Professor: Julia Wolfson, PhD MPP
Assistant Professor
Department of Health Management and Policy
University of Michigan School of Public Health
Office: M3240, SPH II
Email: jwolfson@umich.edu

Class meeting Location: 3755 SPH I

Class meeting Day/Time: Tuesdays, 1:00-4:00

Credits: 3 credits

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description:
In the US, today’s modern food system is nearly unrecognizable from the food system of a century ago. Dramatic social changes and shifts in policies, technology, industry, and advertising (among other things) have changed the way we produce, process, procure, prepare, and consume food. These changes have paralleled equally dramatic increases in rates of obesity, diabetes, and other diet related diseases among children and adults. We produce more food than we can eat, participate in a globally connected food system, and yet we face the dual problems of obesity and hunger/food insecurity, particularly among vulnerable populations with low socio-economic status. The way we eat has spawned a set of incredibly intractable public health problems which are complicated by the important social and cultural role food plays in our society today and throughout history.

This course uses the social ecological framework as a vehicle to explore the many different factors that influence the way we eat. We will examine different policy and public health approaches to address a variety of problems stemming from the modern US food system within the context of the social/cultural factors that surround food. This course places a strong emphasis on discussion, and requires active participation in class activities. We will discuss complex questions about how government has responded to diet related health problems, the appropriate role for government in efforts to facilitate healthy eating, and how to develop and evaluate policy approaches to help people eat better and improve health.

Course Materials:
All course readings will be provided on CANVAS.
Course goals:
The goal of this course is to provide students with a nuanced understanding of the social and policy determinants of eating behavior, the complex relationship between food and health, and the policy levers available to influence that relationship.

The specific objectives of this course are to help students:
1. Understand and assess the complex and interrelated factors (individual, structural and policy) that influence eating behavior and food related public health problems.
2. Appraise the political landscape and stakeholders that are important for making policy change in the area of food systems and eating behavior.
3. Apply principles of policy-making, policy change theory, and social determinants of health to food related problems in the US.
4. Critically evaluate academic literature, reports, and policy documents related to food and food systems.
5. Develop strong written and verbal communication skills.
6. Define and frame public health problems in such a way that inspires policy change.

Course competencies:
Primary course competencies:
A.6: Policy analysis: Understand the policy-making process and the role of politics; assess a problem and identify and compare potential policy solutions; and understand and critically assess methods to evaluate policy impact.
B.1: Convey: Speak and write in a clear, logical and grammatical manner in formal and informal situations; prepare presentations; facilitate and participate in group discussions.
C.5: Collaboration: Work collaboratively with others as part of a team or group, demonstrating commitment to the team’s goal and encouraging individuals to put forth their best effort.

Secondary course competencies
B.2: Listen: receive, process, and respond appropriately to information conveyed by others.
B.3: Interact: Perceive and respond appropriately to the spoken, unspoken or partly expressed thoughts, feelings and concerns of others.

Course prerequisites:
None

Classroom expectations and course format:
Class sessions will include a variety of activities including lectures, discussions, group activities, student presentations and debate. Most sessions will include at least some lecture to provide background information that supplements the assigned readings and frames the discussion. Many class meetings will include group discussions either in small groups or with the entire class. One class period will be devoted to a debate of a complex policy question in which students will role play different stakeholders with an interest in the policy questions at hand. Two class periods will be devoted to student presentations of group and individual projects.
It is expected that students will actively participate in discussions and come to class having done the readings and prepared to contribute. It is also expected that students will address each other with respect and consideration for the thoughts and opinions of others. Some group activities will require the use of computers, and laptops are permitted in the classroom for note taking purposes. Cell phones are not permitted during class time.

SPH is committed to creating classroom environments that are supportive of diversity, equity and inclusion. As a discussion based class, we will engage with each other on a variety of topics. It is totally fine, and expected that members of the class will disagree from time to time—these are thorny and complex issues and there are often not clear cut “right” answers! However, please focus on the ideas being discussed and speak to all members of the class respectfully at all times.

**Assignments and grading:**
All page guidelines for written assignments for this course are based on 12-point font, double spaced lines and 1-inch margins.

Your grade will be based on a mix of individual and group assignments. Throughout the semester you will work on several assignments that build towards a policy memo on a subject of your choosing (as long as it relates to the content covered in the course). You will also conduct a legislative history as a group project. Your final grade will be calculated based on the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>% of Grade</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic for policy memo</td>
<td>Propose a topic (food related problem) to examine as the subject for your subsequent policy memo assignments</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Jan 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>1-2 pages: describe the size and scope of the problem and why it is important for public health</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Feb 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Debate</td>
<td>Participate in in-class debate</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Mar 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislative History</td>
<td>Group project: conduct a legislative history: produce an annotated timeline and stakeholder analysis and present your findings to the class</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Mar 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Alternative Memo</td>
<td>4-5 pages: build on the problem statement and provide 3 policy alternatives to address your problem</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Mar 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Policy Memo</td>
<td>6-8 pages: build on the policy alternative memo (and incorporate feedback) and make a policy recommendation, examine implementation challenges and propose concrete next steps</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Apr 18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>In class participation and submit discussion questions</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
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All of these assignments will be described in much greater detail in class, but briefly:

**Topic for Policy Memo:** (not graded) Each student will select a problem of his or her choice that will be the subject of the problem statement, policy alternative memo and final policy memo
assignments. This assignment should be just 1 or 2 sentences. The purpose is just to make sure you have selected a viable topic for these assignments.

**Problem Statement:** (15%) In 1-2 pages (not including references), describe the size and scope of your problem and why it is important to address. You should cite relevant literature and statistics and frame the problem in such a way so that the solution is not pre-determined.

**Midterm Debate:** (10%) This is an in-class activity that should be both fun and informative. We will divide the class into groups that will represent different stakeholder groups. You will have time in class to research your positions and priorities, and then we will debate two proposed food policies. If everyone engages in a meaningful way, everyone should be able to get full credit on this activity.

**Legislative History:** (15%) This is a group project in which students will be assigned to groups of 4 or 5. Each group will research the legislative history of different federal food policies that have been either proposed or enacted in the past. Each group will produce an annotated timeline and a stakeholder analysis for its policy and will present its work in a 15-20 minute presentation to the class. You will have some time in-class to meet with your group and work on this project.

**Policy Alternative Memo:** (20%) This is a 4-5 page policy memo that will build on the problem statement you previously produced (incorporating instructor feedback). You will address your policy memo to a real life decision maker and present 3 policy alternatives to address your problem. The 3 policies should be realistic and should draw on evidence or theory to support their choice. For each policy, you should describe what it is, why it is a good option, some challenges or drawbacks that should be considered and how that policy could be evaluated.

**Final Policy Memo:** (30%) This is a 6-8 page policy memo that refine and build off of the Policy Alternative Memo assignment. You should incorporate instructor feedback on that assignment, choose one of your 3 policy alternatives and make a recommendation for the policy you think your decision maker should choose. Discuss factors the decision maker should be aware of that will affect implementation of that policy taking political, economic and logistical factors into consideration. Make recommendations for concrete next steps for moving forward with that policy approach. You will also present your problem and recommended policy solution to the class.

**Class participation:**
As is often the case, you will get out of this class what you put into it, but your contributions will influence what your fellow students get out of the class as well. Therefore, active student participation in class discussions and activities is essential. The goal for this course is to have a true seminar experience with students sharing responsibility for the direction of class discussions. Therefore, class participation is worth 10% of your grade. This grade will come from two sources:
1) 5% of your grade will come from your in-class contributions to the discussions and active participation in activities. Students will sign up to lead one course discussion (in pairs). Of course, this means that attendance is important. Please try to minimize the number of sessions for which you will be absent.

2) 5% of your grade will come from discussion questions that should be submitted to the Assignments section of the course website by 8:00am the day class meets. These questions should demonstrate engagement with the assigned readings and could include questions about the readings, substantive reactions to the readings you would like to discuss with the class; questions about policy implications of the content in the readings, etc.

I will expect that you have done the reading prior to class and that you are prepared to engage in meaningful discussion about the readings and related issues. My hope is that you will be active leaders of class discussions and that we will have lively, engaging and challenging discussions.

**Grading Policy:**
All assignments will be scored out of 100 points and then will be weighted for the final course grade according to their worth (described above). For example, the problem statement will be graded out of 100 points. So, if you get a 95/100, for the final grade your score on that assignment will be 95x0.15 (14.25/15).

Because the final assignment builds upon two previous assignments, attention to addressing feedback on prior assignments is important. If you have questions about feedback and want to discuss please email me and we will schedule a time to meet. I will do my best to return assignments to you in a timely manner so you have time to start work on the next assignment.

I will grade all assignments myself. If you have a question or concern about a grade, please make an appointment to meet with me as soon as possible. Assignments are due on the stated date. If you need an extension, please contact me before the assignment is due. Extensions requested after the due date will only be granted in very extenuating circumstances.
Assignments turn in late without prior approval will be docked 5 points per each day late.

**Grading Scale:**
- A+ 97-100
- A  94-96
- A- 90-93
- B+ 87-89
- B  84-86
- B- 80-83
- C+ 77-79
- C  74-76
- C- 70-73
- D+ 67-69
- D  64-66
- D- 60-63

**Academic Integrity:**
The faculty and staff of the School of Public Health believe that the conduct of a student registered or taking courses in the School should be consistent with that of a professional
person. Courtesy, honesty, and respect should be shown by students toward faculty members, guest lecturers, administrative support staff, community partners, and fellow students. Similarly, students should expect faculty to treat them fairly, showing respect for their ideas and opinions and striving to help them achieve maximum benefits from their experience in the School.

Student academic misconduct refers to behavior that may include plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, falsification of records or official documents, intentional misuse of equipment or materials (including library materials), and aiding and abetting the perpetration of such acts. Please visit [http://sph.umich.edu/student-resources/mph-mhsa.html](http://sph.umich.edu/student-resources/mph-mhsa.html) for the full Policy on Student Academic Conduct Standards and Procedures.

For all written assignments students are expected to provide a citation for any and all factual evidence included in their assignments. Students may use any standard citation style of their choice, but must use it consistently within each assignment. Students should cite original sources (academic journal articles, grey literature, government statistics) to support their arguments. Wikipedia (or similar websites) is not an acceptable source.

Students are expected to behave in accordance with the academic standards of the University of Michigan. Plagiarism is not acceptable and will result in a failing grade for the assignment and possibly other consequences as dictated by University policy. Plagiarism is any instance of taking someone else’s words or ideas as your own. If you are unsure as to whether you should cite something, it is better to be safe than sorry.

**Student Well-Being:**
SPH faculty and staff believe it is important to support the physical and emotional well-being of our students. If you have a physical or mental health issue that is affecting your performance or participation in any course, and/or if you need help connecting with University services, please contact the instructor or the Office of Academic Affairs. Please visit [http://sph.umich.edu/student-life/wellness.html](http://sph.umich.edu/student-life/wellness.html) for information on wellness resources available to you.

**Student Accommodations:**
Students should speak with their instructors before or during the first week of classes regarding any special needs. Students can also visit the Office of Academic Affairs for assistance in coordinating communications around accommodations.

Students seeking academic accommodations should register with Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). SSD arranges reasonable and appropriate academic accommodations for students with disabilities. Please visit [https://ssd.umich.edu/topic/our-services](https://ssd.umich.edu/topic/our-services) for more information on student accommodations.

Students who expect to miss classes, examinations, or other assignments as a consequence of their religious observance shall be provided with a reasonable alternative opportunity to
complete such academic responsibilities. It is the obligation of students to provide faculty with reasonable notice of the dates of religious holidays on which they will be absent. Please visit [http://www.provost.umich.edu/calendar/religious_holidays.html#conflicts](http://www.provost.umich.edu/calendar/religious_holidays.html#conflicts) for the complete University policy.

**Feedback:**
I welcome feedback about the class and how it is going at any time. If you have something you would like to discuss, please email me to schedule an appointment.

**Readings:**
Assigned readings will primarily consist of academic journal articles, but will also include reports from the grey literature. You will also read actual laws and policies, congressional reports and transcripts from testimony at House and Senate hearings.

The following texts may be interesting/useful to you as well, though you are not required to purchase them:
- Hesterman OB. Fair food: growing a healthy, sustainable food system for all: Public Affairs; 2012.

**Course Schedule at a Glance:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic/Activity</th>
<th>Assignments DUE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan 10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Course intro, Intro to social ecological framework/ The US food system /// Why do we eat what we eat?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Scope of the problem: obesity, diet related diseases in the U.S. &amp; implications for the US healthcare system /// policy making and policy framework</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Individual &amp; family /// Guest speaker: Judy Smith, how to do legislative history &amp; search grey literature</td>
<td>Topic Selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 31</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Neighborhood food environment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb 7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>School food &amp; federal child nutrition programs /// Guest Speaker: Sara Gold, United Way Detroit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>SNAP /// Guest Speaker: Elissa Trumbull, Fair Food Network</td>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>WIC /// Guest Speaker: Velonda Anderson, City of Detroit WIC Program Manager</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb 28</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>SPRING BREAK</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>DEBATE (soda taxes, nutrition requirements for SNAP)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar 14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>STUDENT PRESENTATIONS: Legislative History</td>
<td>Legislative History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Health claims and food labels /// the role for the US legal system for obesity prevention/// Guest Speaker: Sarah Ball, Research</td>
<td>Policy Alternative Memo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Detailed Schedule and Reading Assignments:

Week 1: Course intro and overview:

Readings: None Required

Recommended:


Week 2: Scope of the problem /// policy making framework:

Readings:


**Week 3: Individual /// family:**

Readings:


**Assignment Due: Policy Memo Topic Selection**

**Week 4: Neighborhood:**

Readings:


**Week 5: School Food:**

Readings:


**Week 6: Government Food Policies: SNAP:**

Readings:

The United States Farm Bill: An Introduction for fruit and vegetable advocates. A Policy Options Brief by the Public Health Law Center. 2009


**Assignment DUE: Problem Statement**

**Week 7: WIC:**

Readings:


**Week 8: SPRING BREAK!**

Readings: None

**Week 9: DEBATE- Soda Taxes and Nutritional requirements for SNAP:**

Readings:


**Week 10: Student Presentations: Legislative History**

Readings: None

**Assignment Due: Legislative History**
Week 11: health claims and food/menu labels /// the role for the US legal system for obesity prevention:

Readings:


Assignment Due: Policy Alternative Memo

Week 12: Media, bias, message framing and food advertising:

Readings:


**Week 13: Food system workers, community interventions, sustainable agriculture:**

Readings:


The hands that feed us: Challenges and opportunities for workers along the food chain: Food Chain Workers Alliance; 2012.


**Week 14: Conclusions and wrapping up:**

Readings:


Week 15: Student Presentations: Policy Memos

Readings: None

Assignment Due: Final Policy Memo