

PUBP 390/ECON 300: Economics of Health Care Policy
Spring 2021

TR 2-3:20 pm, ISC 1127

Instructor Information

Jennifer Mellor, Professor of Economics and Public Policy, jimmell@wm.edu

Office Hours: MW 3-4 pm and by appointment at <https://cwm.zoom.us/j/8996527923>

Course Description

This seminar provides an introduction to the U.S. healthcare system and an overview of public policies pertaining to private and public insurance and healthcare cost containment. Topics include the history of the US healthcare system and healthcare reforms, policies affecting private insurance, Medicare and Medicaid, and policies to address costs and promote access in private markets and public insurance programs. Readings include textbooks chapters, academic journal articles, policy briefs, and health policy podcasts. URLs/PDFs will be available on Blackboard. There is no required textbook.

Course Objectives

By taking this course, you will:

- Understand the historical origins of the US healthcare system.
- Learn what makes the US healthcare system different in its structure and performance.
- Learn key economic concepts pertaining to private insurance markets.
- Learn key economic factors determining levels and growth of healthcare expenditures.
- Understand the role of the Medicare and Medicaid programs in the US healthcare system.
- Learn to apply economic concepts in analyzing health policies.

Evaluation

Two midterms, 35% total. Scheduled for March 2 and April 13. Each midterm will contain multiple choice and short-answer questions as well as one or two essay prompts. I will distribute a study guide about one week prior to each exam, but please know that the best way to prepare for exams is to keep up with the readings and our in-class activities. Please make use of class and office hours to ask questions and improve your understanding of concepts.

Weekly Response Papers, 15% total. No more than once a week, and in 9 to 10 weeks this semester, you will write a short response paper for one of the assigned readings for that week. I'll distribute a separate handout describing what's expected of you and what I'll be looking for.

State Health Policy Profile, a team project, 15%. Working in teams, you will conduct in-depth research on one U.S. state's policies to address problems related to access to or costs of healthcare. Each team will meet periodically during the semester and submit short progress reports at milestones; by the end of the semester, each team will produce two deliverables: a 10-minute presentation and a written report. I'll distribute a separate handout describing what's expected and when.

Final exam, 30%. Scheduled for Tuesday, May 17, 2-5 pm. The final exam will be based on the majority of the material during the semester. Like the midterms, it will contain a mix of multiple choice and short-answer questions and essay prompts. The exam will test your command of the material we covered throughout the semester and your ability to synthesize and apply concepts.

Participation, 5%. Good participation means being in class and not multi-tasking while in class, coming to class having read and considered the assigned readings, and sharing your thoughts with others.

Other Important Dates to Know

- *Add/drop period ends on February 5.*
- *Withdrawal period ends on March 29.*
- *Break days: Friday February 12, Thursday March 4, Wednesday March 17, Tuesday April 6, Wednesday April 7, Monday April 26.*

Contacting Me

My W&M email address (jimmell@wm.edu) is the best way to get in touch with me. I will generally respond within 24 hours to emails received during the week; it may take me a bit longer to reply if your email comes in on the weekend, so plan ahead.

Office Hours

I will host office hours by Zoom on Mondays/Wednesdays 3-4 pm. No appointment is needed. Office hours will be at a <https://cwm.zoom.us/j/8996527923> and are first-come, first-served. Students who would like to meet with me at times other than these can email me to setup an appointment. My physical office on campus is in Tyler 433, for future reference; I will not be using it for student appointments this semester.

Course Policies

Course mode. Following the last move-in date for all students, the majority of class meetings will meet in-person on campus. Before then, classes will meet synchronously on Zoom. Currently, this means that in-person classes will begin on Tuesday February 9. Thereafter, I will use Blackboard and in-class reminders to notify you when class will meet on Zoom (usually because of a guest speaker or a group activity).

Staying Healthy Together. During in-person meetings, it is essential that you follow the mask-wearing and social-distancing guidelines that W&M has established.

Attendance. Please attend class and be engaged while you are here. The course will be more meaningful for you, me, and everyone else when you are here, asking questions, and participating in discussions. That said, I realize that things come up that prevent you from coming to class (illness, emergencies). I ask that you let me know as soon as it is possible and that you follow-up with me about what you missed. If you miss class because you become sick with COVID-19 or due to COVID-19 related matters (e.g., quarantining because a roommate is sick), I will work with you to make the necessary adjustments.

Exams. Except in cases of documented emergencies, exams will not be rescheduled. Needing more time to study is not a valid reason to reschedule an exam; sorry.

Grading scale. Letter grades for the course will be based on a standard 100-point scale as determined by the following ranges: A (≥ 93 through 100), A- (≥ 90 through < 93), B+ (≥ 88 through < 90), B (≥ 83 through < 88), B- (≥ 80 through < 83), C+ (≥ 78 through < 80), C (≥ 73 through < 78), C- (≥ 70 through < 73), D+ (≥ 68 through < 70), D (≥ 63 through < 68), D- (≥ 60 through < 63), and F (less than 60).

PolLEV. I will sometimes use PolLEV to facilitate discussion and check understanding of concepts. Please bring a smartphone, tablet, laptop, or other web-capable device to every class. If you are a new PolLEV user, please visit this site to create an account: <https://www.polleverywhere.com/login>. You must use your W&M credentials when creating the account.

Disabilities. W&M accommodates students with disabilities in accordance with federal laws and university policy. Any student who feels they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a learning, psychiatric, physical, or chronic health diagnosis should contact Student Accessibility Services staff at 757-221-2512 or at sas@wm.edu to determine if accommodations are warranted and to obtain an official letter of accommodation. For more information, please visit www.wm.edu/sas.

Honor Code. Academic integrity is at the heart of W&M, and we all are responsible for upholding the ideals of honor and integrity. The Student Handbook (www.wm.edu/studenthandbook) includes your responsibilities as a student and the full Code. I expect your full participation and observance of the Honor Code.

Blackboard. The Blackboard website is the central repository for the course. I will use it to communicate to the class as a group, post Zoom locations for office hours/others class meetings, and grade response papers. You will use it to submit some of your work and complete reading assignments. Make sure that you regularly check both it and the email account associated with Blackboard.

Etiquette. Please do not use cell phone and laptops during class for non-course-related activities. There are several strong academic studies that show that use a laptop during class to multi-task (e.g., shop, browse social media, or catch up on email, etc., while in class) distracts other students, lowers the quality of classroom interaction, and affects the multi-taskers grades and comprehension. I reserve the right to ask students to close laptops during face-to-face meetings.

Course Calendar

For a list of topics by date, see the next page of the syllabus.

To see titles/authors of the readings and to locate links/PDFs, see the Readings folder on the Blackboard website. You will find a folder for each class meeting. Please note that I will be updating the readings folders as we go through the semester. The updates will include specific guidance about the readings (what to focus on, what questions to consider, what to read vs. skim, etc.). I will do by updates by Friday afternoon at 5 pm for the subsequent week's class periods.

Course Outline

Unit 1: Understanding the Context and History of US Health Policy

- 1/28 The U.S. Health Care System Facts & Figures
- 2/2 History of Comprehensive US Health Reform
- 2/4 Healthcare Reform Attempts Pre-ACA
- 2/9 Passage of the Affordable Care Act
- 2/11 Interest Groups and Healthcare Reform Today

Unit 2: Policies Affecting Private Insurance Coverage

- 2/16 Health Insurance and Demand for Healthcare
- 2/18 Demand for Health Insurance
- 2/23 Adverse Selection in Health Insurance
- 2/25 Health Insurance Exchanges
- 3/2 **1st Midterm**
- 3/4 *Break Day*

Unit 3: Public Insurance

- 3/9 Medicaid Basics
- 3/11 Medicaid Expansion
- 3/16 Medicare Basics
- 3/18 The Benefits and Costs of Medicare
- 3/23 Shoring up the ACA via Public and Private Insurance

Unit 4: Policies to Address Healthcare Costs

- 3/25 International Healthcare Systems/Comparisons
- 3/30 Factors that Drive Healthcare Spending Growth
- 4/1 Hospital Prices/Price Transparency
- 4/6 *Break Day*
- 4/8 Prescription Drug Prices
- 4/13 **2nd Midterm**
- 4/15 Medicare Payment
- 4/20 Low Value/High Value Care
- 4/22 Paying for Performance
- 4/27 Coordinated Care

Unit 5: Bringing it All Together

- 5/4 State Health Policy Profiles
- 5/6 State Health Policy Profiles

- 5/17 **Final exam**