



GEOG 38311: Health Equity in the U.S.: Policies and Politics Spring 2025 Syllabus

**Wednesdays, 10:00 am-12:45 pm
Roosevelt House Room 204**

Office Hours: 1:00-2:00pm

Instructor: Ram Raju, M.D., Former President and CEO at New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation and former CEO of Cook County Health and Hospitals System

Contact Information: Please email Dr. Raju at rr2786@hunter.cuny.edu

Overview:

Despite increasing financial investment and the recent advances in medical technologies, health outcomes in the United States have stagnated. The current policy and healthcare delivery model is not working. A Robert Wood Johnson Foundation supported study showed that social determinants of health predict 80% of clinical outcomes, while only 20% of clinical outcomes are influenced by actual clinical care.

Course Learning Goals:

This course will explore how to transform the current federal, state, and local regulatory and operational framework from one that focuses on “sick care” to one that keeps patients and their communities healthy. The emphasis will be on integrating the “social context,” i.e. social determinants of health into care delivery, and developing policies that blend public health, health care, and human services to address the whole patient. The course will also consider how best to align incentives for patients, payers (commercial and government), care providers, community-based organizations, and pharmaceutical companies. Case studies will examine vulnerable communities, including those who are homeless, involved in the criminal justice system, and undocumented immigrants.

Course Format and Expectations

The course will combine in-depth reading, discussion, lectures, and oral and final written assignments that will allow students to practice implementing policy. Readings will be drawn from current health policy literature, state and local government sources, and news analysis.

The course will include guest speakers from time to time who are active practitioners, who will share their expertise with the students and provide insight into policymaking in their field depending on their availability.

Prior to each session, students will be expected to complete the assigned readings, materials, and resources (totaling approximately 50-85 pages per week) and be prepared to actively engage with the specific topics and questions provided for instructor-facilitated, student-driven class discussions/presentations.

Final written assignment is due at the end of the course. Failure to submit the assignment will affect the final grade. Specific format guidelines and content expectations by which the assignment will be graded will be provided at the start of the course.

Course Requirements and Grading:

The distribution of weights for each course requirement is as follows:

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|---|-------|
| 1. Participation in the class. | (30%) |
| 2. Midterm Assignment – Health Policy Op-Ed | (20%) |
| 3. Final Assignment – Health Policy Think Tank Report | (60%) |

Course Outline at a Glance:

Week Zero: January 29: No Class

Week One: February 5: Introduction to health equity (First class)

Week Two: February 12: No Class

Week Three: February 19: Introduction to social determinants of health

Week Four: February 26: Root causes of poor health in vulnerable populations.

Week Five: THURSDAY March 6th: Social determinants of health in health policy - Part One and Two

Week Six: March 12: Stakeholders involved in health policy, politics, and care delivery.

Week Seven: March 19: Geographies of health and health care access

Week Eight: March 26: Public-private partnerships and the role of anchor institutions

Week Nine: April 2: Addressing social determinants of health within the health care system + Guidelines on how to write an Opinion-Editorial (Op-Ed)

Week Ten: April 9: Changing incentives through payment reform

Week Eleven: April 16 No Class

Week Twelve: April 23: Health policy in non-health sectors

Written Assignment 1 - Health System CEO Opinion-Editorial (Op-Ed) Due

Week Thirteen April 30: Intersectoral public policies for social and health equity

Week Fourteen: May 7: Community-led solutions + Guidelines on how to write a Think Tank Report.

Week Fifteen: May 14: Aligning medical care, public health, and social services systems to achieve health equity (Final class)

May 21: Final Written Assignment - Health Policy Think Tank Report Due

May 23: End of Spring Term

May 27: Final grade submission deadline

Written Assignment:

MIDTERM ASSIGNMENT: (OPINION EDITORIAL (OP-ED): You are the CEO of a large health system that spans multiple states. From your unique stakeholder perspective and bully pulpit, write an 800-word, New York Times style opinion editorial (op-ed) to call for the uniting of all stakeholders in health policy, politics, and healthcare delivery towards addressing the social equity needs of people and communities to achieve health equity. Descriptively cite factual data and at least 2 specific examples (from the assigned course readings thus far) of burgeoning policies and programs in both non-health sectors and within the health care system to advance your opinion.

Your goal is to deliver a convincing message to a broad audience, including the public at large, in a style free of jargon, to articulate a distinct opinion from your unique perspective, using the format guidelines provided.

Op-ed writing guidelines: <https://commskit.duke.edu/writing-media/writing-effective-op-eds/>

FINAL ASSIGNMENT: You are the research director of a nationally renowned health policy think tank focused on advancing health equity through social equity in the United States. Write a 10-page thematic report presenting a thorough and cohesive argument for developing an integrated policy framework at the local/community level that would engage different sectors and align incentives of stakeholders towards effectively improving health disparities and achieving a culture of health and better health equity within the next 5-10 years.

Your goal is to apply all the course readings, materials, resources, and class discussion content to compose this report, and you are expected to appropriately cite at least 15 of the course readings (in endnotes) to corroborate all the details and data you present.

Detailed Syllabus

Week One

Introduction to health equity (First class meets)

Readings, materials, and resources:

1. RWJF_What Is Health Equity? And What Difference Does a Definition Make?
2. Health Affairs_Health Policy Brief - Achieving Equity inHealth
3. American Journal of Public Health_Health Disparities and Health Equity - The Issue Is Justice
4. Journal of Health Politics Policy and Law_The Many Roads toward Achieving Health Equity
5. JAMA_Social Policy as HealthPolicy
6. Grant Makers in Health_Health Equity and Social Justice - A Health Improvement Tool

Be prepared to discuss:

- a. What are the sources of health inequities within our communities, and across our country?
- b. What is the role of social equity in achieving health equity?
- c. What are the benefits and challenges of applying a justice framework toward achieving health equity?

Week Three

Introduction to social determinants of health

Readings, materials, and resources:

1. WHO_Health equity through action on the social determinants of health Commission on Social Determinants of Health_Final Report
2. Lancet_Achieving Health Equity - From Root Causes to Fair Outcomes
3. Health Affairs_Health Policy Brief - The Relative Contribution of Multiple Determinants toHealth Outcomes.
4. Annual Review of Public Health_The Social Determinants of Health - Coming of Age
5. National Academies of Medicine_Social Determinants of Health 101 for Health Care - Five Plus Five

Be prepared to discuss:

- a. What are the primary determinants of health in your lives?
- b. What (if any) are the differences between social determinants of health and socially determined health inequities (as discussed last week)?
- c. Who should address social determinants of health?

Week Four

Root causes of poor health in vulnerable populations.

Readings, materials, and resources:

1. Urban Institute-Center on Society and Health_How Are Income And Wealth Linked to Health And Longevity?
2. Health Affairs_Health Policy Brief - Housing and Health An Overview of Literature
3. America's Essential Hospitals_The Social Determinants of Health - Homelessness and Unemployment
4. Health Affairs_How Health Care Reform Can Transform The Health Of Criminal Justice-Involved Individuals
5. American Journal of Industrial Medicine_ Undocumented Status as a Social Determinant of Occupational Safety and Health

Be prepared to discuss:

- a. Participate in an exercise detailing the social determinants of health for a particular vulnerable population.
- b. Participate in an exercise detailing the social determinants of a particular health condition afflicting vulnerable populations.

Week Five

Social determinants of health in health policy - Part One

Readings, materials, and resources:

1. Shi_ Introduction to Health Policy - Chapter One - Overview of Health Policy
2. Health Affairs_ Where Health Disparities Begin - The Role of Social and Economic Determinants - And Why Current Policies May Make Matters Worse
3. WHO_ The need to monitor actions on the social determinants of health.
4. Kaiser_ Beyond Health Care- The Role of Social Determinants in Promoting Health and Health Equity
5. HHS_ Health People 2020 Framework + Social Determinants of Health | Healthy People 2020

Be prepared to discuss:

- a. How are recent health policy changes being utilized to promote health equity through action on the social determinants of health? At the state level? At the national level?

Social determinants of health in health policy - Part Two + Guidelines on how to write a policy memorandum

Readings, materials, and resources:

1. WHO_ The Economics of Social Determinants of Health and Health Inequalities - A Resource Book: Executive Summary and Chapters 4-6
2. RWJF_ A New Way to Talk About the Social Determinants of Health

Be prepared to discuss:

- a. What are effective arguments to be made in favor of focusing on social determinants of health in local health policy?

Week Six

Stakeholders involved in health policy, politics, and healthcare delivery.

Readings, materials, and resources:

1. RAND_ Stakeholder Perspectives on a Culture of Health
2. Navigating the Politics of Health_ A Systematic Review of U.S. Policymakers' Views on the Social Determinants of Health, Health Equity, and Health in All Policies

Be prepared to discuss:

- a. Who are the key stakeholders to engage to affect change within health policy, politics, and healthcare delivery? At the community level? At the state level? At the national level?

Week Seven

Geographies of health and health care access

Readings, materials, and resources:

1. 2011 Health Affairs_ Higher Risk of Death in Rural Blacks and Whites than Urbanites is Related to Lower Incomes, Education, and Health Coverage

2. AJPH_ Investigating Neighborhood and Area Effects on Health
3. IJHG_ A spatial analysis of variations in health access
4. Health & Place_ Measuring Food Deserts in New York City's Low-income Neighborhoods
5. IJHC_ Spatial accessibility of primary care
6. Grantmakers in Health_ Tackling SDOH Through Place-Based Initiatives

Be prepared to discuss:

- a. How should place-based health disparities affect policy approaches to health equity?
- b. Who should be involved in addressing place-based health disparities?

Week Eight

Public-private partnerships and anchor institutions

Readings, materials, and resources:

1. Health Affairs_ Identifying Policy Levers And Opportunities For Action Across States To Achieve Health Equity
2. The Guardian_ Five ways public-private partnerships can build healthier cities.
3. Democracy Collective_ Anchor Mission Playbook
4. 2017 JICSP_ Exploring public private partnerships in health and education: a critique.

Be prepared to discuss:

- a. How can public-private partnerships and anchor institutions promote health equity at the community / local level to address place-based disparities and social determinants?

Week Nine

Addressing social determinants of health within the health care system + Guidelines on how to write an Opinion-Editorial (Op-Ed)

Readings, materials, and resources:

1. Commonwealth Fund-KPMG_ Investing in social services as a core strategy for health organizations - Developing the business case.
2. Academy Health_ Paying for Population Health - Case Studies on the Health System's Role in Addressing Social Determinants of Health
3. Health Affairs Blog_ Defining The Health Care System's Role In Addressing Social Determinants And Population Health_ November 17, 2016
4. AHA_ Food Insecurity and the Role of Hospitals
5. AHA_ Housing and the Role of Hospitals

Be prepared to discuss:

- a. What role does the health system have within a community? vs. within a state or nationally?
- b. What responsibility does the health system have to address health inequity?
- c. What opportunities does the health system have to promote health equity through social determinants of health?

Week Ten

Changing incentives through payment reform

Readings, materials, and resources:

1. NYSDOH_ VBP Social Determinants of Health and Community Based Organizations Informational Webinar (+ watch at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pjX-Z8cUjvM&feature=youtu.be>)
2. JAMA_ Social Determinants of Health in Managed Care Payment Formulas

3. National Quality Forum_ A Framework for Medicaid Programs to Address Social Determinants of Health - Food Insecurity and Housing Instability

Be prepared to discuss:

- a. How can stakeholders be incentivized to address health equity? How can these incentives be aligned to satisfy all stakeholders?
- b. Who should be paid for which health care services vs. health outcomes and by whom?

Week Twelve

Health policy in non-health sectors

Readings, materials, and resources:

1. Public Health Institute_ Health in All Policies - A Guide for State and Local Governments - Parts 1 & 8
2. New York Times_ A Focus on Health to Resolve Urban Ills
3. Health Affairs_ Examine Whether the Health-in-all Policies Approach Promotes Health Equity

Be prepared to discuss:

- a. Does the Health-in-all Policies approach promote health equity? What are its limitations?

Week Thirteen

Intersectoral public policies for social and health equity

Readings, materials, and resources:

1. Health Affairs_ Health Policy Brief - Community Development and Health
2. JAMA_ Investing in Housing for Health Improves Both Mission and Margin
3. Health Affairs Blog_ Funding For Local Public Health: A Renewed Path For Critical Infrastructure_ August 22, 2017
4. Health Services Research_ Impact of a New York City Supportive Housing Program on Housing Stability and Preventable Health Care among Homeless Families
5. Health Affairs_ Social Determinants As Public Goods_ A New Approach to Financing Key Investments in Healthy Communities
6. CDC_ Communities in Action - Pathways to Health Equity: Chapter 6

Be prepared to discuss:

- a. How can Community development and Health fields collaboratively improve the health outcome of a population?
- b. What do you understand by affordable housing seen as drug prescription and in what ways can affordable housing be likened as prescription drugs?
- c. How can supportive housing placement impact communities?
- d. How can policies create structural barriers in achieving health equity, and how can these barriers be addressed?

Week Fourteen

Community-led solutions + Guidelines on how to write a Think Tank Report

Readings, materials, and resources

1. CDC_ Communities in Action - Pathways to Health Equity: Chapters 4-5

Be prepared to discuss:

- a. How can communities be motivated and empowered to achieve health equity?
- b. What are the limitations of community-based interventions?

Week Fifteen

Aligning medical care, public health, and social services systems to achieve health equity

(Final class)

Readings, materials, and resources:

1. Putnam Consulting Group_ The Road to Achieving Equity - Findings and Lessons from a Field Scan of Foundations that are Embracing Equity as a Primary Focus
2. Astho A Transformed Health System in the 21st Century White Paper

Be prepared to discuss:

- a. Discuss topics for your final written assignment (central claim you plan to make), useful readings you plan to cite, counterarguments you plan to address.

Accessing Course Materials via eRes

Electronic Reserve materials can be accessed electronically, on or off campus. For full details about the eRes system, please visit: <https://libguides.library.hunter.cuny.edu/reserves#Accessing%20E-Reserves>

To access materials, go directly to: http://libguides.library.hunter.cuny.edu/er.php?course_id=47208.

1. If a copyright agreement box appears, type your course specific password* with no spaces and caps.
 - a. The password is: raju383
2. Click Go.
3. Select appropriate folder.
4. Select title of work needed.

Incomplete and Credit/No Credit Requests

There will be NO INCOMPLETES (except for a death, serious illness, or work-related issues such as travel). Incompletes must be requested in writing prior to the last class session (unless of an unforeseen emergency as outlined above) and will be given only if student s grade is at "C" or above at the time the IN is filed, and with evidence of a satisfactory reason. At the time you request an IN you must also complete a Contract to Resolve an Incomplete Grade (form available at the college) and get my signature. Otherwise, I will average your existing grades based on the course grading rubric and record the grade you have earned.

To receive a CR/NC you must have completed all course requirements (exams, quizzes, etc.) and request the CR/NC option prior to beginning the final exam. Based on your final score you will be assigned a letter grade based on the numerical standards that can be found on the Hunter College homepage at <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/advising/how-to/file-credit-no-credit-cr-nc> (where you can also download a copy of the Credit/No Credit form) or in the undergraduate catalog at <http://catalog.hunter.cuny.edu/content.php?catoid=37&navoid=10489>.

Hunter College Policies

Academic Integrity Statement: "Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures."

ADA Statement: “In compliance with the ADA and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational access and accommodations for all its registered students. Hunter College students with disabilities and medical conditions are encouraged to register with the Office of Accessibility for assistance and accommodation. For information and appointment contact the Office of Accessibility located in Room E1214 or call (212) 772-4857 /or VRS (646) 755-3129.”

Hunter College Policy on Sexual Misconduct: “In compliance with the CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Hunter College reaffirms the prohibition of any sexual misconduct, which includes sexual violence, sexual harassment, and gender-based harassment retaliation against students, employees, or visitors, as well as certain intimate relationships. Students who have experienced any form of sexual violence on or off campus (including CUNY-sponsored trips and events) are entitled to the rights outlined in the Bill of Rights for Hunter College.

- a) Sexual Violence: Students are strongly encouraged to immediately report the incident by calling 911, contacting NYPD Special Victims Division Hotline (646-610-7272) or their local police precinct, or contacting the College's Public Safety Office (212-772-4444).
- b) All Other Forms of Sexual Misconduct: Students are also encouraged to contact the College's Title IX Campus Coordinator, Dean John Rose (jtrose@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-650-3262) or Colleen Barry (colleen.barry@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-772-4534) and seek complimentary services through the Counseling and Wellness Services Office, Hunter East 1123.

CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct Link: <http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/ia/Policy-on-Sexual-Misconduct-12-1-14-with-links.pdf>