PhD in Social and Political Sciences

Course: 41029 HEALTH & SOCIETY

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Instructors:

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Course Description

The field of health is dynamic and multifaceted, shaped by a complex interplay of social, economic, and political factors. The well-being of individuals is influenced by diverse, interconnected determinants, while economic and social institutions, in turn, depend on the health of the populations they serve. In today's world, health and healthcare present both unprecedented opportunities and pressing challenges. While technological advancements and medical innovations continue to transform healthcare, societies also face rising inequalities, escalating costs, evolving ethical dilemmas, and emerging health crises.

The **Health & Society** course provides PhD students with a critical, interdisciplinary framework to examine these issues through the lens of social sciences. The course explores the broader socio-demographic, cultural, and political contexts that shape individual health behaviors, healthcare systems, and health policy. It adopts both an individual-level (behavioral) and system-wide (population) perspective, with a primary disciplinary focus on health policy and health economics.

A key component of the course is the practical application of research methodologies used in health economics and policy. Through a combination of traditional lectures, critical discussions of scholarly papers, and hands-on evaluations of real-world case studies, students will gain firsthand experience in the strengths and limitations of these research approaches. By the end of the course, students will be equipped to conduct empirical research that contributes to advancing knowledge in health policy, health economics, and the broader societal implications of health.

Coursework and Grading

1) **Students' presentations** (30%) – Throughout the course students will have the chance to present selected papers on a chosen topic related to the course contents.

2) **Final exam** (70%)

SYLLABUS

Block 1: Health & Society: exploring the bidirectional link through research	
Lesson 1	**Introduction to the course** • Defining health: biomedical, social, and political perspectives • Overview of health determinants: individual, social, economic, and political factors
Lesson 2	**The socioeconomic gradient in health and health inequity** • How do we quantify socioeconomic disparities in health? • Social, economic, political determinants of health: prevalent theories and models
Lessons 3	**Health co-benefits to other sectors in the society: theoretical framework and current research** *Class discussion on selected papers (student presentation)*
Block 2: The Economics of Health & Healthcare Systems	
Lesson 4	**Healthcare Systems – Structure, Performance, and Financing** • Key models of healthcare systems and their financing mechanisms. • Healthcare system performance: theoretical framework and empirical research
Lesson 5	**Optimal health expenditure** • Macro-level expenditure: effectiveness and efficiency • Trends in macro-level expenditure • Budget cuts and health outcomes
Lesson 6	**Determinants of health expenditure: aging** • Determinants of healthcare spending • Common arguments for healthcare expenditure growth: aging
Lesson 7	**Determinants of health spending: insurance and moral hazard** • Health insurance and asymmetric information • Is moral hazard a risk healthcare spending? • What are the pros and cons of the existing experimental evidence?
Lesson 8	**Determinants of health spending: health behaviors**

	• Health behaviors and healthcare spending • Are bad behaviors “rational”? • Policies and health behaviors
Block 3: Frontiers in health policy and health economics research	
Lesson 9	**Evaluation of health systems’ performance: theoretical framework and empirical challenges** • Defining health system performance: Key dimensions (efficiency, equity, quality, access, responsiveness) • Importance of rigorous methodological approaches in health system evaluation
Lesson 10	**Economic evaluation in healthcare: theoretical underpinnings and empirical applications** Measuring of health outcomes: theoretical underpinnings and empirical challenges • Measuring quality of life • Monetary value of health benefits • Beyond health outcomes – wellbeing
Lessons 11	**Experimental studies in health economics & policy research** **Discrete choice experiments** • Comparison to other design used in health service research • Overview of applications of experimental studies in health economics and policy • Introduction to Discrete Choice Experiments: what are they and their application in health economics?
Lesson 12	**Final session: student present research ideas** Course Wrap-up