University of Iowa  
School of Journalism & Mass Communication  
Summer 2016  
JMC: 5267:0EXW (019:267:EXW)  
Strategic Health Care Communication  
W 5:30 pm-9 pm

Course Description:  
Medical care spending is 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 faster as baby boomers age and millions of Americans gain health coverage under the Affordable Care Act signed into law six 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 healthcare, medicine and related science for the average person, writing and communicating about it in an understandable way. Since this is a summer course, we will pay particularly close attention to the news of the day whether it be the back and forth of Clinton and Trump and Sanders as it relates to healthcare or the Zika virus and its impact on the Olympics or the Midwest. 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 and the changing healthcare system in general. You’ll find that just getting health insurance is a small part of this law and we will look beyond the politics to its real implications.

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 can endanger 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? There’s no difference other than the price, but we will look at that, too. The difference between Medicare and Medicaid is that one government plan provides medical benefits to the elderly and the other to poor Americans, but most do not even know this because it isn’t explained to them.

While learning and being refreshed upon basic writing and information-gathering through instructor handouts, videos, 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. **But you must be digital in this class.** If you’re not on Twitter
or LinkedIn or Facebook, I encourage you to be on them and be familiar with these and other social media platforms. Students will learn to write about healthcare 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 at least three graded writing assignments including the final exam as well as shorter exercises throughout the semester where students will be asked to write a quick turnaround story on a speaker that talks during class.

**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, as one key example, and my Forbes columns, [http://www.forbes.com/sites/brucejapsen/](http://www.forbes.com/sites/brucejapsen/). You can also sign up for various news outlets for free or friend them on Facebook or follow them on Twitter such as Politico or NPR’s Shots blog. We can do this in class if you are not already using social media.

**Instructor Office Hours**

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

**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. Misspelling names is inexcusable.

*Attendance, participation for in-class work and general engagement in course, classmates, speakers and instructor: 40 percent*

*Outside reporting, writing and editing exercises: 30 percent* (two short stories/blog posts that will be largely based on a guest speaker in class)

*Final reporting and writing project: 30 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](http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook)).

**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](http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook): "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, June 15)**

**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 healthcare landscape. Your study for this class is to read and follow key developments in healthcare. Be prompt and check into the classroom by 5:30 so we have everybody connected.

**Writing concisely.** The fewer words, the better, are important, particularly with healthcare and medical science stories. We will take a look at the latest healthcare news on the Affordable Care
Act, the Zika virus or whatever is in the news, discussing how we would write it or make it better. Feel free bring in some examples if you desire to add to the discussion.

**Week Two (Wednesday, June 22) (possible guest lecture from insurance industry 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 or I will at least guide you to some of the better health information news.

**Week Three (Insurance/provider theme) (Wednesday June 29) 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.” We will want to ask our guest speakers how they work to break down jargon given a PR person for an insurance company or hospital may talk jargon all day long but have a challenge when they communicate outside of the hospital to reporters and the public at large.

**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 insurance industry discussion. Many initiatives in Medicare related to quality and outcomes are also going on in the private insurance sector.

**Week Four (Wednesday, July 6) (Pharmacy/provider theme) Walgreens releases earnings today so I am hopeful for a speaker from Walgreens) (Start individual conferences)**

**Pharmacy, mental health and how the drugstore in America has changed.**

**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. (We will do this if we don’t have a speaker).

**Week Five (Wednesday, July 13) (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. Each student will get individual time of up to 30 minutes or what is needed. If you want to schedule on a day other than today, you can do that. We will likely schedule individually allotted time and students will be credited as class time for these important individual sessions.

**Week Six (July 20) (Doctor, Hospital, provider theme)**
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.

Week Seven (July 27) (Resources we may have missed)
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 Eight (Aug. 3 class) Final is due this week
A story of 500 to 650 words (always double-spaced). Take a position on an aspect of health care reform or something that has emerged in the news over the summer. 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.

About the professor
Bruce Japsen is a health care journalist, author and educator who writes for Forbes. Based in Chicago, his work is largely focused on health policy, healthcare-related businesses and the Affordable Care Act. Bruce is a sought after speaker and analyst. He’s part of the cast of Forbes writers who appear weekly on 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 30 years of professional and academic journalism experience, including newspaper, TV, radio and Web-based media, writing for the New York Times (2011-2013) working as the health care business reporter at the Chicago Tribune (1998-2011). 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 and the University of Chicago. 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.