300.652 THE POLITICS OF HEALTH POLICY
March 27 to May 15, 2020
Fridays 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM
All class sessions held via Zoom
Break out rooms 11:00-11:50 AM via Zoom
(4 credit hours)

FACULTY:
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COURSE OBJECTIVES:
R. Virchow, one of the founders of public health, once said that “Public Health is a Social Science and Politics is Public Health in its most profound sense.” Yet research into how political forces shape the health of populations is limited. The focus of this course is on the dynamics of these political and economic forces and on the powerful effects they have on health. It aims to analyze how power ---- namely class, race, and gender power --- is reproduced in society, nationally and internationally, and how it affects the health and wellbeing of populations. The course also analyzes the causes of underdevelopment and looks at the reasons for the growth in social inequalities, both worldwide and within nations.
Additional issues central to this course include:
• The effect of wealth and income distributions on levels of population health;
• The question of why some countries have national health insurance, others have national health services, and the U.S. has neither;
• The influences of financial and corporate interests in the health sector;
• The question of whether political parties make a difference; the finances of political parties; and what is meant by democracy with a look at its meaning for health.
• A special focus will be made on the political context that determines the Coronavirus epidemic, analyzing the different responses in different countries.

These and other topics are discussed in both formal presentations and in Oxford-style debates with active student participation. The course is an adaptation of a previous course that was awarded The Golden Apple four times. No consent of instructor required. All students are welcome.

CLASS SESSIONS:
Classes are held **Fridays from 09:00 AM to 12:00 PM (via Zoom)** according to the following timetable:

9:00 to 9:45 AM Lecture
9:45 to 10:00 AM Break
MODUS OPERANDI:
Each class session involves the following three components:

- 9:00-9:45 AM: Professor Navarro and guest professor will present materials in a lecture-style format. Slides will be provided in CoursePlus and will be presented in the session.

- 10:00-11:00 AM: Debate and Discussion forums

- How countries respond to the Coronavirus epidemic.

- Participating professors will present material in a lecture-style format.

- Debate and discussion forums, similar to Oxford-style debates in which participants defend alternative positions, are designed to stimulate exchange among course participants. Active participation is expected from all class enrollees.

- Each student will complete one three-page position paper on one of the topics addressed in the debate and discussion forum.

- Examples of topics that may be raised for discussion and debate include:
  - What are the conditions for a successful response to the pandemic?
  - Which countries are in a better position to respond to the pandemic?
  - Is the United States ready and equipped for such a response?
  - The current Administration’s intent to dismantle the Environmental Protection Agency
  - The proposed tax reform by the Trump Administration and its impact on inequalities in the U.S.
  - The failed dismantling of ObamaCare
  - What are the politics of current tobacco or gun control initiatives?
  - What are the political and social forces surrounding the debate over public funding of abortions?

Student workgroups (from 11:00 AM-12:00 Noon):
The class will be divided into small groups of no more than 5 students per group. Each group will analyze a specific piece of legislation or public intervention in order to comprehend the political process that led to the approval of that specific intervention. It will focus primarily on the “hanky panky” of politics, studying the interests of the different groups involved in that process and how these groups operate in the political institutions and through what instruments. The primary focus of these working groups will be the Coronavirus pandemic. The group will choose one of the following topics:

- The political context that determines the Coronavirus epidemic and the response and how the Central government responds to this epidemic? How the CDC and other central agencies
responded to it?
● How the state and municipal departments responded to it?
● How the pharmaceutical industry responded to it?
● What are the different political parties’ response to it?
● How other countries have responded to it?

In the last two class sessions, students present the findings of their study.

EVALUATION OF STUDENTS:
1. An individual three-page position paper on one of the topics addressed in the debate and discussion forum: 20% of final grade.
2. Participation in debates/discussions: 35% of final grade.
3. Final group paper and presentation: 45% of final grade.

ETHICAL CONDUCT
Academic ethics as discussed in the Policy and Procedure Memorandum for Students will be adhered to in this class.

READINGS:

There are required readings for each class session, all of which are posted on Course Plus. Some readings are classic articles, while others are examples of relevant current studies. The goal is to expose students to a diversity of positions in the analysis of the issues studied.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

WEEK 1: The Political Context of Health Policy, Part I: The International and National political context of major health problems in today’s world

Class: March 27, 2020
Lecturer: Vicente Navarro

● What is the relationship between the political, economic and social forces that impact health policy? How can this relationship be conceptualized?
● What is meant by the political context of health?
● What type of questions can be asked to comprehend the political context of health?
● How are public health and healthcare affected by the political context?

Required Readings


Navarro V. (2020). The Consequences of Neoliberalism in the Current Pandemic. (To be published)
WEEK 2: The Political Context of Health Policy, Part II: Globalization, development and the North-South divide.

Class: April 3, 2020
Lecturer: Vicente Navarro

- How is economic globalization affecting health and social policies?
- How does the North-South relationship affect health and social policies?
- Discuss some of the major theories of development and underdevelopment of health policies (i.e.: structuralist, Malthusian, functionalist, and others).

Required Readings


WEEK 3: The Political Context of Health Policy, Part III: Political systems and health policy: The welfare state in the developed world.

Class: April 10, 2020
Lecturer: Vicente Navarro

- Discuss the political forces behind welfare state development in advanced industrialized countries.
- To what degree is there democratic and popular participation in the establishment, development, and evaluation of health policies?
- What is the impact of political parties and social movements on health policy?
- How did the Maastricht Treaty impact the welfare states of European Union nations?

Required Readings


Class: April 17, 2020
Lecturer: Vicente Navarro

- What are the political and economic forces behind the growth of social inequalities?
- How does greater social inequality impact on the health and welfare of populations?
**Required Readings**


**WEEK 5: The Political Determinants of Health Care Systems:** The Political Determinants of National Health Systems. Summary Session

Class: April 24, 2020
Lecturer: Vicente Navarro
- Describe the political forces behind some of the major public health reforms in developed countries.
- What the US can learn from other countries and what other countries can learn from the U.S.

**Required Readings**


**WEEK 6: The Political and Economic Determinants of Health & Social Policies, Part II:** Debates on Income Inequality and Social Cohesion - Employment, Income and Health in the U.S.

Class: May 1, 2020
Lecturer: John Schmitt
- What are the political, social and economic forces that determine the standard of living in the U.S.?
- What is the relationship between economic power, economic outcomes, the media, and popular opinion?
- How well does the U.S. economy do at creating good jobs and economic mobility?

**Required Readings**


Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez, Gabriel Zucman
WEEK 7: Student Working Group Presentations
Class: May 8, 2020

**Due in COURSEPLUS before Class:** Individual Student Position Papers, Group Presentations

WEEK 8: Student Working Group Presentations
Class: May 15, 2020

**Due in COURSEPLUS before Class:** Group Presentations, Final Group Papers