

Course Syllabus

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Master of Applied Psychology (MAP)

Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology (GSAPP)

Rutgers University

New Brunswick, New Jersey

18:844:512 Public Policy in Mental Health

Instructor: Judith Glassgold, PsyD

E-mail: judith.glassgold@rutgers.edu

Fall 2021 Introduction

The world has changed in front of our eyes due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and protests against racial injustice. As a health crisis, COVID-19 pandemic affects our health and wellbeing, particularly our mental health and psychological wellbeing. Many have dealt with uncertainty, fear, isolation, hardship, and loss. We all are trying to understand where we go next.

At the same time we have come face to face with the impact of discrimination and prejudice on our society. The deaths of African Americans at the hands of government authority raises questions about the fundamental nature of our ideals and our government's equitable treatment of its citizens. The pandemic also raises profound questions of fairness and equity in our society as the pandemic affected Americans unequally.

I feel it would be remis to have a class on behavioral health policy and not address the times we live in and these two challenges that shape our lives and careers. I hope this class can provide you a foundation on which you can build your career in behavioral health and help you understand the times we live in. So, this semester, we focus on a close examination of the effects and implications of COVID-19 and health equity for behavioral health policies in the U.S.

The existing healthcare system in the U.S. is the foundation upon which any response to these challenges is based, so we examine the existing policies and seek to understand where we need to go. There are many improvements that need to be made to our behavioral health system so that you can innovate and make a positive difference in our world.

Finally, this is a course on policy, which will include a section on how to understand, analyze, and when necessary change the status quo and public policy via science and advocacy. I hope this course gives you a sense of how to be active and engaged in these complicated times. We will also examine the first year of the Biden/Harris administration to examine their policies. Finally, New Jersey has a gubernatorial election this year. We will discuss election news and policy differences in a nonpartisan manner where appropriate to our subject matter.

Note: I will use the term behavioral health as an overarching term to describe the mental health, substance use, education, neurodevelopmental policies. Mental health, substance misuse, education and other specific terms will be used to describe those specific issues.

Course Description

This course examines the federal and state policies affecting mental health, substance use, special education, and neurodiversity. Students will develop an understanding of policies affecting access, financing, and treatment. Psychology also can improve policy. We will discuss and explore how to integrate psychological science into public policy. Skills learned will include skills in research and advocacy for behavioral health policies.

An emphasis will be on learning skills for critical analysis of contemporary policy issues especially policies that aim to: expand access to care, reduce behavioral health disparities, improve treatment alignment to patient needs, encourage service delivery reform, increase community services, and reduce re-institutionalization. Students will be trained in gathering and evaluating information that can inform their perspective on policy and services.

Reading and topics may change during the class.

Course Objectives

- 1. Students will be able to analyze problems related to current healthcare dilemmas in mental health, substance misuse treatment, and neurodevelopmental/neurodiversity issues.
2. Students will complete research in public policy.
3. Students will develop a scientifically-based proposal for policy change.
4. Students will learn skills to advocate for policy change.

Course Responsibilities

Expect to spend 6-7 hours per week on the class in both synchronous and asynchronous activities.

- Engaged reading of materials
Active, informed participation in weekly discussions
Participation in class/group tasks and assignments
Students will prepare 2 written public policy documents

Course Structure

This course will be a mix of synchronous (in real time) and asynchronous (self-paced) classes. Some of the classes may be in-person or via Zoom. As of August 1, 2021, I do not know if/how many classes will be held in the classroom as our class size exceeds Rutgers COVID-19 room limit. I will update this information as I learn more.

Anyone can take this class totally asynchronous (self-paced) and do the assignments and watch the class sessions. The main difference between asynchronous classes and synchronous is that the discussions for the asynchronous course are entered in the discussion portal via Canvas for that class date. However, it will be more work; please let me know if you want this option.

If you choose a synchronous option (by Zoom or in-person), you are required to attend synchronous sessions (at least via Zoom) in real time (unless excused with permission of the instructor or asynchronous participation). Zoom sessions will be conducted by the professor and guest lecturers. All sessions will be recorded for those who can't attend or who wish to review the material. Two classes may be entirely virtual and offered asynchronously to all participants.

There are deadlines for certain assignments to keep you on task but extensions will be granted. If necessary, I will set up smaller groups learning pods to give you a chance to work closely with your learning community; these activities can be scheduled at your discretion.

Course material is online on the Canvas Learning Management System. Synchronous students will simply participate in the synchronous discussions in-person or on Zoom.

For classes are done via synchronous sessions on Zoom. You will be sent the link in advance. Due to class size, please mute your microphone. Please use Chat for questions. Chat is only for course material. I will answer questions that are posted in the Chat: please indicate it is a question. You can "chat" with each other during the lecture. Please use your camera when possible, it is helpful to me to see if you look bored, confused etc.

Course Basics

You will need to have access to a computer with an up-to-date browser, operating system and some additional software on your computer to take this class. All questions regarding CANVAS should be directed to the Help Desk.

Please bring a device to in-person classes that has internet access and that you can read/download files.

Some of the documents in this course will be available to you in PDF form. If you do not have Adobe Acrobat Reader software on your computer, you can download it by going to http://get.adobe.com/reader/ .

Announcements

Announcements will be posted in CANVAS on a weekly basis. They will appear on your CANVAS dashboard when you log in and/or will be sent to you directly through your preferred method of notification from CANVAS. Please make certain to check them regularly, as they will contain any important information about upcoming projects or class concerns.

Email

In this course we will use email for private messages. You can either check your messages in the CANVAS system or set your notifications to your preferred method of contact. Please check your messages regularly. When submitting messages, please do the following:

- Put a subject in the subject box that describes the email content with your name, week and message subject. For example: YOUR NAME WK2 ASSIGNMENT.
Send email only to Inbox and not my personal email account.
Do not send messages asking general information about the class, please post those in the Online Questions & Office Hours.
Technical questions about CANVAS should be sent to help@canvas.rutgers.edu
Do not submit your assignments by message.
Make certain to check your messages frequently.

Questions

In online courses it is normal to have many questions about things that relate to the course, such as clarification about assignments, course materials, or assessments. Please post these in the Discussion Forum set up for questions: Online Questions & Office Hours, which you can access by clicking the DISCUSSIONS button in the course navigation links. This is an open forum, and you are encouraged to give answers and help each other.

Discussions

Discussion Forums are a way for you to engage with each other about the course content. Most lesson modules will have question that links to a Discussion forum. You can also access each forum by clicking on the Discussions button in the course navigation links. In order to get full credit for each discussion, you will need to post a thoughtful, well-written response to the question and respond to two of your classmates' answers by the deadline noted on Canvas. See the Discussion Rubrics for more information on how to create these posts.

Office Hours

I will be available before/after class when in-person and for private virtual office hours using Canvas. We will schedule time to connect via Zoom. There is a virtual Discussion FAQ forum for ongoing questions.

Turnaround/Feedback

Written Discussions and Assignments will be graded within 10 days.

Important Dates

The due dates for your assignments can be found in the Calendar in the global navigation links at the top of your screen and with each assignment. Please review these. In addition, I will post reminders prior to the due dates in the Announcements and the Module's overview file.

Weekly Assignments

Each week you will need to complete the following:

- Engage with Canvas system and review Modules.
Follow Class syllabus and Calendar
Complete Reading or watch/listen to audiovisual files.
Post or Class Participation in the weekly Discussion
Complete any weekly quizzes, assignments, or other tasks

Course Modules

Each week in the class is listed as a Module in Canvas. The module will include an overview document, Objectives & Activities, that explains the topics, learning goals, and assignments/discussion topics for that class. The reading materials, assignments, and discussion topics are listed in separate sections in that module. Some modules may include synchronous lectures via Zoom (recorded), or slides that can be reviewed at your own pace. We will have three guest lectures for about an hour: 9/08, 10/27, and 11/17 by psychologists actively engaged in aspects of policy. Assignment due dates are listed in the Modules.

Each week I will send out an announcement of what to expect for the next week and reminders for assignment due dates.

Reading/Podcasts/Materials:

Readings will include current articles, chapters from books, reports, podcasts, video news reporters, blogs, documentaries, and legislation, which will be available online in Canvas in each Module. There is no text book, resources will be posted in Canvas.

Certain publications from the federal government publications (available online for no-charge via download) are useful as background and sections may be assigned weekly:

- Behavioral health trends in the United States: https://www.samhsa.gov/data/release/2019-national-survey-drug-use-and-health-nsduh-releases
Facing Addiction in American: The Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health (2016) https://addiction.surgeongeneral.gov/sites/default/files/front-matter.pdf
Guidance to State and School Systems on Addressing Mental Health and Substance Use Issues in Schools. https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/pep19-school-guide.pdf

Sources

To find legislation at the federal level for Congress go to www.congress.gov

To find legislation for New Jersey: https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/Default.asp

In this era, there is a great deal of information online, much of it unverified. We will use scholarly journals from psychology, public health, and medicine. Health Affairs is the leading policy journal, available through Rutgers libraries. Journals published by the American Psychological Association, the American Public Health Association, American Medical Association, American Psychiatric Association, Lancet and other professional publishers are generally reliable. Kaiser Family Foundation Health News is a good source of general health-related policy news. https://www.kff.org . Certain news outlets, PBS, NPR, the New York Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal are generally reliable news sources for policy. But separate out the opinion articles from news stories and seek at least two sources for news stories. Please check every assertion you see with independent sources. Politifact is a fact-checking news source.

Note: Causation vs. Correlation. One of the challenges in explaining policy to nonscientists is to distinguish between research that can determine direct causal relationships, usually experiments with random selection of participants and controlling variables, and correlation where two factors seem associated but we do not know the causal relationship. Most research in real life focuses on correlations and is not causal. For example, during the summer both ice cream consumption and violence increase but neither causes the other; rather, a third factor, heat plays a role in the increase. Although many policies are based on correlations, such policies might not address the underlying concerns.

Written Assignments

There are two written assignments: creation of a one-page public policy proposal to address a problem in mental health, substance use, special education, and neurodiversity. You are expected to describe a problem and then an evidenced-based solution. For example, a possible problem is the lack of employment opportunities for adults with autism. A possible solution are policies that provide enhanced vocational training in secondary school programs and specialized vocational programs for adults throughout their lifetime that reflect current scientific advances in neurodiversity. The one-page public policy proposal has three stages: a) selection of topic and justification; b) annotated bibliography; c) final document.

The other written assignment is a letter to a public office holder Member of Congress, State Legislator, Administrator, Mayor, School Board on the behavioral health problem in the public policy proposal. This is due in the last class. Frameworks and examples for written assignments is available in the Welcome module.

I will make myself very available the first few weeks of class to assist you in selecting your topics. Below are the dates and assignments for the project. Please note, there are two graded assignments: an annotated bibliography and the final project; the other two steps, topic selection and outline are graded incomplete/complete.

Policy Project Schedule

Table with columns: Assignment, Date Due, Grade. Rows include: Topic Selection & Outline (Sept 28, I/C), Annotated Bibliography (Oct 26, Letter grade), Final Policy Project (Nov 30, Letter Grade), Letter to Policy Maker (Dec 14, Letter Grade).

Grading

Periodic Reading quizzes (generally 3-5 multiple choice questions) = 10% of grade; 5 points each

Module Assignments = 15% of grade

In-class/on-line Discussions = 15% of grade; graded Complete/Incomplete

Preparation Assignments for Public Policy Project = 20% of grade

- Topic Selection and Justification, 10 points
Annotated Bibliography, 40 points

Public Policy Proposal = 25% of Grade, 50 points

Letter to Public Official = 15% of Grade, Letter Grade

Each of these tasks will have a Rubric that will explain the grading standards and evaluation methods.

MAP Grades and Grading Policy

Grade Description Numerical Equivalent

A Excellent 90-100 (4.0)

B+ Very Good 87-89 (3.5)

B Good 80-86 (3.0)

C Average 70-79 (2.0)

F Failure 69 or below (0.0)

EX Excellent (rare)

C Complete

INC Incomplete

S Satisfactory

U Unsatisfactory

PA Pass

NC No credit given

MAP Program requirement: All MAP students must achieve a grade of B- or better and maintain a GPA of 3.0, or academic remediation will be enforced.

Rubrics

Frameworks and examples for written assignments is available in the Welcome module.

Rutgers Resources

Informed on resources, computing, accessibility and other issues, go to the final Module.

Proceed to Learning Support Resources and review the resources before starting the course module (Week 1) activities.

Course Summary:

Summary table with columns: Date, Details, Due. Rows list dates from Tue Sep 7, 2021 to Tue Dec 14, 2021 with corresponding assignment details and due times.