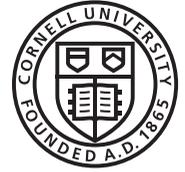# Health Care Policy

Focused on the intersection of health care delivery and policy

Program highlights: Demography | Economics and health policy | Health management | Regulation

Overview

The United States health care system spans the public and private sectors and is regulated in large part by policy decisions that impact individuals, families, and communities. Students drawn to understanding the complexities and broad implications of the healthcare industry—its management, delivery, cost, equity, and advancements—will find the Health Care Policy (HCP) major, offered by the Policy Analysis and Management (PAM) Department, especially compelling.

With a foundation in demography, economics, econometrics, statistics, writing, and mathematics, and depth in the natural sciences, the major integrates analytical thinking and research skills with quantitative data analysis skills. HCP students will choose a *Standard track* or a *Science-intensive track*. Students on both tracks pursue similar requirements in structural principles, a curriculum concentration, and additional Policy Analysis and Management courses. The *Science-intensive track*, which includes preparatory coursework for medical school and other health professional graduate programs, is recommended for students who intend to pursue a career in clinical health care.

HCP provides in-depth study in health policy analysis, systems management, and health care administration. The curriculum examines health care from behavioral, cross-cultural, policy, and social perspectives. Students apply theories to understand and explain the development of government policies addressing health care, and learn how the private health care system interacts with the public sector to affect health. As professionals and practitioners, leaders and managers, students will be able to navigate the economic and political landscape of the industry, and make evidence-based administrative policy decisions using science and data.

Sample Courses

The US Health Care System (PAM 2350) studies the stakeholders of the U.S. health care system and how they interact with one another. The course examines the role of medical care in producing health and the costs and benefits of new medical technologies. The objectives and behavior of key stakeholders: patients, employers, and taxpayers who pay for health care; private and public (i.e., Medicare and Medicaid) health insurers who manage the funds; hospitals, physicians, and other health care professionals who provide medical care; and pharmaceutical and medical device firms that supply products that providers use are also addressed.

Pharmaceutical Management and Policy (PAM 3110) provides an overview of the management and policy issues facing the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries is provided. This course perspective is global, with an emphasis on the U.S. as the largest and most profitable market.

Health Disparities (PAM 3180) examines how health disparities are defined and measured, sources of health disparities, and strategies to reduce health disparities. Students learn of the complexities of factors that influence patterns of disease and health at multiple levels by analyzing studies of health outcomes, the social conditions that are related to the health of populations, and some of the mechanisms through which these patterns are produced.

Sick around the World? Comparing Health Care Systems around the World (PAM 3780) uses a unifying framework to teach students how to systematically analyze the institutional and organizational setup of different health care systems around the world. The structure and performance of several health care systems is benchmarked against the US health care system.

Research

Undergraduate research opportunities abound for students interested in working closely with faculty members on specific topics.

HCP faculty research spans health policy and management and includes issues such as the economics of the health care system (Medicare, Medicaid, the structure of health care delivery systems, rural health networks); access to, and quality of, health care services (managed care enrollment choice, long-term care, mental health services); human behavioral aspects of health (risky behaviors and related health outcomes, policies and programs promoting health and disease prevention, reproductive health and human sexuality); and women's health (promoting women's health, alternative medicine, and medical ethics).

Research examples

- The effect of prescription drug monitoring programs on Opioid utilization in Medicare
- The impact of pharmaceutical marketing on physicians' prescribing behavior
- The impact of price transparency on patients' decision making
- Impact of policies requiring Emergency Room physicians to discharge patients within 4 hours
- The effect of hospital queues on medical quality
- Health care demand among ACA exchange enrollees
- Long-term health insurance and welfare effects
- Causes and consequences of health disparities

Honors program

HCP students can pursue a research honors program, which gives official recognition to students who have demonstrated excellence in their academic work and their capacity for independent research. In addition to fulfilling the requirements for the major, students in the honors program will participate in an honors seminar and prepare an empirically-based honors thesis. Honors students work with a research mentor in preparing for their thesis. Students apply to the Honors program during the first semester of their junior year.

Experiential Opportunities

Beyond the required course work, students may take advantage of many other educational opportunities, most of which involve working with Cornell faculty members or other professionals.

Study away options

Studying abroad allows students to take compare the U.S. health care system with those of other countries.

The *Capital Semester* in Albany, NY, New York State's capital, allows students to work as paid interns in the New York State Legislature and examine challenges inherent in state health policy.

Human Ecology's summer program, *Practicing Medicine: Health Care Culture, and Careers* in New York City, allows students to examine how health policy organizations function.

Internship examples

Aetna (now CVS Health)

Columbia University Summer Public Health Scholars Program

Greater New York Hospital Association Summer Internship Program

Healthcare Management Program, Northwell Health

National Cancer Institute/National Institutes of Health

United States Department of Veterans Affairs

Professional Pathways

The HCP major prepares students for leadership roles in careers in health policy analysis that require a strong foundation in the natural sciences and for careers that combine clinical health care with involvement in the broader health care system and public policy. Students will fill an important niche in this growing field.

They will also contribute to broader areas of the health care industry, including pharmaceuticals.

Graduate/Professional school

HCP students who pursue the *Science-intensive track* will also complete the coursework required for medical school and other health-related professional graduate programs.

HCP students who pursue the *Standard track* will be prepared for a variety of graduate programs, including MHA and MPH programs.

Sample of early-career paths

Analyst, Kaiser Family Foundation

Business Consultant, Aetna

Clinical Administration Analyst, University of California, San Francisco

Health Care Consultant, Booz Allen Hamilton

Project Coordinator, Westchester Medical Center, New York

Strategy and Analytics Consultant, IBM