**ECON 1701.01. Human Disease: Health, the Economy, and Society**

MWF 10-11:50, Stokes 103S. Periodic additional sessions T 6-8pm.

**Sam Richardson, PhD**  
[sam.richardson@bc.edu](mailto:sam.richardson@bc.edu)

Maloney 314

Office hours: Fridays 1-3 and by appointment

*I generally respond to e-mail quickly. However, be aware that I often detox from the internet from sundown Saturday to sundown Sunday: please plan accordingly.*

**Course Description**

About 9% of the world's economic resources (and 18% of the United States' resources) are devoted to health care—the prevention and treatment of human disease. This course will explore the social consequences of and responses to infectious and chronic diseases. Economics can provide insight into why researchers focus more on some diseases than others, why some health care systems work better than others, and how health care resources might be deployed more efficiently. Students will develop the ability to analyze the broader context and consequences of human disease, with a focus on the economics of health care policy.

*This course satisfies one social science core requirement, and can be substituted for principles of microeconomics for the purposes of an economics major or minor.*

**Content-Based Learning Objectives:**

Students will gain the ability to:

- Compare the nature of evidence in economics and social science to the nature of evidence in the natural sciences.
- Explain the main assumptions neoclassical economists make about human nature, and discuss situations in which these assumptions are unlikely to hold.
- Interpret demand and supply curves, and explain why (and under what assumptions) their intersection identifies the economically efficient quantity.
- Discuss ways in which health care markets violate the assumptions underlying the efficiency of markets.
- Explain and critically evaluate the cost-effectiveness approach to resource allocation decisions.
- Understand characteristics of health insurance policies, and explain the reasons why health insurance plans have some of these characteristics.
- Explain moral hazard and adverse selection, and identify situations in which these phenomena are likely to cause problems with health care markets.

**Broader Learning Objectives:**

Students will:

- Gain an appreciation of the (dismal) concept of scarcity.
• Develop an ability to explicitly consider the incentives (both financial and non-financial) that influence everyday decision-making.
• Develop an ability to think critically about unintended consequences of government policies.
• Improve their ability to argue persuasively for a policy position.
• Develop an ability to analyze health policy questions from an economic perspective.
• Become more sophisticated consumers of data and research. Students should understand the difference between correlation and causation, and be able to consider multiple explanations for observed correlations.
• Apply economic reasoning to social justice issues surrounding health as a human right.

**Required Materials:**


All other materials will be provided on Canvas.

**Assessment:**

10% Class participation
20% Problem sets (the lowest problem set grade will be dropped)
15% Gapminder group video project and presentation
10% Midterm 1
10% Reflection paper on cost-effectiveness analysis
10% Epidemic simulation group project and presentation
10% Midterm 2
20% Take-home final exam

*Note that the percentages sum to 105%. I will drop the lowest 5% of your grade.*

**Enduring Questions Reflection Sessions and Activities**

These evening reflection periods are designed to connect the economics and biological course content to societal problems that demand our personal and collective attention. We hope these sessions will help you think about ways in which the course material contributes to your understanding of your identity and your place in the world.

2/7 Speakers on the BC norovirus outbreak
2/21 Movie viewing: "And the Band Played On"
2/28 Nadia Abuelezam on disease modeling
3/30 (Thursday) Theatre trip: Mrs. Packard at the Bridge Rep Theater

4/25 TBD: Obesity

**Request for Accommodations**

If you have a disability and will be requesting accommodations for these courses, please register with either:

Dr. Kathy Duggan (dugganka@bc.edu), Associate Director, Connors Family Learning Center (learning disabilities or AHD) or

Dean Paulette Durrett (paulette.durrett@bc.edu), Assistant Dean for students with disabilities (all other disabilities).

Advance notice and appropriate documentation are required for accommodations.

**Academic Integrity**

Unless otherwise specified, students are encouraged to work together on assignments, but each student must submit his or her own work for non-group assignments. Any outside sources used for any assignment must be cited appropriately. Please familiarize yourself with the university’s policy on academic integrity, available at [www.bc.edu/integrity](http://www.bc.edu/integrity). Any violations of the standards of academic integrity will be reviewed by the Committee on Academic Integrity. Depending upon the seriousness and circumstances of the violation, possible penalties include a failing grade, university probation, suspension, or expulsion.