the support of party leaders, or is it unlikely to generate partisan conflict?

Module 5 The Policy Process and Politics of Reform


**Due 11/5**

**Blog Post:**

Using James Q. Wilson’s typology for analyzing the connection between policy design and political feasibility, comment on the most important factors that distinguished the “success” of the Affordable Care Act and Medicare Modernization Act from the “failure” of the Clinton-era Health Security Act. How did the initial design and key modifications along the way improve the chances of success for ACA and MMA? What are the implications of this type of analysis for current Republican proposals for rolling back or modifying the ACA?
Due 11/12
Strategy Memo: For a selected public health issue, identify the most probable factors that could create a “window of opportunity” for policy change. Would that window most likely open in the “problem stream” or the “politics stream”? In the event a window indeed opened, what steps could advocates take to “couple” their preferred alternative with the problem and politics streams and advance it on the policy agenda?

Due 11/15
Case Study: Case study paper outline with timeline of key events and basic line of analysis is due via submission to Canvas.

Module 6
The Role of Courts in Health Policy

Materials:


Due 11/19
Blog Post: What are the long-term consequences of the 1999 Supreme Court decision Olmstead v. L.C.? How has that interpretation of the rights of individuals with disabilities affected states and the health care industry?

Due 11/27
Strategy Memo: For a selected public health issue, assess the advantages and disadvantages of pursuing policy changes through legislation and litigation. Which would likely be the most effective strategy, at least in the short term?

Module 7 Policy Implementation


Due 12/3
Blog Post: What features and challenges of the international Ebola outbreak in 2014-15 presented an extraordinarily difficult scenario for policy implementation?


Due 12/6  
Strategy Memo: Based on real experience or a hypothetical scenario of what might follow “successful” policy change for a selected public health issue, identify the “weak links” in moving from policy to actual population health improvement.

Module 8  
The Challenges of Public Administration and Health Policy

Materials:  


Due 12/10
Blog Post: How do cultural attitudes and the political environment affect the ability of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection to enforce current policies restricting the sale of unpasteurized (“raw”) milk?


NOTE: COPY URLs ABOVE AND PASTE INTO WEB BROWSER

Due 12/13
Strategy Memo: Select a public health issue and identify the most important challenges facing the principal governmental agency responsible for policy implementation and administration in that issue area. How could the agency do a better job, and what are the steps that could be taken to help it do so?

Due 12/20
Case Study: Final case study paper with abstract, timeline of key events, and list of references is due via submission to Canvas.