

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

**BENF 2260**

**SWRK 6260**

**SOCI 2952**

**COURSE TIME & LOCATION:** Tuesdays, 1:45 pm- 4:45 pm, [DRLB 3N6](#) (209 South 33<sup>rd</sup> Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104)

**PROFESSOR:** [Jennifer J. Prah](#) (she/her), Founder and Director, [Health Equity and Policy Lab](#), Amartya Sen Professor of Health Equity, Economics and Policy

**OFFICE PHONE AND EMAIL:** 215-746-1330, [jenpr@upenn.edu](mailto:jenpr@upenn.edu)

**OFFICE HOURS:** Tuesdays, 4:45 pm-5:45 pm or by appointment (please email me),

**OFFICE AND OFFICE HOURS LOCATION:** 3701 Locust Walk, Room D4, Zoom

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

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### I. OVERVIEW

This course considers various theoretical approaches to justice and health, motivated by the idea that a moral framework is needed to address the ethical challenges posed by inequalities in access, quality, financial burdens, and resource priorities, as well as rising health care costs and the social determinants of health. The course includes four parts. The first part examines ethical frameworks that involve various approaches to medical and public health ethics. The second part presents an alternative theory of justice and health, the health capability paradigm (HCP), grounded in human flourishing. The third part explores domestic health policy applications of the HCP, including equal access, equitable and efficient health financing and insurance, rising costs, allocating resources and the social determinants of health. The fourth and final part of the course investigates domestic health reform, particularly a normative theory of health policy decision making grounded in political and moral legitimacy. The course scrutinizes the relevance of health justice for governing health at the domestic level, that is within countries, offers an alternative theory of health and social justice, the health capability paradigm, and of health governance, shared health governance, evaluating current domestic health, social and economic systems and proposals for reforming them in light of these alternative theoretical frameworks.

### II. STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES / ATTENDANCE

Students are expected to adhere to the University of Pennsylvania Center for Community Standards and Accountability (CSA) guidelines (<https://csa.upenn.edu>). Attendance is required.

### III. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

“Academic integrity is central to Penn's educational mission and the institution has set out definitions and standards to guide students and faculty in its [Code of Academic](#)

Integrity.” (<https://cetli.upenn.edu/resources/academic-integrity/>) Center for Excellence in Teaching, Learning and Innovation, University of Pennsylvania.

Penn's Mutual Commitment to Academic Integrity, Equitable Instruction, Trust, and Respect  
(<https://www.college.upenn.edu/sites/default/files/files/AcademicIntegrity20.pdf>).

**IV. STAVROS NIARCHOS FOUNDATION (SNF) PAIDEIA PROGRAM.** This course is part of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF) Paideia Program, which serves as a hub for dialogue in undergraduate education at Penn. SNF Paideia designated courses integrate students’ personal, professional, and civic development through “dialogue across difference” – i.e., engaging with diverse ideas and people for the purposes of mutual understanding, collective problem solving, and individual and community wellness. Engage further with Paideia’s mission to 'educate the whole person' at <https://snfpaideia.upenn.edu>.

## V. RESOURCES

**The Marks Family Writing Center:** “The Marks Family Writing Center was established in 2003 to provide writing support to Penn students and faculty across the disciplines. Thanks to the generous support of [Howard Marks](#), the Center is open to Penn students 6 days a week. In addition to providing individual writing guidance and feedback to our students, the Marks Family Writing Center also presents writing workshops across campus, consults with faculty and assists them with designing and responding to writing assignments, and engages in community outreach.”  
<https://writing.upenn.edu/critical/wc/> Schedule an appointment here: [http://writing.upenn.edu/critical/wc/schedule\\_appointment.php](http://writing.upenn.edu/critical/wc/schedule_appointment.php).

I have spoken with Valarie Ross and Valarie is delighted to offer the Marks Family Writing Center and staff services as resources to assist you in your writing assignments. Ms. Ross may be contacted here: [vrross@writing.upenn.edu](mailto:vrross@writing.upenn.edu)

**Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center:** The Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center is an invaluable resource at the University of Pennsylvania. I have been in contact with Lauris Olson, Librarian & Coordinator, Social Sciences Collections, University of Pennsylvania Libraries who coordinates collection development and management activities of subject librarians for anthropology & archaeology, business, gender & women’s studies, psychology, social policy & practice/social work, and education. As the Penn Libraries' social sciences bibliographer since 1998, Lauris Olson ([olson@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:olson@pobox.upenn.edu)) is responsible for selecting books, journals, electronic resources, and other media supporting Penn research and instruction in sociology, political science, economics, linguistics, criminology, and related fields, is the Penn Libraries' African studies bibliographer and is delighted to offer the Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center and staff services as resources to assist you in your writing assignments.

**VI. CORE COMPETENCIES:** Critical Thinking, Knowledge and Analysis, Creativity, Oral Communication, Written Communication, Collaboration

**VII. CORE VALUES:** Kindness, Respect, Listening, Space, Collaboration, Support, Preparation, Ownership of Own and Others' Success, Presentism, Participation

**VIII. ELECTRONICS:** No computers, tablets, phones, or other electronic devices are permitted to be used for anything other than taking notes during class. Using your smartphone, tablet, laptop, smartwatch, or any other device that connects you to the world outside of the classroom is not allowed unless an exception is made in association with some classroom activity (or some disability).

## **IX. COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS**

**Week 1: Course Overview (01/21/25)**

**Week 2: Introduction (01/28/25)**

*Topics:*

- Theoretical foundations
  - Human flourishing and health capability
  - Social choice theory and health capability
  - Trans-positionality and prioritization among health capabilities
  - Ethical commitments and public moral norms
  - Ethics of the social determinants of health
  - A joint scientific and deliberative approach
- Applications
  - Rethinking equal access: agency, quality and norms
  - Responsibility and health: voluntary risk and paternalism
  - Moral foundations of health insurance: preventing, mitigating, and coping with risk
  - Market failures, public goods, and the role of the private sector
  - A robust concept of opportunity costs: incorporating efficiency
  - Disabilities and reasonable accommodation
- Normative theory and health policy decision making
  - Norms and values in the public's assessment of policy
  - Public moral norms and domestic health reforms
  - Internalization and agreement on moral values

*Required Reading:*

Ruger, JP. 2010 “Preface” and “Introduction”, in [Health and Social Justice](#). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press

**Week 3: Approaches to Medical and Public Health Ethics (02/04/25)**

*Topics:*

- Welfare economic and utilitarian approaches
- Communitarianism and liberal communitarianism
- Egalitarian theories: equal opportunity and equal welfare
- Libertarian and market-based approaches
- Deliberative democratic procedures
- Summary of problems with current set of frameworks

*Required Reading:*

Ruger, JP. 2010 “Chapter 1: Approaches to Medical and Public Health Ethics” in [Health and Social Justice](#). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press

*Suggested Reading:*

References cited in Chapter 1, listed in the Bibliography section of Health and Social Justice, which interest you and motivate you to read and explore further.

**Week 4: Health and Human Flourishing (02/11/25)**

*Topics:*

- Aristotle’s theory
  - Human flourishing
  - Appropriate ends of political activity
  - Enabling functioning as a measure of political arrangements
  - Other ends for political action
  - Defining flourishing
- The capability approach
  - Capability sets
  - Heterogeneity
  - Measures of well-being freedom: opportunity and process
  - Selection and valuation
  - Basic capabilities
  - An underspecified theory

*Required Reading:*

Ruger, JP. 2010 “Chapter 2: Health and Human Flourishing” in [\*Health and Social Justice\*](#). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press

Ruger, Jennifer Prah. “[Positive Public Health Ethics: Toward Flourishing and Resilient Communities and Individuals](#).” *The American Journal of Bioethics*, vol. 20, no. 7, 2020, pp. 44–54.

Health Equity and Policy Lab. THEORIES. [HEALTH CAPABILITY PARADIGM](#) page and subpages thoroughly reviewed in their entirety.

*Suggested Reading:*

References cited in Chapter 2, listed in the Bibliography section of *Health and Social Justice*, which interest you and motivate you to read and explore further.

**Week 5: Pluralism, Incompletely Theorized Agreements, & Public Policy (02/18/25)**

*Topics:*

- Social choice theory, collective rationality, and Arrow’s impossibility result
  - Problems in social choice
  - Arrow’s impossibility theorem
- Incompletely theorized agreements
- Incompletely specified agreements
- Incompletely specified and generalized agreements
- Incompletely theorized agreements on particular outcomes
- Incompletely theorized agreements and public policy
- Pluralism, ambiguity, and incompletely theorized agreements
- Incompletely theorized agreements and health capability
- Health capability set: central and non-central health capabilities

*Required Reading:*

Ruger, JP. 2010 “Chapter 3: Pluralism, Incompletely Theorized Agreements, and Public Policy” in [\*Health and Social Justice\*](#). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press

Health Equity and Policy Lab. THEORIES. [SHARED HEALTH GOVERNANCE](#) page and subpages thoroughly reviewed in their entirety.

*Suggested Reading:*

References cited in Chapter 3, listed in the Bibliography section of *Health and Social Justice*, which interest you and motivate you to read and explore further.

## **Week 6: Justice, Capability, and Health Policy (02/25/25)**

### *Topics:*

- Trans-positionality: a global view of health
  - Health capabilities: health functionings, health needs, and health agency
  - Health and disease
- Equality, sufficiency, and priority
  - A hybrid account: measuring inequality in health policy
  - Attainment and shortfall equality
  - Efficiency and health policy
  - Ethics of the social determinants of health
  - Limitations and objections

### *Required Reading:*

Ruger, JP. 2010 “Chapter 4: Justice, Capability, and Health Policy” in [\*Health and Social Justice\*](#). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Health Equity and Policy Lab. RESEARCH. [HEALTH EQUITY](#) page and subpages thoroughly reviewed in their entirety.

### *Suggested Reading:*

References cited in Chapter 4, listed in the Bibliography section of *Health and Social Justice*, which interest you and motivate you to read and explore further

## **Week 7: Grounding the Right to Health (03/04/25)**

### *Topics:*

- Scope and content of a right to health
- Duties and obligations in domestic and international policy and law: ethical commitments and public moral norms
- Positive and negative rights: a constitutional right to medical self-defense

### *Required Reading:*

Ruger, JP. 2010 “Chapter 5: Grounding the Right to Health” in [\*Health and Social Justice\*](#). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Health Equity and Policy Lab. RESEARCH. [HEALTH CAPABILITY](#) page and subpages thoroughly reviewed in their entirety.

*Suggested Reading:*

References cited in Chapter 5, listed in the Bibliography section of *Health and Social Justice*, which interest you and motivate you to read and explore further.

**Spring Term Break** (March 8-16, 2025)

**Week 8: Equal Access** (03/18/25)

*Topics:*

- Rethinking equal access: agency, quality, and norms
  - Defining equal access and a right to health care
  - Equal opportunity and equal resources
  - Rethinking equal access: a health capability perspective
  - Justification for high-quality care
  - Health agency
  - Health norms
- High-quality care and a two-tiered system
- Responsibility and health: voluntary risk compared with involuntary risk
- Paternalism, libertarian paternalism, and free will

*Required Reading:*

Ruger, JP. 2010 “Chapter 6: A Health Capability Account of Equal Access” [\*in Health and Social Justice\*](#). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press

*Suggested Reading:*

References cited in Chapter 6, listed in the Bibliography section of *Health and Social Justice*, which interest you and motivate you to read and explore further.

**Week 9: Equitable and Efficient Health Financing and Insurance** (03/25/25)

*Topics:*

- Theory of demand for health insurance
- Behavioral economics and prospect theory
- Medical ethics and equal access to health care
- Welfare economics and the capability approach
- Vulnerability and insecurity

- Moral foundations of health insurance
- Gains in well-being from risk pooling and health insurance
- Empirical evidence on the equity of health financing models
- Market failures, public goods, and the role of the private sector

*Required Reading:*

Ruger, JP. 2010 “Chapter 7: A Health Capability Account of Equitable and Efficient Health Financing and Insurance” in [Health and Social Justice](#). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Health Equity and Policy Lab. RESEARCH. [HEALTH FINANCING AND INSURANCE](#) page and subpages thoroughly reviewed in their entirety.

*Suggested Reading:*

References cited in Chapter 7, listed in the Bibliography section of *Health and Social Justice*, which interest you and motivate you to read and explore further.

**Week 10: Allocating Resources (04/01/25)**

*Topics:*

- Reasoned consensus through scientific and deliberative processes
- Frameworks for combining technical and ethical rationality for collective choice
- Allocations within the broader social budget
- Allocating within the health policy budget: benefits package: types of goods and services guaranteed
- An evidenced-based approach: medical appropriateness and clinical practice guidelines
- Medical futility and setting limits
- Universal benefits package
- Hard cases: the “bottomless pit objection” and “reasonable accommodation”
- Joint clinical and economic solutions: incorporating efficiency
- Resource allocation and age: reaching the highest average life expectancy

*Required Reading:*

Ruger, JP. 2010 “Chapter 8: Allocating Resources: A Joint Scientific and Deliberative Approach” in [Health and Social Justice](#). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Health Equity and Policy Lab. RESEARCH. [HEALTH EFFICIENCY](#) page and subpages thoroughly reviewed in their entirety.

Health Equity and Policy Lab. RESEARCH. [RESOURCE ALLOCATION](#). page and subpages thoroughly reviewed in their entirety.



*Suggested Reading:*

References cited in Chapter 8, listed in the Bibliography section of *Health and Social Justice*, which interest you and motivate you to read and explore further.

**Week 11: Domestic Health Reform (04/08/25)**

*Topics:*

- Political and moral legitimacy: a normative theory of health policy decision-making
- Public moral norms and domestic health reforms
- Norms and values in the public's assessment of policy
- Alternative frameworks: political conceptions and political processes
- Case study: the Clinton Administration and failed health reform

*Required Reading:*

Ruger, JP. 2010 "Chapter 9: Political and Moral Legitimacy: A Normative Theory of Health Policy Decision-Making" in [\*Health and Social Justice\*](#). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press

*Suggested Reading:*

References cited in Chapter 9, listed in the Bibliography section of *Health and Social Justice*, which interest you and motivate you to read and explore further.

**Week 12: Conclusion and Recap (04/15/25)**

*Required Reading:*

Ruger, JP. 2010 "Conclusion" in [\*Health and Social Justice\*](#). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press

**Week 13: Fulfilling Global Health Justice Requirements: Realizing the Health Capability Paradigm (04/22/25)**

*Topics:*

- Where Primary Responsibility Falls: States
- Core Principles for Society
- Health Capability: Conceptualization and Operationalization
- Resources for Health Capability: Financial Protection and the Need for Universal Insurance

*Required Reading:*

Ruger, JP. 2018 “Chapter 11: Fulfilling Global Health Justice Requirements: Realizing the Health Capability Paradigm (HCP)” in [\*Global Health Justice and Governance\*](#). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Health Equity and Policy Lab. THEORIES. [PROVINCIAL GLOBALISM](#) page and subpages thoroughly reviewed in their entirety.

*Suggested Reading:*

References cited in Chapter 11, listed in the Bibliography section of *Global Health Justice and Governance*, which interest you and motivate you to read and explore further.

**Week 14: Presentations (04/29/25)**

**X. ORGANIZATION OF COURSE**

The course pedagogy involves in person discussion. Please come prepared to make comments, ask questions and positively add to the in-person class discussion each week. Students are expected to read the required readings for each week and to participate in discussion as well as serve as a lead discussant.

**XI. ASSIGNMENTS**

Assignments and percentage effort will include the following:

Final Paper and Presentation .....	40%
Final Paper Outline .....	10%
Class Participation .....	35%
Lead Discussant .....	15%

Class Participation and Lead Discussant: Class participation is important -- students are encouraged to share their knowledge, comments, critiques, feedback, and alternative opinions in efforts to present thoughtful comments and analytical arguments on various issues and topics. Students are expected to have done required reading in preparation for each class. Students are expected to sign up to be lead discussant 1-3 times during the course, depending on class size, and will prepare a one-page handout (uploaded to the course website by noon on the day of the respective class) and contribute to and collaborate in leading class discussion.

Final Paper, Outline and Presentation: The paper is your opportunity to choose a topic related to the course to explore and develop your thoughts, ideas and research to become more knowledgeable about a particular academic problem or policy issue and to present a thoughtful argument. There is significant flexibility in the subject and form of the paper. This paper should not have been or be submitted for another class. Maximum length is 20

pages in APA format, double-spaced. An outline of the paper is due on (03-17-2025 by midnight) (email to [jenpr@upenn.edu](mailto:jenpr@upenn.edu)). The paper is due by midnight on (05-09-2025) (email to [jenpr@upenn.edu](mailto:jenpr@upenn.edu)). Although not required, I would be happy to offer you feedback on your paper topic, thesis, approach, etc., so please email me and/or come to office hours to discuss. I will provide feedback to you on your outline. You will give a presentation on your paper during the last course meeting on (04-29-2025). Please take advantage of the resources listed on the syllabus and elsewhere at the University of Pennsylvania to assist you in your process. Please include an “Acknowledgments” section at the end of your paper thanking staff, faculty and any fellow students who provided you with help, advice, guidance and/or assistance on your paper.

**Graduate Students:** Graduate students taking the course as SWRK 6260, will have an additional lead discussant assignment, be expected to complete suggested reading, in addition to required reading, assignments and complete a longer final paper (30 pages) assignment.