

Controversies in International Health

PH507 Spring 2020

Course Syllabus

Course Description:

Numerous issues and debates continue to define global health. Most recently, the new coronavirus – COVID-19 - has challenged global public health in its efforts to survey, contain and understand the outbreak. Alongside these central global health practices has also come increasing awareness and discourse about how global disease outbreaks and their control efforts – such as quarantines, trade restrictions, and travel bans – affect the world socially, culturally, politically and economically. Indeed, whether the topic is communicable diseases such as a coronavirus or HIV/AIDS; the continuing and now often coincident rise of noncommunicable diseases linked to nutrition, socio-economic status, and lifestyles; or dramatic changes to our climate and environment, it is clear that global health must balance the multisectoral influences impacting health outcomes as well as those arising from potential solutions at the same time.

Although major achievements in science, medicine and technologies during the 21st century have advanced global health efforts, health disparities also continue to arise and/or persist both within and between countries. This requires us to not only analyze how health systems are organized and the roles that all health actors play in determining priorities and outcomes, but also how these fit into the larger social, political and economic context. The social determinants of health model, such as described by Dahlgren and Whitehead, continues to provide an excellent analytical tool for understanding and navigating these and other global health issues.

Through this course, and continuing from our work in PH506, we will explore current challenges and controversies in global health by applying prerequisite skills and concepts to pressing questions facing our world. We will examine how competing priorities amongst actors shape global health policy and discourse, as well as how social, cultural and political sensitivities (e.g. gender) influence health research, policies and interventions. The course will use a variety of learning activities, including site visits, guest lecturers, video documentaries, role play scenarios and class discussions to explore a wide range of issues in global health.

Course objectives:

- To expose students to a variety of issues in global health
- To assist students in using critical thinking to analyze global health issues
- To expose students to the work of various global health and humanitarian organizations.

Learning outcomes:

- Critically appraise a wide range of global health controversies and challenges, identifying main actors, competing priorities and contextual factors and determinants.
- Articulate a particular health problem and build a case for their position on the issue, drawing on the various course materials and their own individual work and experiences.
- Examine how different health organizations operate, prioritize their activities and carry out their work in line with the controversies and issues studied in class.

Schedule of Sessions

All sessions take place in the Vollandes classroom, except for site visits (noted below). Readings noted below should be completed **before** each class as they are essential for class discussions and activities. Additional readings may also be indicated after the session and will be posted on BlackBoard in that case.

Wednesday 4 March – Session 1

10:00-12:00pm Learning Outcomes

Health Actors; Coronavirus and Global Health Governance Challenges

- Become familiar with the course, its approach, assessments and syllabus
- Examine the roles, realities, and priorities of global health actors (ICRC & UNFPA) in humanitarian contexts through class discussion
- Discuss the current status of COVID-19, including the role of health actors in global health governance

2:00-5:00pm

Barriers to Diabetes Care in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMIC) - Health Systems Perspective

Guest Lecturer Dr. David Beran, UNIGE

Film, Lecture and Group Activity

Learning Outcomes

- Describe diabetes and its treatment
- Identify obstacles to achieving diabetes care in LMIC.
- Critically assess the role of various actors in the current state of diabetes care in LMIC. **Required Readings:**

[The Novel Coronavirus Originating in Wuhan, China: Challenges for Global Health](#)

[Governance](#) Diabetes in Sub-Saharan Africa: from Clinical Care to health policy (PDF to be posted on BlackBoard)

Wednesday 11 March – Session 2 9:30-12:00pm

Learning Outcomes

HIV/AIDS – Why do initiatives at the international level fail to reach the ground?

- Describe the current status of HIV/AIDs, as well as its prevention and care
- Examine an example of international health policy and identify the challenges of achieving it at the local level.

2:00-5:00pm (Meeting time is **2pm sharp** at the Pregny Gate of the Palais des Nations)

Visit to Human Rights Council (HRC) at the Palais des Nations (UN)

Learning Outcomes

- Observe how intergovernmental mechanisms such as the HRC address human rights issues
- Appreciate how state actors express and/or defend their positions or proposed actions on given human rights issues
- Make linkages between issues observed in the assigned readings and the HRC session and global health

Required Readings

[High Commissioner updates Human Rights Council on human rights concerns, and progress, around the world](#)

[The Secretary-General remarks to the UN Human Rights Council: “The highest aspiration: a call to action for human rights \(bilingual version\)](#)

[Human Rights Council](#)

Identifying gaps in HIV policy and practice along the HIV care continuum: evidence from a national policy review and health facility surveys in urban and rural Kenya (PDF to be posted on BlackBoard)

Wednesday 18 March

Potential Visit to JTI and Guest Lecture regarding Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) (Details

TBC) Readings:

[The Philip Morris-funded Foundation for a Smoke-Free World: tax return sheds light on funding activities](#)

[Can vaping save the world from smoking? Health experts may not agree](#)

[WHO FCTC Media Briefing Human Rights](#)

[WHO FCTC Media Briefing Gender](#)

[WHO FCTC Overview](#)

Wednesday 25 March

9:30-12:00

Visit to Medecins Sans Frontières (MSF) (Doctors Without Borders)

MSF Access Campaign

Learning Outcomes

- Describe the history and work of MSF
- Articulate the opportunities and challenges associated with the MSF funding model
- Describe what is meant by the “Access Campaign” and why it is important to the global health context

2:15pm-4:00pm

Visit to GEOSec at WMO

Climate Change, Data and Health

Learning Outcomes

- Describe how satellite data can be used to track health and related outcomes of climate change.
- Appreciate the inherent interdisciplinarity and collaboration that plays an increasingly important role in global health.

Readings:

[MSF Access Campaign: About Us](#)

Wednesday 1 April

10:00-16:00

The Role of Gender in Health

Guest Lecture by Dr. Shirin Heidari, GENDRO

Lecture and Role Play

Learning Outcomes

- Articulate both obvious and subtle influences of gender on health
- Describe how gender impacts health research
- Apply concepts learned by creating a group roleplay to be performed in class (e.g. podcast script, radio show, other scenario). (You will be given time to work on this during the session, no advance preparation required)

Readings:

[Genders, sexes, and health: what are the connections—and why does it matter?](#)

[Offline : Gender and global health – an inexcusable global failure](#)

[Transgender people: Health at the margins of society](#)

Wednesday 8 April

9:00-12:00pm

Visit to the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)

Strengthening Nutrition for Global Health

Learning Outcomes

- Describe different aspects GAIN's work with regards to nutrition and global health
- Describe how GAIN determines eligibility for funding and what makes their programmes unique.

2:00-4:30pm (Vollandes)

Environmental Health and Climate Change

Learning Outcomes

- Define environmental health and routes of exposure
- Identify current issues related to climate change
- Appreciate the inherent complexities in understanding environmental health issues and interventions through group work examples

Readings:

[GAIN - Malnutrition](#) (please explore the malnutrition and quick facts tab, as well as just exploring their site to get an idea of the scope of their work) [Animal-source foods for human and planetary health](#)

[There is no public health without environmental health](#)

[Climate change is having widespread health impacts](#)

Wednesday 15 April

9:00-12:00

Global Fund/GAVI

Understanding Hybrid Partnerships: The Work of Global Fund and GAVI Learning

Outcomes:

- Describe the work of Global Fund and GAVI
- Examine their funding models and identify challenges and opportunities associated with their funding approaches

2:00-4:00 (Vollandes)

Review of Health Actors; Class Debate on Eradication Learning

Outcomes:

- Summarize what you have learned about the roles of different health actors
- Engage in a meaningful class debate on when eradication is an appropriate goal for global health Readings:

[Global Fund Brochure](#)

[Focus on building resilient and sustainable systems for health Global](#)

[Fund in the era of the SDGS: time to rethink?](#)

[Not remotely refreshing: global health fund criticized over Heineken alliance](#)

[GAVI: About Us](#) (Study the partnerships section and diagram) [Disease](#)

[Eradication: Is it Worth the Trouble?](#)

Wednesday 22 April

9:30-4:30pm

Final Presentations (details below) and Wrap Up

Each student will make a 10-minute presentation (plus 5 minutes for questions) on a chosen global health issue.

Assessments and Grading:

Your overall course grade will be determined through the following modes of assessment:

Reflection Exercise on HRC	15%
Advocacy Letter	15%
Mid-term Essay	30%
Final Presentation	30%
Class Participation	10%

Assessment details:

- **Assessment 1: Reflection on the Human Rights Council visit** ○ As we learned last semester, human rights and the right to health play an important and normative role in global health. Having visited the Human Rights Council (HRC), I would like you to reflect on what you learned about human rights and health both through the visit and the associated readings (addresses by the Secretary General and the High Commissioner).

- Please write a brief reflection (maximum 500 words) on what you have learned about the relationship between human rights and health. To help you, here are some guiding questions:
 - From what you have observed, how do human rights intersect with the definition of health, both directly and indirectly?
 - Do you feel that health receives adequate recognition in the human rights dialogue? Do you feel it is explicitly articulated?
 - Was there anything particularly surprising about what you have observed with respect to the processes of the HRC?
 - Your reflection will resemble a journal entry. Imagine how you would tell a friend about what you have learned about the HRC with regards to health. Extra research is not necessary, but please include references if you quote any facts or information. The tone of this piece is casual – first person voice is fine. ○ Maximum 500 words, single or double-spaced.
 - **Due Tuesday 17 March, 11:59pm.**

- **Assessment 2: Mid-Term Essay** ○ The SDGs and your internship organization
 - How does your organization’s work advance the Sustainable Development Goals and the principle of “Leave No One Behind” in global health?
- Research your organization’s work and identify two instances where they are working towards an SDG related to global health. Be as specific as possible (e.g. identify targets rather than the broader goals where possible). Describe how they are working towards the goal (e.g. via programme/policy/initiative), how much of an impact it could have, and any other actors they are collaborating with to achieve their goals.
- Identify one instance where the principle of “Leave No One Behind” is embodied in their work and explain how the programme/policy/initiative meets this principle. Guidelines:
 - Your organization is likely working towards any number of SDG goals and targets. Please choose whatever is most interesting to you, as long as you can demonstrate the connection between your SDG goal/targets and global health. Remember that your organization’s website is an excellent starting point for research. You might also consider (briefly) interviewing work colleagues for ideas and inputs. Don’t forget to reference them if you do and please respect the time they are offering you!
 - Your essay should include a brief introduction to your organization and to the SDGs, as well as a concluding paragraph on your organization’s progress towards the SDGs.
 - Essay length: 1500 words, not including references.

▪ **Due date: Tuesday 31 March 11:59pm**

- **Assessment 3: Advocacy Letter** ○ Letter to a Minister of Health as a concerned Global Health Expert
 - Your assignment is to write a one-page letter to the Minister of Health of a given country, explaining why the proposed plan noted in the below scenario might be counterintuitive to “A Healthy Future”, using your understanding of the determinants of health.
- A national government announces a new decade-long initiative called “A Healthy Future”. A major component of this campaign will be the development of state-of-the-art health centres, health research facilities and laboratories in the capital city. In order to help fund this project, the government proposes to relax environmental regulations and restrictions in hopes of attracting greater investment from various companies looking to operate in the country. Various other national programmes will be reduced as a result, such as breakfast at school and food-for-work. For your reference, this is a lower middle-income country where wealth is concentrated in the capital city region. Guidelines:
 - Maximum length is 500 words.
 - Keep in mind the appropriate tone and level of detail to use while addressing a senior government official.
 - **Due date: Monday 13 April 11:59pm**

• **Assessment 4: Final Presentation**

- You will give a 10-minute PowerPoint presentation (plus 5 minutes for questions) on an issue of your choosing in global health. During the presentation, you should:
 1. Provide a brief introduction to the issue and why it is important to global health.
 2. Analyse the issue using the Dahlgren and Whitehead model and determinants of health.
 3. Propose potential solutions/next steps in addressing this challenge, outlining which actors would be involved and why.

Guidelines:

- As a general rule, a good presentation will convey to the audience that the selected issue is important, that its context has been well-considered, and that the solution(s) presented is evidence-based, would be supported by experts and relevant organizations, is relevant and feasible within its context, and would be a worthwhile investment of resources (this includes time and money).

- Please remember that this is a presentation and not an in-depth research paper. You should use a sufficient number of references to support your arguments, and these should be drawn from a variety of sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, WHO (and/or other relevant organisation) publications, websites, reputable media, lecturer's presentations, and authoritative class discussions. Extra credit will not be given for including a large amount of references, although the sources you use must be referenced properly.
- Clarity, accuracy, completeness of information and critical analysis will be considered when grading the presentation.
- Your presentations should be sent to me via email by 8:30am on Wednesday 22 April (in advance of the start of our session).
- Presentations will be timed, so going over 10 minutes will be penalized.
- Be prepared to ask questions about your colleagues' presentations!

Course Expectations

Classes:

- Students are expected to be prompt for all classes and site visits so that lectures/tours can begin on time.
- Business casual dress is required during site visits and guest lectures.
- Please be respectful and supportive towards your classmates and any staff members at all times.

Logistics:

- All course materials will be posted on BlackBoard. Any announcements and materials updates will also be posted there.
- I can be reached by email at dhandan@bu.edu for any personal academic queries related to the course. I will also be available before or after class for queries.
- Submission dates are strictly enforced. Requests for late submission due to extraordinary circumstances (e.g. illness supported by a medical certificate, emergencies), must be submitted to both myself and the Programme Director.
- Feedback on your assignments will be returned via email.
- Grades will be uploaded to the Grade Centre for the course on BlackBoard.

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

- The participant demonstrates awareness of current global health 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 her/his 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 effort to critically analyze it.