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:


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
• Brian Blase et al., The Case Against Obamacare: A Health Care Policy Series for the 112th Congress

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:

• 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:

• 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

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:


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?