Prerequisites

This class has no formal prerequisites. However, training and experience in research methods and statistics/econometrics is highly encouraged.

Course Description

Individuals make decisions on a daily basis (e.g., what to eat, whether to exercise, exposing themselves to risky products and activities) that often have a profound impact on their immediate and long-term health status. Moreover, when confronted with illness and disease, they choose (individually or in consultation with their physician, family members, and friends) whether to consume medical care and, if so, the type and amount of services. Many of the choices involving health and medical care are complicated because they involve an understanding of small probabilities, dose-response relationships, genetics, discounting, aging, and insurance reimbursement. This course will explore how and why individuals make decisions about their health and medical care, often in ways that diminish their overall health status and well-being.

Course Objectives

This course will introduce students to the process of health and medical decision making. Through the use of textbook instruction, practical case studies, scientific journal articles, and class debates, students will learn how to formulate and apply the techniques of choice theory and decision making under uncertainty as it relates to health and medical care. To further hone their skills in this area, during the second half of the quarter, students will select a specific topic pertaining to health or medical decision making, prepare a research report, and then present their topic to the class.
Textbook

Required Textbook


Additional required readings will mainly comprise academic journal articles, which are available on the journals’ websites and are accessible for no charge through the University of Miami library (search for the journal name at http://library.miami.edu/articles/ and then find the article within the journal database). These articles are also commonly available through an online search engine if accessed through the University of Miami’s network. The professor will distribute any unpublished working papers and manuscripts.

Some of the topics will be introduced using selected material from:


These textbooks are not required for the course, but copies will be available for your access in the reserve room of Richter Library if you are interested in additional background reading.

Course Outline

Students must complete all required readings prior to class and come prepared to discuss/debate the chapters/articles and ask questions about the material. Sometimes the professor will lead the discussion and at others times one of the students will lead. Repeated observations that you have not completed the readings and did not prepare for class properly will result in a lower professionalism grade. The syllabus is not a fixed document and is subject to revisions. Health and medical decision making is a dynamic and fluid area so I will incorporate new topics and related articles when timely and appropriate.

Guide for the structure of class each week: We will typically cover 1-2 topical areas per week. On Monday, I will briefly introduce and motivate the topic using the assigned chapter readings and other material. We will then discuss/debate the first two assigned readings. On Wednesday, we will discuss/debate the third and fourth assigned readings followed by a 15-minute discussion of related current events. To prepare for the discussion of current events, each student will select and post (Discussion Board on Blackboard) one news article related to the topic of the week and 2-4 students will be randomly selected to lead the class discussion emphasizing how their news articles relate to the decision-making concepts discussed that week. Keep in mind that this is a rough outline for each class and it is subject to change depending on the material and discussion. At the end of class on Wednesday, I will articulate and clarify the assignments for the coming week. In the course schedule that follows, the first two articles for a particular week will be discussed on Monday and the next two will be
discussed on Wednesday. All other chapters/articles (termed optional) are included for reference purposes and supplementary readings.
I. Introduction and Review of Core Concepts

Week 1: 1/17 & 1/19

Course Overview and Introduction to Health and Medical Decision Making


Articles:


Optional:


Week 3: 1/29 & 1/31

**Dietary Supplements, Weight Management, and Preventive Health Care** *(Paper Topic Due on 1/31)*

Chapter: Chapters 7 and 8 in *Consumer Health: Making Informed Decisions.* Butler 2012.


**Week 4:**

2/5 & 2/7 **Medications, Treatments, and Patient Compliance**  
*(Mid-Term Exam on 2/7)*

**Chapter:** Chapter 5 in *Consumer Health: Making Informed Decisions*. Butler 2012.

**Articles:**


**Optional:**


Week 5: 2/12 & 2/14

Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM)

Chapter: Chapter 6 in Consumer Health: Making Informed Decisions. Butler 2012 (pp. 105-132).


Week 6: 2/19 & 2/21

Aging and End-of-Life Care


Feng, Zhanlian, Laura A. Coots, Yevgeniya Kaganova, and Joshua M. Wiener. 2014. “Hospital and ED Use among Medicare Beneficiaries with Dementia Varies by Setting and Proximity to Death” Health Affairs 33(4):683-690.


**Residual Week:** ?? & ??

**Advertising for Health Care and Better Health**

**Chapter:** Chapter 9 in *Consumer Health: Making Informed Decisions*. Butler 2012.

**Articles:**


**Optional:**


**Course Requirements and Grading**

*Determination of grades:*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Final Report</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Term Exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professionalism (including class participation, article summaries, and news articles)</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Final Report:* The final research report will be due at 3:30pm on February 28th. Late submissions are strongly discouraged and will be assessed a penalty of 2 points per hour up to a maximum of 10 points per day. This comprehensive report will be an analysis of a health and medical decision making topic of your choice. The report should be 10 double-spaced pages, not including title page, references (*Chicago Style* preferred; http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html), tables, or figures. A one-page single-spaced proposal of your report topic will be due no later than the beginning of class on January 31st. Late proposals will decrease your final report grade and will not be accepted after February 2nd. Final reports must be well written, well organized, and free of grammatical mistakes and typos. Students should rely on journal articles, textbooks, newspaper/magazine articles, and other reference materials, but no assistance is permitted from classmates, instructors, friends, etc. In addition, students are encouraged to utilize the Writing Center and submit their draft reports through SafeAssign, which will detect possible plagiarism. Final reports will be submitted to me through Blackboard via SafeAssign to ensure that any previous issues are resolved.

*Mid-Term Exam:* The mid-term exam will occur on February 7th. It will contain 25 multiple choice and true/false questions, which will be completed in 30 minutes. Every student must take the mid-term exam during the assigned day and time. I do not offer make-up exams nor extra credit assignments at the end of the semester.

*Participation in Class Discussions/Article Summaries/News Articles (Current Events):* Students are expected to attend every class, read the assigned chapters and articles prior to class, and come prepared to discuss/debate the readings. The participation grade for students who miss classes, arrive late, and/or come to class unprepared will be marked down accordingly. Class discussion of specific articles will focus on: (i) what is the research question(s); (ii) why is the research question(s) important/timely; (iii) why is the research question(s) difficult to answer; (iv) how do the authors attempt to answer the question(s), including a review of data and methods; (v) what are the results; (vi) what are the implications of the results for health and medical decision making; and (vii) pose one question pertaining to this study that you would like the class to discuss.

For the last 15 minutes of class on most Wednesdays, students will describe current events related to the topic of the week. These impromptu presentations will begin during the second week of class. The news articles must be related to the topic of the week, and must have been published within the prior three months in a major media outlet (e.g., The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Economist, Business Week, Huffington Post, etc.). No less than two and no more than four
students each week will be randomly selected to briefly summarize their current event articles and lead a short discussion emphasizing how the article relates to the health and medical decision making concepts being discussed that week. To receive credit for the new articles, files must be uploaded to Blackboard (Discussion Board) no later than 2:00pm each Wednesday.

The article summaries for each assigned article must be completed and printed prior to the start of class on the day the article is being discussed. Please do not ask a classmate to submit your article summary as this will result in a zero grade for both students. Article summaries should be a minimum of one single-spaced typed page and must be printed prior to the start of class. The article summarizes will be collected at the end of each class and then graded on a pass/fail scale. Posted news articles will also be graded on a pass/fail scale.

Please note that the grading for professionalism, article summaries, and news articles (current events) are all lumped into one category, which is worth 40% of your final grade. Performance in all three areas matters and poor performance in even a single area can significantly drop your overall grade. Please come to class prepared, professionally engage your classmates, demonstrate your understanding of the topics through the article summaries and current events, and provide interesting insight with your contributions.

**Attendance Policy**

Attendance is mandatory as this is a seminar-type class with frequent discussion and debate. A student who fails to attend at least 80% of class sessions will receive a poor grade and possibly an F for the professionalism component (40%) of the final grade. Students are expected to arrive in the classroom at least 5 minutes before the start of each class and to attend all sessions. Unexcused late arrivals or absences will result in a lower final grade. Unavoidable absences (religious holidays, medical emergencies, family emergencies, athletic events, etc.) should be confirmed with the professor no later than one day prior to the class time. All cell phones, computers, and other electronic devices must be TURNED OFF during class time unless prior approval is obtained from the instructor. Emailing, texting, Facebooking, Skyping, tweeting, electronic surfing, and other forms of non-classroom communication are strictly forbidden. Each student is entitled to one warning and thereafter will receive no credit for participation on that day.

**Honor Code**

I expect you to abide by the University of Miami Undergraduate Honor Code. You can find it on the web (https://umshare.miami.edu/web/wda/deanstudents/pdf/undergrad_honorcode.pdf).

**Testing Accommodations**

Anyone using the testing services of the Office of Disability Services (http://www.miami.edu/index.php/academic_resource_center/disability_services/) must schedule appointments at least 1 week prior to the mid-term exam, and preferably earlier. The spaces fill up quickly.
Professor Bio