Controversies in International Health

Course Description and Syllabus

17 October - 5 December 2018
Geneva, Switzerland
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Numerous controversies have marked the evolution of modern public health. The use of quarantines to prevent the spread of certain infectious diseases, mass campaigns of immunization, development of modern contraceptives, and the use of seatbelts to prevent car accidents, to name but a few, are examples that have spurred heated debates in the global public health arena.

Despite the major improvements in science and technology in the 21st century, health improvements are unevenly distributed with many countries in the world showing little, uneven, or no progress at all. Understanding why such health disparities have arisen and persist requires us not only to analyze how health systems are organized, but also to consider broader economic, social and political issues that impede the achievement of health and wellbeing and influence living conditions of populations around the world. Central to the inherent complexity of the issues at hand is the analysis of the policy making process, i.e. how issues get on to the policy agenda, who decides and why certain programs are implemented or not.

Policies are the results of interactions among different stakeholders (organizations, groups, networks or individuals) who share certain beliefs about which courses of action should be taken. The sum of these interactions forms what we call the policy process, which itself takes place in a wider social and political context. The distribution of power, the range of actors involved, their interests, and the formal and informal arrangements that govern the interactions among them are important factors to consider.

Through this course, students will be introduced to contemporary issues and controversies in international health. In addition to public and international controversies, we will also look at
various public health issues usually kept secret from public scrutiny (e.g. the strategies of the tobacco industry) or which are particularly sensitive (e.g. corruption in the health sector). Various analytical frameworks will be presented to assist students in a critical analysis of the issues being covered.

Course Objectives:
- To expose students to the complexity and diversity of the range of actors and their interests in guiding global health policies and thinking.
- To expose students to a variety of controversies in international health issues.
- To assist students in using critical thinking to analyze international health issues.
- To introduce students to health policy analytic frameworks and tools.
- To expose students to the work of various international health and humanitarian organizations.

Learning Objectives:
By the end of the course students should be able to:
- Critically appraise a wide range of international health controversies, identifying the main actors, analyzing their respective arguments, interests, power and positions.
- Articulate a particular controversy and build a case for their position on the issue, drawing on the various course materials and their own individual work and experiences.
- Work in groups to summarize, present and debate a given controversial issue during classroom discussions or through written assignments, expressing their opinions in a clear and convincing way.
- Examine how different organizations operate, prioritize their activities, and carry out their work in line with the controversies that will be studied in class.

Format:
This course relies on a variety of supports:
- Weekly readings.
- Media monitoring done independently by students on current global events.
- Social media monitoring done independently by students based on topics identified in the class and on current affairs.
- In class lectures.
- Viewing of global health documentaries.
- In class interactive discussions. Discussions will be based on weekly reading and materials presented during class.
• Some discussion will be led by guest experts from the arena of international development and humanitarian relief in person or through recorded material
• Site visits to international organizations.

All of the above are a mandatory part of the course, which consists of at least 40 contact hours with the instructor. Course meeting times vary based on scheduling of site visits and guest lectures.

Teaching material:
Most of the teaching material will be made available on Blackboard prior to each session in specific folders.

Reading assignments for a particular class sessions should be completed before class as we will discuss the reading in class and/or the session content will take off from where the text ends. We will usually limit the number of compulsory readings to one or two articles per session. Additional references/websites links/audio-visual material will be provided allowing those willing to deepen their understanding of the issues to do so. These references will also be useful to students to build their arguments for the group discussions and the written assignment. Evidence of having read the weekly assignment before the class discussion will count toward the participation grade.

Class discussions:
This course is meant to foster debates and interactions. Students will be asked to work in groups, to synthesize and comment the content of the assigned materials. Individual contributions will also be encouraged and assessed. Students should bring insightful comments and questions that prompt on-topic discussion. Varying opinions bring richness to discussion. This said, we expect students, to state any disagreement or objections to another class member’s idea in a respectful and courteous manner. The class will also provide a forum to share information amongst students on the work they are doing in their internships and a place to reflect on the course material as it relates to the internships. Students are encouraged to ask questions and raise discussion points about their internship work within the larger context of global public health.

Site visits:
Site visit to the UN Palais in Geneva will offer the opportunity to
  • Appreciate the operational environment in which controversies in international health emerge.
  • Appreciate an operational context within which to consider the controversies that we study in class.
  • Appreciate the interdisciplinary nature of development work.
Absences and punctuality:
Planned absences should be notified to the instructor in advance and should have previously been discussed with Dr. Carla Rachman. Please note that punctual attendance is a given!

Class attire:
Business casual.
You are expected to dress the way you do for your internship.

Course requirements
Requirements, on which evaluation of the student is based, are as follows:
1. Class participation 25% (Participation in class 10%, Tests on current events and discussions in class 5% per test. A total of three tests - 15%)
2. Assignment 1 Information vs Evidence - 25%
   Deadline: TBD on 17.10.2018
3. Assignment 2a Controversy analysis: Written component - 30%
   Deadline: TBD on 17.10.2018
4. Assignment 2b Presentation in class - 20%
   Deadline: TBD on 17.10.2018

Assignments and Grading
In the first class each student will be assigned a topic that has been perceived as a controversy in an international context.

Details on the assignment will be provided in the first class of the course including- submission format, word limits, grading criteria. The same will also be shared via BlackBoard.

The assignments are interdependent and build on each other.

Academic code of conduct
Please make sure that you are familiar with the BU Academic Conduct Code which covers cheating, plagiarism and other related topics.
http://www.bu.edu/cas/students/undergrad-resources/code/
Instructor “Office Hours”:

For questions that cannot be resolved by email, the course instructor is available to meet with students by appointment to discuss questions or concerns related to the course during the lunch hour of class, before class, some days after class, and sometimes on non-class days. Please send an email to set up an appointment: sunoor@bu.edu

Class Participation:

Class participation is a vital element of this course. All students are expected to raise questions and discuss issues based on the readings, the lectures, and comments from guest lecturers or the instructor. Relevant comments or questions based on past work or academic experiences are encouraged. Class participation also includes any group or individual presentations that are given throughout the course.

Class participation is graded on the quantity and quality of content.

The following minimum is expected of all students enrolled in this course:

• The participant demonstrates awareness of current global issues and their interdependence and impact.
• The participant has insightful comments and questions that prompt on-topic discussion.
• Varying opinions bring richness to discussions. If disagreeing with another class member’s ideas, the participant states his/her disagreement courteously.
• The participant states informed comments and opinions, which draw upon relevant readings, lectures, class discussions and/or other experiences. The student’s participation helps clarify or synthesize issues.
• The student’s participation demonstrates that s/he has read the assigned readings with a “critical eye”. Participation should demonstrate not only mastery of the content of the assigned materials but an ability to critically analyze.

Please note that the visiting lecturers are taking time from their busy work schedules to share their expertise, so sessions need to start on schedule. Students are expected to attend each session, but if there are circumstances that will result in an absence or tardy attendance please notify the instructor in advance. Excused absences will only be granted under special conditions and must be pre-arranged ahead of time with the instructor and approved by the Program Director. Any unexcused late arrival or absence will be taken into account when grading class participation.

Teaching material:

Most of the teaching material will be made available on the Blackboard prior to each session in specific folders.

Reading assignments for a particular class session should be completed before class as we will discuss the reading in class and/or the session content will take off from where the text ends. We will usually limit the number of compulsory readings to one or two articles.
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Grading:
Letter grade Quality GPA (grade point average)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>GPA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>3.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
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<tr>
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<td>F</td>
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**A**
This exceptional grade is assigned only to work that has **persistently outstanding** quality in both substance and presentation. The student must demonstrate a sustained capacity for independent thought and extensive study, producing rigorous and convincing analyses in well-ordered prose. The student must consistently demonstrate a **firm grasp over current affairs**.

**A-**
Awarded to work that is clearly focused and analytical, and based on wide reading. The student must cover all the principal points of a question and systematically develop a persuasive overall thesis, allowing for one or two venial omissions or infelicities of expression.

**B+, B, B-**
This range of grades indicates that the student has shown some evidence of original thought and intellectual initiative. The student has cited sources beyond the class materials, and shown
a degree of originality in perception and/or approach to the subject. The work will show thoughtful management of material, and a good grasp of the issues. The differences between a B+, a straight B and a B- may reflect poor presentation of the material, or mistakes in punctuation, spelling and syntax.

C+, C, C-
Work in this grade range is satisfactory, but uninspiring. If the work is simply a recitation of class materials or discussions, and shows no sign of genuine intellectual engagement with the issues, it cannot deserve a higher grade. Should an essay fail to provide a clear answer to the question as set, or argue a position coherently, the grade will fall within this range. Quality of presentation can lift such work into the upper levels of this grade range. Work of this quality which is poorly presented, and riddled with errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation, will fall into the lower end of the range. To earn a passing grade, the work must demonstrate that the student is familiar with the primary course material, be written well enough to be readily understood, be relevant to the assignment, and, of course, be the student’s own work except where properly cited.

D-F
Work that is fatally flawed in one or more ways, such as: so poorly written as to defy understanding; so insubstantial or irrelevant that it fails to address the subject; is guilty of plagiarism.
### Course Schedule

#### Week 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>17.10.2018 at Rue des Vollandes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time:</td>
<td>09:30-12:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic:</td>
<td>Current events &amp; health update</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Course Introduction, Expectations, and House rules.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assignment for the CIH course- explanation, discussion, clarifications</td>
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<td>Walt’s triangle. Policy making- processes &amp; windows.</td>
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<td>Dr. Sunoor Verma</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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#### Week 2

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<tr>
<td>Topic:</td>
<td>Current events &amp; health update</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Policy windows &amp; actors</td>
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<td>Addiction &amp; controversies.</td>
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<td>Simulation – Harm reduction Malaysia</td>
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<td>Dr. Sunoor Verma</td>
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<thead>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Topic:</td>
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<td>Simulation – Harm reduction Malaysia</td>
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<td>Documentary ‘Women in AIDS’</td>
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<td>What exactly happened in Malaysia?</td>
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<td>Discussion.</td>
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<td>Dr. Sunoor Verma</td>
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#### Week 3

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<td>Topic:</td>
<td>Current events &amp; health update</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Test 1.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-communicable diseases &amp; controversies.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>21.03.2018 at Rue des Vollandes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time:</td>
<td>13:30-15:30</td>
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| Topic: | “The politics of insulin: the search for scalable solutions”  
Guest speaker: Dr. David Beran, Hospitals of the University of Geneva |
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week 4</strong></td>
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| **Date:** | 07.11.2018 at Rue des Vollandes  
**Time:** | 09:30-12:30  
| **Topic:** | 09:30- 12:30  
09 :30- 11 :30  
‘Whistleblowing in the UN’  
Guest speaker : Dr. Caroline Hunt, Geneva.  
11:30-12:30  
Discussion -Marginalised, Invisible and minority groups & health.  
Dr. Sunoor Verma |
| **Date:** | 07.11.2018 at Rue des Vollandes  
**Time:** | 13:30 – 15:30  
| **Topic:** | Marginalised, Invisible and minority groups & health.  
Dr. Sunoor Verma |
| **Week 5** |  
| **Date:** | 14.11.2018 at Rue des Vollandes  
**Time:** | 09:30-12:30  
| **Topic:** | The Case of Flint- documentary. Poverty, Discrimination & Health  
Debrief on Flint controversy |
| **Date:** | 14.11.2018 at UN Palais  
**Time:** | 13:30-15:30  
| **Topic:** | Visit to the UN. (TBC)  
Meeting at the Visitor’s entrance of the UN across the ICRC museum. |
| **Week 6** |  
| **Date:** | 21.11.2018 at Rue des Vollandes  
**Time:** | 09:30-12:30  
| **Topic:** | 09:30- 12:30 Humanitarian emergencies & Health  
‘The story of Bungamati’- listening to the powerless and marginalised.  
WASH  
Live connect to Kathmandu, Nepal  
Raj Dhakwa- Founder, The Bungamati village to village project, Nepal  
(TBC) |
| **Date:** | 21.11.2018 at Rue des Vollandes  
**Time:** | 13:30-15:30  
| **Topic:** | 13:30- 14 :00  
Test 2 |
**Week 7**

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Current events & health update
Presentations and discussion |

**Week 8**

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| Topic:        | Current events & health update
Presentations and discussion
Test 3
Dr. Sunoor Verma |

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time:</td>
<td>13:30-15:30</td>
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</table>
| Topic:        | 13:30-15:30
Health Innovation, Affordable Technologies, Private-Public partnerships
Guest speaker: Mr. Jon Bastow, Director Business Development and Partnerships, FIND
Campus Biotek
Course evaluation. Wrap-up |

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