

## **Problems in Comparative Health Policy**

Syllabus  
(Spring 2008)

Prof. Douglas J. Besharov

Government health care spending in industrial countries has increased significantly in the past decade and even more substantial increases are projected in the future. Although the United States leads OECD countries in the percent of GDP spent on health care and in per capita health care spending, all countries are struggling with issues of cost containment balanced with providing services.

This course examines how the U.S. and other industrial nations deliver health care and attempt to control costs. It then explores why countries with some variant of universal health care regularly spend a smaller percentage of GDP on health care than the U.S. Finally, it discusses the tradeoffs involved in various approaches and the varying roles of public and private resources.

This course will be a research-oriented seminar in which students will work closely with the instructor and each other. Student input will be integral to the development of the required projects for the course. Please note in the schedule below that the class is not scheduled for every week in the semester; for some of the open weeks, I will be scheduling guest lectures in downtown D.C. The other weeks will be left open to allow students to work on their projects.

### **Projects**

There are five projects for this course all of which will revolve around a single country's health system as chosen by each student on the second week of class. The project topics are noted in the schedule below. The template for each paper will be determined by the class on the day that we discuss the project topics. Please note that the final project will be a joint report from all members of the class which will build on the previous four projects. We will discuss the format of this report later in the semester.

I try to work closely with students and I will be pleased to discuss topics and help plan research strategies. I am generally in my campus office on Wednesdays, but it is necessary to call to make an appointment. My campus phone number is (301)405-6341. If you cannot reach me on campus, please feel free to call AEI (202)862-5904 or, preferably, at home (301)986-1969 (8:30-10 p.m. is best).

I try to respond to e-mails in a timely manner: besharov@umd.edu. My fax number is (202) 862-5802.

## Grading

Project #1: 15%  
Project #2: 15%  
Project #3: 15%  
Project #4: 15%  
Joint report: 30%  
Class participation: 10%

## Recommended References

Although there are no assigned textbooks for this class, I will assign you readings for each of our class periods. Below, I have listed a number of references that will help you in the initial stages of your projects in understanding the health care system of the country you have chosen.

Dixon, Anna and Elias Mossialos, eds. *Health Care Systems in Eight Countries: Trends and Challenges* (London, European Observatory on Health Care Systems, April 2002) at <http://www.euro.who.int/document/OBS/hcs8countries.pdf>

OECD. *Health at a Glance 2007: OECD Indicators* (Paris, OECD, 2007) at <http://fiordiliji.sourceoecd.org/v1=5298929/cl=25/nw=1/rpsv/health2007/index.htm>.

Colombo, Francesca and Nicole Tapay. "Private Health Insurance in OECD Countries: The Benefits and Costs for Individuals and Health Systems." OECD Health Department Working Papers 15 (2004) at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/42/6/33820355.pdf>

Simoens, Steven and Jeremy Hurst. "The Supply of Physician Services in OECD Countries." OECD Health Department Working Papers 21 (2006) at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/27/22/35987490.pdf>

Erlandsen, Espen. "Improving the Efficiency of Health Care Spending: Selected Evidence on Hospital Performance." OECD Economics Department Working Papers 555 (2007) at <http://oberon.sourceoecd.org/v1=1213462/cl=13/nw=1/rpsv/cgi-bin/wppdf?file=514mjxp41dr4.pdf>

Mattke, Soeren, Edward Kelley, Peter Scherer, Jeremy Hurst, and Maria Luisa G. Lapetra. "Health Care Quality Indicators Project: Initial Indicators Report." OECD Health Department Working Papers 22 (2006) at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/1/34/36262514.pdf>

## Schedule of Classes

*January 30: Course introduction.* The importance (and challenges) of comparative studies, the special case of health policy, the nature of our inquiry.

*February 6: Country selection.* Each student selects a country to study, explaining why it is a country of interest and describing the types of information available.

*Country descriptions (Project #1) planning.* The first product of the course will be a description of the country's basic program. In this session, the class will develop a template for the report: Is it universal? What role does the private sector play? What are enrollment procedures? Do individuals have a choice of providers? How are charges/premiums determined? What is/is not covered? What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the country's program? What changes/improvements have been proposed? And so forth.

*February 13:* This class is being held open for additional discussion/planning for Project #1, and also a guest visitor to the class.

*February 20: Project #1 paper presented.* Papers due on the Monday preceding.

*February 27: U.S. comparisons (Project #2) planning.* The second product of the course will be a comparison of the county's program to that of the U.S. In this session, the class will develop a template for the report: How does access to health care differ by income and employment between the two countries? What are the differences in amount spend per capita and as a percent of GDP and what are the principles drivers of cost in each country? How do the countries differ in measured health outcomes and which health outcomes are better determinants of the overall strength of each nation's system? And so forth.

*March 5:* This class is being held open for additional discussion/planning for Project #2, and also a guest visitor to the class.

*March 12: Project #2 paper presented.* Papers due on the Monday preceding.

*March 19: NO CLASS – Spring Break.*

*March 26:* This class is being held open for additional discussion/planning for Project #3, and also a guest visitor to the class.

*April 2: Cost containment analysis (Project #3) planning.* The third product of the course will be a description of the county's resource allocation and cost containment procedures. In this session, the class will develop a template for the report: What policies are in place that limit government health spending? Are these policies effective in containing costs? What are the trade-offs of these cost containment policies? What are the possible effects of stricter cost containment policies? Of more lenient policies? And so forth.

*April 9: Project #3 presented. Papers due on the Monday preceding.*

*April 16: Applicable lessons paper (Project #4) planning.* The fourth product of the course will be an analysis of the lessons applicable to the U.S. of the county's health policies, particularly its resource allocation and cost containment procedures. In this session, the class will develop a template for the report: What lessons can be learned from other countries that apply to the current U.S. health care system? To a proposed universal health care system? To a variant of the two systems? Can the U.S. maintain its current health care system but still import policies from other countries? And so forth.

*April 23: This class is being held open for additional discussion/planning for Project #4, and also a guest visitor to the class.*

*April 30: Project #4 paper presented. Papers due on the Monday preceding.*

*May 7: Joint report planning.* Describe broad elements of U.S. system, and then prepare a collaborative report on cross-national lessons for U.S. Each student will be assigned an identifiable section (which will be individually graded).

*May 14: Joint report presented.*

*May 21: Joint report due.*