Course Description:
Medical care spending was about $3 trillion a year in the U.S., accounting for almost one in every six dollars spent in the U.S. economy and growing even before the Affordable Care Act legislation was signed into law four years ago by President Obama. Yet this large and important system is confusing, complex, expensive and difficult to understand.

The goal of this course will be to break down medicine, related science and health care for the average person, writing and communicating about it in an understandable way. In particular, we will spend a good part of the semester studying and examining the Affordable Care Act, or what has come to be known as Obamacare. You’ll find that just getting health insurance is a small part of this law.

Because health care is not written and communicated so consumers can understand it, people suffer injuries and even death from medical errors, while doctors and insurance companies that cannot convey their messages in easy-to-understand ways result in a frustrated public at large. All of this costs money and endangers lives.

What is the difference between an ACO and a PPO and how do you write that in a way that people will know whether to buy that plan over an HMO? If a patient is “treatment-naïve” for the HIV virus, why don’t medical researchers simply write that the test results turned up “negative?” Are generics better or worse than brand names? The difference between Medicare and Medicaid is that one plan provides medical benefits to elderly and the other to poor Americans, but most do not even know this because it has never been explained to them effectively.

While learning and being refreshed upon basic writing and information-gathering through instructor handouts, videos, texts, lectures and guest speakers, students will also spend time doing research and interviews necessary to write stories, speeches or memos to help fellow health professionals, businesses and the public at large.

Students will also practice and study how to write and edit across all platforms whether they be print, digital or broadcast outlets. They will learn to write about health care and medical issues in a more understandable, organized and convincing manner. Students will also study the writing of others.

Student goals will be accomplished through lectures, guest speakers, readings and writing assignments. There will be a mid-term and final writing assignment as well as two or three
shorter exercises throughout the semester where students will be asked to conduct interviews or
cover events or research topics or presentations for their stories.

Texts
“Inside Obamacare: The Fix for America’s Health Care System” (required – it launched as an e-
book and costs less than $4)
Health Care Terms, a book by Deborah and Virgil Slee (optional)
A Medical Dictionary (optional)

Students should follow, read and watch the news, particularly in the 24-hour period before each
class. Read the New York Times health page, as one key example, and my Forbes blog,
http://www.forbes.com/sites/brucejapsen/. It’s free and you get an e-mail each time you write
something. You can also sign up for various news outlets for free or friend them on Facebook or
follow them on Twitter. We can do this in class if you are not already using social media.

Instructor Office Hours
Office hours are by appointment, but instructor generally available via phone or through our
digital classroom throughout the week. My schedule is flexible.

Grading
Student grades are based on several things that include writing assignments, a midterm and a
final project. Grades will be determined in the following manner.

Attendance, participation for in-class work and general engagement in course, classmates,
speakers and instructor: 30 percent
Outside reporting, writing and editing exercises: 20 percent (two short stories/blog posts)

Midterm reporting and writing assignment: 15 percent

Final reporting and writing project: 20 percent (grade based ½ reporting/interviewing and ½
writing)

Deadlines:
Deadlines are critical in journalism, public relations and communicating information in today’s
digital age. Late assignments will drop at least one letter grade for each day they are past
their deadline.

Check daily your e-mails and the news item section of our classroom, particularly the
morning of class.

In today’s media, developments in the news are reported more frequently than ever. You should
be attuned to the latest health and medical science developments.

Spelling, style and grammar.

Grades suffer if copy has spelling, style or grammatical errors.
**Attendance/Class participation**

It is important to attend class during our Wednesday evening allotted time and participate while you are in class. See grading.

**Administrative Home**

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the administrative home of this course and governs matters such as the add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and other related issues. Different colleges may have different policies. Questions may be addressed to 120 Schaeffer Hall, or see the CLAS Academic Policies Handbook at [http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook](http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook).

**Electronic Communication**

University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). Faculty and students should use this account for correspondences ([Operations Manual, III.15.2, k.11](#)).

**Accommodations for Disabilities**

A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet privately with the course instructor to make particular arrangements. See [www.uiowa.edu/~sds/](http://www.uiowa.edu/~sds/) for more information.

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**Academic Honesty**

All CLAS students or students taking classes offered by CLAS have, in essence, agreed to the College's [Code of Academic Honesty](#): "I pledge to do my own academic work and to excel to the best of my abilities, upholding the IOWA Challenge. I promise not to lie about my academic work, to cheat, or to steal the words or ideas of others; nor will I help fellow students to violate the Code of Academic Honesty." Any student committing academic misconduct is reported to the College and placed on disciplinary probation or may be suspended or expelled ([CLAS Academic Policies Handbook](#)).

**CLAS Final Examination Policies**

The final examination schedule for each class is announced by the Registrar generally by the tenth day of classes. Final exams are offered only during the official final examination period. No exams of any kind are allowed during the last week of classes. All students should
plan on being at the UI through the final examination period. Once the Registrar has announced the date, time, and location of each final exam, the complete schedule will be published on the Registrar's web site and will be shared with instructors and students. It is the student's responsibility to know the date, time, and place of a final exam.

Making a Suggestion or a Complaint

Students with a suggestion or complaint should first visit with the instructor (and the course supervisor), and then with the departmental DEO. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

Understanding Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community have a responsibility to uphold this mission and to contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported immediately. See the UI Comprehensive Guide on Sexual Harassment for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.

Reacting Safely to Severe Weather

In severe weather, class members should seek appropriate shelter immediately, leaving the classroom if necessary. The class will continue if possible when the event is over. For more information on Hawk Alert and the siren warning system, visit the Department of Public Safety website.

Semester schedule.
The semester is likely to change pending availability of speakers and or news developments in health care that may break over the course of the semester.

Week One (Wednesday, August 27)
Today’s media/course overview. We will discuss the changing media, important goals for the course and expectations and how you will work to communicate in this shifting landscape. There’s nothing you have to study for to prepare for this but please be prompt and check into the classroom by 5:30 so we have everybody connected.

Week Two (September 3) (possible guest lecture to join instructor)
The health care media landscape. Class overview: getting started, writing concisely and choosing topics that people will want to read. What's important to consumers about health care news and why? We will also sign up for news web sites. You can get started by signing up to Forbes to follow me. We will also sign up for and review other sites that are free and push out important information.

Week Three (September 10) (possible guest lecturer to join instructor)
Writing concisely. The fewer words, the better, particularly with medical care. We will take a look at some of the early marketing campaigns of the Affordable Care Act to individuals and
Medicaid recipients under the expanded coverage. Bring in some examples if you desire to add to the discussion.

**Week Four (September 17)** Possible guest communicator from health insurance industry

**Insurance, quality and outcomes.** We will begin to look at key cost-containment and quality improvement efforts in health care and how to communicate them. In addition, we will talk about covering an event, speech or medical conference as you gather information throughout the semester for our various projects. Never be afraid to ask a doctor or health executive what they mean. “Doc, I know you are an otolaryngology specialist but don’t you really mean: ear, nose and throat doctor.”

**Week Five (September 24)**
**Medicare and Medicaid.** These vast government health insurance programs are important. We will begin to look at communicating basics of how this program works and is changing, discussing basic mechanics and building on Sept. 11 week discussion. Many initiatives in Medicare related to quality and outcomes are also going on in the private insurance sector.

**Week Six (October 1) (Individual conferences)**
**Providers of medical care.** Medical, health and science web sites. What can they do for you in your reporting, writing and communicating efforts? They help broaden a story beyond local. You have a friend with a rare condition or a family member with a health insurance hassle. This helps make your story more powerful. Possible guest speaker.

**Week Seven (October 8) (Individual conferences)**
Let’s look at where we are in the semester and talk about your mid-term due next week and the end-of-semester story, memo or project you want to do. We will likely schedule individually allotted time and students will be credited as class time for these important individual sessions.

**Week Eight (October 15) (midterm is due)**
A story, blogpost, essay, memo or speech of 400 to 500 words (always double-spaced). Take a position on an aspect of health care reform or perhaps talk to someone about this particular open enrollment period, the second for the Affordable Care Act. Perhaps you know someone who cannot get insurance or you know a small business that cannot afford to provide care to employees. Or, maybe there is an aspect of the Affordable Care Act that is not even being addressed.

During this class, let’s talk about what you want to do for a final project. Writing a story about a person, a condition, disease, health insurance dispute or public policy issue. Profile and interview techniques to be discussed.

**Week Nine (October 22)**
**Medical Journals, Peer-reviewed Research and Scientific Studies**
Writing and reporting about medical journal reports, scientific breakthroughs and things a young reporter, public relations executive or marketer might do in their first communications job. We will examine this world, what to look for in the articles and how to read these often formula written, yet complicated works by academics and researchers.
Week Ten (Nov. 5)
(guest speaker – possible flip with Week 9)
Drugs, Big Pharma and the Food and Drug Administration. We may do an exercise in-class that takes an impenetrable press release from a medical company or the Food and Drug Administration web site, for example, and we will re-write it for a mass audience.

Week 12 (November 12) (Start individual conferences)
Lecture TBA

Week 13 (November 19) (More individual conferences)
Lecture TBA

Week 14 (Thanksgiving Week/No Class)
You have no class this week. Enjoy your break

Week 15 (December 3)
Final checklists. Fact-checking and proofreading techniques. Professor available throughout the week for any last-minute consultations on final story

Week 16 (December 10)
Final project is due. 500 to 700 words (Length to be discussed. Semester overview, project assistance)

About the professor
Bruce Japsen is an award-winning, health care journalist, author and educator who writes primarily for Forbes. Based in Chicago, his work is largely focused on health policy, business and the Affordable Care Act. His stories also appear in the New York Times, Chicago Medicine magazine and financial news web site Motley Fool. Bruce is a sought after speaker and analyst, regularly appearing on numerous TV and radio programs such as Fox News Channel’s “Forbes on Fox” program as well as Chicago outlets like WBBM Newsradio-780 and 105.9 FM and WTTW’s Chicago Tonight public affairs program on PBS. He has more than 25 years of professional and academic journalism experience, including newspaper, TV, radio and Web-based media, working as the health care business reporter at the Chicago Tribune from 1998 to 2011. He has also been a reporter at Crain’s Modern Healthcare magazine, the Dubuque (IA) Telegraph Herald and the Des Moines Register, covering everything from Big Ten football and basketball to an Academy Award nominated movie and presidential politics. In addition to this program at Iowa, Japsen has taught at Loyola University Chicago’s School of Communication and the University of Chicago’s Graham School of General Studies. He sits on the University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication Advisory Board and is a past president and member of the Saint Andrew School advisory board in Chicago.