

Last revised: 03/05/2023

PH 398 - How did US health care become such a disaster? An investigative think tank

Wheaton College, MA, Spring 2023

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On-campus Office: Knapton 007A (Tuesdays and Fridays)

Office Hours: Fridays 12:30 – 2:30 pm @ Knapton 007A and on Zoom

(Preliminary and subject to change)

Course description

Despite being the wealthiest nation in the world, the US has a health care system that ranks dead last among that of eleven high-income countries (including Norway, the Netherlands, Australia, the UK, Germany, New Zealand, Sweden, France, Switzerland, and Canada). Why does the US spend the most money on health care but have a life expectancy that ranks around fortieth in the world? Why is the price of insulin almost ten times higher in the US than in Canada? Why are my hospital bills seemingly harder to understand than ancient hieroglyphic texts? In this advanced seminar-style course, we will hunt for answers to such puzzling questions by critically examining the historical and economic determinants that shaped (and are still shaping) the US health care system. We will devise potential solutions through intensive reading, writing, and research; critical thought and discussion; and interaction with real healthcare leaders who are doing their part to improve the health of their communities. There will be heavy emphasis on persuasive writing and group project work simulating what it's like to operate in a high-stakes industry or policy environment.

Prerequisites:

- PH 101 (Introduction to Public Health)
- Please email me (oh_hace@wheatoncollege.edu) if:
 - o You are an advanced student who plans to take PH 101 concurrently, or
 - o You do not meet this course prerequisites but have evidence for sufficient academic and/or experiential background to take this course

Good background courses (not required):

Working in the intersection of public health, economics, policy, and business requires critical and interdisciplinary thought. The following courses are NOT required, but will be helpful if you do not have much background in public health.

- ECON 102 (Intro to Microeconomics) or ECON 112 (Intro to Microeconomics with BioPharma Applications)
- MGMT 111 (Fundamentals of Business)
- MGMT/PSY/SOC 141 (Statistics for the Social Sciences) **or** MATH 141 (Introductory Statistics)
- ECON 262 (Health Economics)

Required books/readings:

- **(R)** Elisabeth Rosenthal. *An American sickness: How healthcare became big business and how you can take it back*. New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2017. This is our main textbook.
- **(HS)** Marya W. Holcombe & Judith K. Stein. *Writing for decision makers: Memos and reports with a competitive edge*. Belmont CA: Lifetime Learning Publications, 1981. This is the text that we will reference to write concise and persuasive memos.
- Various academic papers, news articles, and videos from the health economics and public health fields.

Recommended references:

- Leiyu Shi & Douglas A. Singh. *Delivering Health Care In America: A Systems Approach* (Eighth Edition). Burlington, MA: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 2022. This is a helpful reference for those who would like a comprehensive text on the US health care system.
- N. Gregory Mankiw. *Principles of Microeconomics* (Seventh Edition). Cengage Learning, 2014. This is a helpful reference for basic microeconomic principles.

Course objectives

This course has the following aims:

- 1) Build a foundational understanding of the key components of the US health care system and study the historical and economic factors that shaped it.
- 2) Analyze and evaluate the methods and arguments constructed by past and current economic and public health literature.
- 3) Develop persuasive writing skills that involve intensive research, sound reasoning, and the synthesis of multiple stakeholder perspectives. Apply these skills in a policy or business-oriented workplace.
- 4) Interact and problem-solve with current leaders in the health care industry.

Guest speakers for this course

Name	Role in the course	Role in the health care system
Mark Cassidy	Industry case presenter	CEO, Westside Children's Therapy
Emerson Song	Industry case presenter	Senior Manager, Integrated Healthcare Association
Niyati Shah	Industry case presenter	Senior Manager, Scipher Medicine
Adam Zoellner	Industry case presenter	Group Leader, Mission analysis and operations research, MITRE
Dr. Scott Rivkees	Guest lecture on the post-COVID future of the health care system	Vice Chair of Health Services, Policy, and Practice; Professor of the Practice, Brown University and former State Surgeon General and Secretary of Health of Florida
Dr. Avril Kaplan	Guest lecture on comparative health systems	Senior Health Specialist, World Bank

Course requirements and expectations:

I expect students to read and digest all assigned readings before class and to attend all class sessions. Class participation is an essential component of this course and will determine a significant portion of your grade. While some of the readings are quite complex, please do not worry: we will clarify and reinforce the material during class discussions. For a particularly complex reading, I will likely assign a subset of the reading and ask you guiding questions to aid your digestion of the material. In addition to the readings, there will be writing assignments that require you to synthesize the material in the course. Each student is required to give a short individual oral presentation on three of their memos during the semester, including the required presentation of a different country's health care system. We will discuss the assignments centered on the prior week's discussion material during the first hour of each class. **Late homework submissions will not be accepted unless arrangements were made at least three days in advance of the due date. That said, please email me if unforeseen personal circumstances or health-related issues arise—I will always lean toward listening and understanding!**

This course is akin to what you would encounter at a graduate school setting: you are expected to take full ownership of your learning. You thus may have to engage in independent learning and research to fill in any gaps in knowledge that you encounter. When you step into full-time jobs, graduate school, and/or entrepreneurial ventures after your time at Wheaton, you will find that most real-life professional scenarios involve situations that you have never encountered before. You will be expected to “figure it out”, often with vague instructions from your supervisor or from your market environment. If you ever get stuck, I encourage you to come to office hours and/or contact me, sooner rather than later! Seeking help and advice is an important channel of learning.

After we cover the material from Rosenthal and the accompanying papers, students will be expected to work in groups to develop policy or business recommendations based on the industries of real leaders who are currently working in health care organizations.

Attendance, participation, & absence policies

A sizeable chunk of your learning from this course will come from in-depth discussion with your colleagues. It is thus critical that you show up for class sessions and contribute to our conversations (one course session is equivalent to a week's worth of content). That said, I understand that life can throw us some major curveballs at inconvenient times. If you have a personal and/or health-related emergency arise, please let me know asap so that I can support you as best as I can. To make up for a missed class session and earn your points for that session, we will schedule a one-on-one meeting to discuss the content that you missed and you will be required to submit an additional assignment based on our discussion. Depending on how much time you need to process your emergency, we will keep the deadlines flexible for these make-up assignments. If, due to an emergency, you miss a class session where you are scheduled to present, you will be required to either give a make-up presentation on a new topic or submit a 2000-word paper (depending on your preference) that we can discuss during our one-on-one meeting. For each course session, I will assign “discussion leaders” based on the random drawing for oral memo presentations. I expect these discussion leaders to drive the conversation (with my help).

The use of Canvas

I will post readings (excluding book readings), links to videos, and announcements on the course Canvas site. Students will also submit all of their assignments and project deliverables on Canvas. Please familiarize yourself with the course Canvas site and let me know asap if there are any questions and/or concerns!

Course grading:

Class participation	28% for attendance, leading discussion, and active participation 2% for introduction to yourself assignment
Weekly one-page policy memos	25% (eight required – will keep seven for final grading: The highest six scores + the score on the comparative health systems memo. The comparative health systems memo cannot be dropped from grading). Students can choose to do an optional ninth creative extra credit assignment for up to 2% toward their final grade.
Oral memo presentations	10% (three required, including comparative health systems memo)
Final group project	25% (group members' strengths report, memo outline, summary of conference call, presentation slides, final paper)
Final group presentation	10%

Grading scale:

- A – 88 - 100%
- B – 76 – 87.99%
- C – 64 – 75.99%
- D – 52 – 63.99%
- F – Below 52%

Accessibility and accommodations statement:

Wheaton is committed to ensuring equitable access to programs and services and to prohibit discrimination in the recruitment, admission, and education of students with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities requiring accommodations or information on accessibility should contact Accessibility Services at the Filene Center for Academic Advising and Career Services at accessibility@wheatoncollege.edu or (508) 286-8215.

Tentative student presentations schedule

** Students will be randomly assigned to two of these five possible oral memo presentations

Date	Presentation topic
Feb 14**	Implementing Medicare for all?
Feb 21**	Implications of a health insurance payment structure change for a vertically-integrated hospital/physician practice
Feb 28**	Taming drug prices
Mar 7**	Medical devices, testing, and ancillary services
Mar 21**	What kind of health care contracting company would you start?
Apr 11	Comparative analysis of another country's healthcare system. Required for all students.
May 2	Final presentation. Required for all students.

Tentative course schedule and readings

Date	Readings & content covered	Homework due	Homework assigned
Jan 31	Course introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overview of the major stakeholders in the US health care system - How to critically analyze research literature - How to write a policy memo <p>Videos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Khan Academy – “Healthcare system overview” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LMHxxvbzFqc) - Kaiser Family Foundation – “Health of the healthcare system” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kIR7TCPQh0c&t=3s) <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (R), Introduction, pages 1-8 - (HS), pages 1 – 22 	None	Assigned: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction to yourself (due Feb 7) 2. Memo #1 - Critique of research paper

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Popper, Karl (1963) "Science: Conjectures and Refutations," in <i>Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge</i>, 33-39, Routledge & Kegan Paul. - Freedman, David A. (1991) "Statistical Models and Shoe Leather," <i>Sociological Methodology</i>, 21(2):291-313. - UChicago Harris Public Policy Leadership Programs. "How to write a policy memo that matters" (https://harris.uchicago.edu/files/how_to_write_a_policy_memo_that_matters_0.pdf) - SBAR (Situation; Background; Assessment; Recommendation) https://asq.org/quality-resources/sbar 		
Feb 7	<p>The age of health insurance and hospitals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The three different types of health insurance (Medicare, Medicaid, Private Health Insurance) - Hospital payment - Health insurance models - Fee-for-service versus managed care - Hospital/Insurer bargaining <p>Videos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kaiser Family Foundation – "Health insurance explained" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-58VD3z7ZiQ) - Khan Academy – "Medicare overview" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VpLKdKkpg68) <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (R), pages 1-54 - (HS), pages 23-43 - Landon et al. (2004) "Comparison of performance of traditional Medicare vs Medicare managed care," <i>JAMA</i>, 291(14): 1744-1752. - Roberts et al. (2018) "Changes in hospital utilization three years into Maryland's global budget program for rural hospitals," <i>Health Affairs (Millwood)</i>, 37(4): 644-653. 	<p>Due:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction to yourself 2. Memo #1 - Critique of research paper 	<p>Assigned:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Memo #2 – What are the biggest barriers to implementing "Medicare for All"? Where should we start? 2. Oral presentation (for those randomly assigned)
Feb 14	The age of physicians	Due:	Assigned:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The evolution of physician priorities in the US. - Physician payment. - Profit-generation strategies - Vertical integration with hospitals <p>Videos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Khan Academy – “Paying doctors” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4J-dRA3MGc8) <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (R), pages 55-86 - (HS), pages 45-64 - La Forgia A, Bond AM, Braun RT, Kjaer K, Zhang M, Casalino LP. Association of Surprise-Billing Legislation with Prices Paid to In-Network and Out-of-Network Anesthesiologists in California, Florida, and New York: An Economic Analysis. JAMA Intern Med. 2021 Oct 1;181(10):1324-1331. doi: 10.1001/jamainternmed.2021.4564. PMID: 34398193; PMCID: PMC8369382. - Post B, Norton EC, Hollenbeck BK, Ryan AM. Hospital-physician integration and risk-coding intensity. Health Econ. 2022 Jul;31(7):1423-1437. doi: 10.1002/hec.4516. Epub 2022 Apr 23. PMID: 35460314. 	<p>1. Memo #2 – What are the biggest barriers to implementing “Medicare for All”? Where should we start?</p> <p>2. Oral presentation (for those randomly assigned)</p>	<p>1. Memo #3 – Analysis of the potential impact of changing a health insurance payment structure for a vertically-integrated hospital and physician group</p> <p>2. Oral presentation (for those randomly assigned)</p>
Feb 21	<p>The age of pharmaceuticals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The evolution of the pharmaceutical firm - Key players in the modern world - Key policies that transformed the pharma business - “Pharma Bro” - Ads and patent plays - Pharmacy benefit managers - Generics <p>Videos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wall Street Journal – “How Drug Prices Work” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aeG2IWxYO_Y) - CBS News – “Mark Cuban launches affordable online pharmacy” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWdoG6H2XrE) <p>Readings</p>	<p>Due:</p> <p>1. Memo #3 – Analysis of the potential impact of changing a health insurance payment structure for a vertically-integrated hospital and physician group (due Feb 21)</p> <p>2. Oral presentation (for those randomly assigned)</p>	<p>Assigned:</p> <p>1. Memo #4 – How do we tame drug prices?</p> <p>2. Oral presentation (for those randomly assigned)</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (R), pages 87-127 - (HS), pages 65-83 - Kang SY, Bai G, DiStefano MJ, Socal MP, Yehia F, Anderson GF. Comparative Approaches to Drug Pricing. Annu Rev Public Health. 2020 Apr 2;41:499-512. doi: 10.1146/annurev-publhealth-040119-094305. Epub 2019 Dec 24. PMID: 31874070. - The Commonwealth Fund. "Paying for Prescription Drugs Around the World: Why Is the U.S. an Outlier?" https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/issue-briefs/2017/oct/paying-prescription-drugs-around-world-why-us-outlier - The Commonwealth Fund. "Are pharmacy benefit managers the next target for prescription drug reform?" (https://www.commonwealthfund.org/blog/2022/are-pharmacy-benefit-managers-next-target-prescription-drug-reform) - https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/martin-shkreli-who-raised-drug-prices-5-000-percent-heads-into-fraud-trial/ - https://www.npr.org/2022/05/19/1100019063/pharma-bro-martin-shkreli-been-released-from-prison 		
Feb 28	<p>The age of medical devices, testing, and ancillary services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The history of the medical device industry and their regulation - How ancillary services became big business - Billing strategies <p>Videos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - U.S. Food and Drug Administration – "Medical Device Clinical Trials" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SApXnmZlgFE) - CBS News – "Are prostate cancer PSA screenings necessary?" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzW1I2nCjxQ) <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (R), pages 128-165 - (HS), pages 85-99 	<p>Due:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Memo #4 – How do we tame drug prices? Oral presentation (for those randomly assigned) 	<p>Assigned:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Memo #5 – What problem do you want fixed and how would we start fixing it? Oral presentation (for those randomly assigned)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Brookings Institution – “Private equity-owned air ambulances receive higher payments, generate larger and more frequent surprise bills.” (https://www.brookings.edu/essay/private-equity-owned-air-ambulances-receive-higher-payments/) - Pace LE, Keating NL. A Systematic Assessment of Benefits and Risks to Guide Breast Cancer Screening Decisions. <i>JAMA</i>. 2014;311(13):1327–1335. doi:10.1001/jama.2014.1398 		
Mar 7	<p>The age of contractors, research, and good works for profit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do contractors in the industry do? - Medical codes - “Research” paid by organizations with a lot to gain - The political game <p>Videos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CNBC – “How Lobbying Became A \$3.5 Billion Industry” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZVfTCBUkgM) - Contempo Coding – “Introduction to Medical Coding” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iBKLbXhFOJE) <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (R), pages 166-204 - (HS), pages 101-116 - Groß M, Jürges H, Wiesen D. The effects of audits and fines on upcoding in neonatology. <i>Health Econ</i>. 2021 Aug;30(8):1978-1986. doi: 10.1002/hec.4272. Epub 2021 May 5. PMID: 33951233. - Boetto E, Golinelli D, Carullo G, <i>et al</i>. Frauds in scientific research and how to possibly overcome them <i>Journal of Medical Ethics</i> 2021;47:e19. 	<p>Due:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Memo #5 – What problem do you want fixed and how would we start fixing it? Oral presentation (for those randomly assigned) 	<p>Assigned:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Memo #6 – What kind of health care contracting company would you start? (Due Mar 21) Oral presentation (for those randomly assigned)
Mar 14	NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK		
Mar 21	The age of conglomerates and gaming policies for profit	Due:	Assigned:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Horizontal and vertical integration - Assessing mergers from the consumer's and firm's perspectives <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (R), 205-238 - Attorney General Denies Application for Merger of Lifespan and Care New England Health Systems: https://riag.ri.gov/press-releases/attorney-general-denies-application-merger-lifespan-and-care-new-england-health - Gaynor, Antitrust Applied: Hospital Consolidation Concerns and Solutions: https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Gaynor_Senate_Judiciary_Hospital_Consolidation_May_19_2021.pdf - Paul J Eliason, Benjamin Heebsh, Ryan C McDevitt, James W Roberts, How Acquisitions Affect Firm Behavior and Performance: Evidence from the Dialysis Industry, <i>The Quarterly Journal of Economics</i>, Volume 135, Issue 1, February 2020, Pages 221–267, https://par.nsf.gov/servlets/purl/10180446. 	<p>1. Memo #6 – What kind of health care contracting company would you start?</p> <p>2. Oral presentation (for those randomly assigned)</p>	<p>1. Memo #7 – Analysis of the tradeoffs of hospital mergers</p> <p>(No oral presentation assignment for Memo #7)</p>
Mar 28	<p>Industry guest speakers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emerson Song, Senior Manager, Integrated Healthcare Association - Adam Zoellner, Mission analysis and operations research, MITRE <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (HS), pages 143-162 - For MITRE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o A National Strategy for Digital Health - For IHA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o TBD <p>Optional (if you plan to do extra credit assignment):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (R), pages 280-330 	<p>Due:</p> <p>1. Memo #7 – Analysis of the tradeoffs of hospital mergers</p> <p>(No oral presentation assignment for Memo #7)</p>	<p>Assigned:</p> <p>1. Memo #8 – Comparative analysis of another country's health system (due Apr 11)</p> <p>2. Oral presentation of Memo #8 (everybody – due Apr 11)</p>
Apr 4	<p>Industry guest speakers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Niyati Shah, Senior Manager, Scipher Medicine 	<p>Due:</p> <p>No assignments due this day</p>	<p>See Mar 28 assignments</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mark Cassidy, CEO, Westside Children's Therapy <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Industry-specific readings TBD - Rochester Institute of Technology. "10 Tips for Writing Professional Emails" (https://www.rit.edu/behindthebricks/content/10-tips-writing-professional-emails) 		
Apr 11	<p>I) Comparative health systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guest lecture by Dr. Avril Kaplan, Senior Health Specialist at the World Bank <p>II) What aspects of another country's health system would you want for the US?</p> <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TBD 	<p>Due:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Memo #8 – Comparative analysis of another country's health system Oral presentation of Memo #8 (everybody) 	<p>Assigned:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (Extra credit): Develop a five-criteria tool for selecting a hospital for your grandparents (due Apr 25) Final project packet <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Outline of memo (per HS) (due Apr 18) - Summary of call with guest speaker (due Apr 25) - Final paper (due May 2) Final presentation (due May 2)
Apr 18	<p>What hospital would you choose?</p> <p>What can we expect "post"-COVID?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guest lecture by Dr. Scott Rivkees, Professor of the Practice, Brown University School of Public Health (former State Surgeon General and Secretary of Health of Florida) <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TBD 	<p>Due:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Outline of memo following (HS) 	See Apr 11 assignments
Apr 25	<p>Guided group work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discuss call summaries with guest speakers - Protected time for final projects 	<p>Due:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Summary of call with guest speaker (Extra credit): Develop a five-criteria tool for 	See Apr 11 assignments

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		selecting a hospital for your grandparents	
May 2	Final presentations	Due: 1. Final paper 2. Final presentation	