

Political Studies Program, Summer 2014
HEALTH CARE POLICY
Instructor: James Capretta
Washington, D.C.

No issue has been more dominant in national politics since 2009 than health care. President Obama made reform of health care his top priority during his first year in office, and Congress passed a sweeping reform plan in March 2010. But the issue has not lost its resonance in the ensuing four years. If anything, our political discourse has grown even more contentious, and the debate is certain to continue for several more years.

This issue stirs deep passions in part because it is about more than technocratic health care policy. It's also about rights and responsibilities, the balance between governmental power and private action, and political power. How the issue is resolved could have important implications for the national economy, the federal budget, and our national political culture.

Monday, July 21, 2014, 9:00 am to Noon

The State of U.S. Health Care

Reading:

- Uwe Reinhardt, "Reforming the Health Care System: The Universal Dilemma," *American Journal of Law & Medicine*, Vol. XIX, Nos. 1 & 2, 1993
- Atul Gawande, "The Cost Conundrum," *The New Yorker*, June 1, 2009
- James C. Capretta, "What's Ailing Health Care?," *The New Atlantis* (Spring 2007)

Discussion Questions:

1. Why has medicine become a political issue?
2. What are the main competing theories about why there are problems in U.S. health care? What are those problems?
3. Are these problems unique to the U.S. situation or universally shared across the developed world?
4. Do these competing diagnoses point in different directions in terms of public policy solutions?

Tuesday, July 22, 2014, 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

The 2010 Reform Plan (PPACA) and Its Critics

Reading:

- Congressional Budget Office, Letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on the PPACA, March 20, 2010

- Jonathan Gruber, “The Impacts of the Affordable Care Act: How Reasonable Are the Projections?”, *National Bureau of Economic Research*, June 2011
- Brian Blase et al., *The Case Against Obamacare: A Health Care Policy Series for the 112th Congress*
- James C. Capretta, “The Fiscal Consequences of the New Health Care Law,” Testimony Presented to the House Budget Committee, January 26, 2011

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the main features of the PPACA?
2. What are the main objections to the law? Are they valid?
3. Are the estimates for the PPACA believable? If not, why not?

Wednesday, July 23, 2014, 9:00 am to Noon

Cost Control and the Economics of Reform

Reading:

- Ezekiel Emmanuel et al., “A Systemic Approach to Containing Health Care Spending,” *New England Journal of Medicine*, August 1, 2012
- Joseph R. Antos et al., “Bending the Cost Curve through Market-Based Incentives,” *New England Journal of Medicine*, August 1, 2012
- James C. Capretta and Tom Miller, “The Defined Contribution Route to Health Care Choice and Competition,” American Enterprise Institute, December 7, 2010

Discussion Questions:

1. Do health care costs need to be controlled? Why, or why not?
2. Can the federal government control health costs? How? What are the pros and cons of turning cost control over to the federal government?
3. Is there any evidence that a market-based system would work? If it did, what are the pros and cons? Would there be equity concerns?

Thursday, July 24, 2014, 9:00 am to Noon

International Perspectives

Reading:

- Karen Davis, Cathy Schoen, and Kristof Stremikis, “Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: How the Performance of the U.S. Health System Compares Internationally,” The Commonwealth Fund, 2010
- Sally Pipes, Testimony on the Canadian Health Care System, Senate HELP Committee, March 11, 2014
- Christopher J. Conover, “Health Care Wasn’t Broken,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 2012

- Christopher J. Conover, “Five Myths About American Health Care,” February 28, 2012

Discussion Questions:

1. Is the prevailing perception that U.S. health care is inferior on costs and quality accurate?
2. What explains the popularity of nationalized systems in most of the developed world?
3. Are the data for international comparisons useful? What other factors beyond health might explain these differences?

Friday, July 25, 2014, 9:00 am to Noon

Mend It, or End It (and Replace It)?

Reading:

- Dan Diamond, “Five Things Obamacare Got Right—And What Experts Would Fix,” *California Healthline*, March 20, 2013
- Paul Ryan, “The Optimist’s Guide to Repeal and Replace: Patient-Centered Health-Care Reform for the 21st Century,” Speech at the Hoover Institution, September 27, 2011
- Douglas Holtz-Eakin and Avik Roy, “The Future of Free-Market Healthcare,” *Reuters*, February 20, 2013
- Douglas Holtz-Eakin and Avik Roy, “The Critics are Wrong About the Future of Free-Market Health Care Reform,” *Forbes*, February 22, 2013
- James C. Capretta and Robert Moffit, “How to Replace Obamacare,” *National Affairs* 11 (Spring 2012)
James C. Capretta “What the Health Care Debate Is Really All About,” *Public Discourse*, January 19, 2010

Discussion Questions:

1. Is the PPACA here to stay?
2. Will it work, and how well? Will it cover most people? Control costs?
3. What is the likely scenario for changing or repealing it? What replacement plan is most likely, and would it meet the objectives of voters?