

ECON 190: ISSUES IN U.S. HEALTH CARE

SPRING 2020

PROFESSOR: Ian McCarthy
CLASS: MW 2:30pm – 3:45pm
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Course Description

Health care markets are unique in many ways, including incomplete information on the prices and quality of health care services, incomplete information on what health services are needed, asymmetric information between individuals and insurers as well as between individuals and physicians, modified incentives through the provision of health insurance, and the perception of health care as a fundamental right rather than a standard consumer good. In the U.S., health care markets are further complicated by the fragmented nature of the health care system, including the market for health insurance as well as hospital and physician services. Health economics helps to shed light on these important issues and is a rapidly growing field with an increasing role in public policy.

This course is designed to provide a general understanding of the U.S. health care system through weekly discussions of topical issues. Our weekly discussions will cover many key aspects of our health care system, including health care spending in the U.S., major health care policies, and future challenges of our health care system.

Learning Objectives

Understanding health economics as a student is difficult as many of us have not yet been exposed to the health care system. Purchasing a health insurance plan, choosing a doctor, visiting a specialist, being admitted to a hospital, paying a hospital bill - these are decisions and activities that we often don't make as young adults. Moreover, the study of health economics as a sub-specialty requires some understanding of microeconomics as well as empirical analysis. Naturally, we cannot cover all of this content in one course. We will instead focus on broader issues in the U.S. health care system, with relevant economics and empirical details discussed as necessary. By the end of this course, my goal is that you will:

1. Understand how much the U.S. spends on health care and the primary drivers of these expenditures;
2. Understand the different forms of reimbursement in our health care system, including the details of Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurance reimbursement;
3. Explain the intentions, effects, and shortcomings of the Affordable Care Act; and
4. Accurately describe the benefits and costs of a "Medicare for all"-type system.

Text and Other Materials

The readings and materials for this class will be introduced weekly, with supplemental readings available on occasion. All materials will be publicly accessible...no textbooks or subscriptions required.

All links and readings will be made available on our class website, <https://imccart.github.io/Econ-190/>. Grades and announcements specific to our class will be posted on our Canvas site.

Academic Integrity and Honor Code

The Emory University Honor Code is taken seriously and governs all work in this course. Details about the Honor Code are available online. By taking this course, you affirm that it is a violation of the code to cheat on exams, to plagiarize, to deviate from the instructions about collaboration on work that is submitted for grades, to give false information to a faculty member, and to undertake any other form of academic misconduct. You agree that the teacher is entitled to move you to another seat during examinations, without explanation. You also affirm that if you witness others violating the code you have a duty to report them to the honor council.

Course Outline

Below is a preliminary outline for each weekly topic. Please see the <https://imccart.github.io/Econ-190/> for up-to-date information and links for each topic.

Understanding our Current Health Care System	
Topic 1	Health Spending Podcast: Kaiser Health News, What the Health? “We Spend HOW MUCH On Health Care?”
Topic 2	Private Insurance and Health Care Access Documentary: <i>The Waiting Room</i>
Topic 3	Medicare Podcast: Kaiser Health News, What the Health? “All About Medicare.”
Topic 4	Medicaid Podcast: Kaiser Health News, What the Health? “All About Medicaid.”
Topic 5	The Affordable Care Act (aka Obamacare) Podcast: Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, Closer Look, “Episode 2: Unraveling the Effects of the Affordable Care Act After 10 Years
Topic 6	Hospital Pricing and Competition Podcast: Tradeoffs: Health Care, Policy People, “The Train Has Left The Station”
Topic 7	Health Care Spending and Waste Documentary: <i>Money and Medicine</i> Also: See the NYTimes article, “The Experts Were Wrong...”

Topic 8	Health Care Inequalities Documentary: <i>Take Care, Mr. Elson</i>
New Problems and Challenges Going Forward	
Topic 9	The Future of the Affordable Care Act Podcast: Kaiser Health News, What the Health? “ACA Still Under A Cloud After Court Ruling.”
Topic 10	Opioids Video: National Institute for Health Care Management, “Overcoming Opioids: Paths to Progress”
Topic 11	Surprise Billing Podcast: Kaiser Health News, What the Health? “Who Will Pay To Fix Problems Of Surprise Medical Bills?”
Topic 12	Redesigning Health Insurance Podcast: Tradeoffs: Health Care, Policy, People, “The Good Stuff.”
Topic 13	Medicare for All Podcast: Kaiser Health News, What the Health? “All About ‘Medicare for All’ ”

Assignments

Your grade in this class will be determined by weekly homework assignments (no exams). Each assignment is the same and consists of two parts:

First, before the start of class each week, write down your own understanding of the topic for that week and one question about that topic for which you’d like an answer. You must submit these on Canvas **before class** each week.

Second, at the end of each week, try to answer the question you posed and correct any misunderstandings you had at the beginning of the week.

Full credit will be given for completing both parts to each assignment. There are no wrong answers. There will be at least 12 assignments in the semester, 10 of which will go toward your final grade. That means you should get 2 weeks to miss an assignment. Please use those sparingly!

Communication

I will use Canvas to communicate with everyone as needed. As such, please check Canvas regularly (at least twice a week) for new information. For any specific questions you have regarding the class or health economics more generally, I am happy to meet with you and discuss in person. Unless otherwise announced, I will always be available during my office hours. But if these times do not work for you, just send me an email and we can schedule another time to meet. I will do my best to respond to all emails within 24 hours, but please allow more time over the weekend.

Evaluation

Final grades will be determined based on your 10 final homework assignments, with each assignment worth 10 points. Letter grades will be assigned at the end of the course based on total score achieved: (A = 100-93%, A- = 92.99-90%, B+ = 89.99-87%, B = 86.99-83%, B- = 82.99-80%, C+ = 79.99-77%, C = 76.99-73%, C- = 72.99-70%, D+ = 69.99-67%, D = 66.99-60%, F = <60%)