

# DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH BEHAVIOR AND POLICY

**Vanessa Sheppard, Ph.D.**  
Professor and chair

hbp.vcu.edu (<http://hbp.vcu.edu/>)

The Department of Health Behavior and Policy's mission is to transform the health landscape through multidisciplinary research, education and service. The department's research identifies the behavioral, social, organizational and policy factors that affect the health of individuals and populations. Faculty members and students utilize rigorous quantitative and qualitative methods and engage diverse communities to develop and evaluate programs and policies designed to promote health, improve health care delivery and reduce health disparities. Research findings inform the translation of effective programs and policies into practice. The department provides training to and promotes excellence in the next generation of health behavior and policy practitioners, educators and scientists.

- Healthcare Policy and Research, Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) (<http://bulletin.vcu.edu/graduate/school-medicine/healthcare-policy-research-phd/>)
- Social and Behavioral Sciences, Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) (<http://bulletin.vcu.edu/graduate/school-medicine/social-behavioral-health-phd/>)
- Healthcare policy and research (HCPR) (p. 1)
- Social and behavioral health (SBHD) (p. 2)

## Healthcare policy and research

### **HCPR 601. Introduction to Health Policy. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. The course will familiarize students with the major players and issues in health care policy, using health reform in the U.S. as a framework through which to analyze the issues of cost, quality and access, and will focus on the roles of payers, providers and patients in the health care system. This course is interactive and uses studies from the scientific literature, class discussion and lectures from experts in the field. Students are required to write a paper evaluating the challenges regarding a public health policy topic in the U.S. and prepare a group presentation addressing questions related to key issues of the U.S. health care system.

### **HCPR 610. Foundations in Health Services Research Methods. 1 Hour.**

Semester course; 1 lecture hour. 1 credit. Will provide students with the opportunity to learn and apply basic data analysis skills and statistical methods common in health services research including programming, data cleaning and fundamental approaches in univariate, bivariate and multivariate analyses.

### **HCPR 691. Special Topics in Healthcare Policy and Research. 1-3 Hours.**

Semester course; 1-3 lecture hours. 1-3 credits. May be repeated for a maximum of 6 credits. Prerequisite: permission of instructor. The course may include discussion of research topics of emerging interest/ importance and published papers of current interest; new findings in health services research, health economics and health policy; and the application of research methods and study design to current topics within the broad field of healthcare policy and health services research, focusing on interdisciplinary research and applied methods. Graded S/U/ F.

### **HCPR 692. Special Topics in Healthcare Policy and Research. 1-3 Hours.**

Semester course; 1-3 lecture hours. 1-3 credits. May be repeated for a maximum of 6 credits. Prerequisite: permission of instructor. The course may include discussion of research topics of emerging interest/ importance and published papers of current interest; new findings in health services research, health economics and health policy; and the application of research methods and study design to current topics within the broad field of healthcare policy and health services research, focusing on interdisciplinary research and applied methods.

### **HCPR 697. Independent Study in Healthcare Policy and Research. 1-3 Hours.**

Semester course; 1-3 lecture hours. 1-3 credits. May be repeated for a maximum of 6 credits. Provides the opportunity for students to conduct research under the direction of a faculty member. A proposal for a course of study must be submitted to and approved by the program director of the Ph.D. in Healthcare Policy and Research. Credits will be assigned commensurate with the complexity of the project. Arrangements are made directly with the appropriate faculty member and department chair. Graded as S/U/F.

### **HCPR 699. Departmental Seminar. 1 Hour.**

Semester course; 1 lecture hour. 1 credit. Students will attend seminars presented by faculty and invited guests on topics and trends within health policy and health services research. Students and faculty will meet weekly to discuss the theoretical concepts and papers presented and other related topics. Graded as S/U/F. Crosslisted as: SBHD 690.

### **HCPR 701. Health Services Research and Policy I. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. The first course of a two-semester sequence intended to familiarize students with the major players and issues in health care policy, using health reform in the U.S. as a framework through which to analyze the issues of cost, quality and access and to help students develop an independent research proposal. The focus is on the roles of payers, providers and patients in the health care system. This course will be interactive and use studies published in the scientific literature, policy briefs, government reports and textbooks about the health care system as teaching tools. Students will be required to write several short response papers addressing questions related to key issues under health reform as well as develop a research topic and conduct a literature review related to that topic.

### **HCPR 702. Health Services Research and Policy II. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Prerequisite: HCPR 701 or permission of instructor. The second course of a two-semester sequence intended to familiarize students with the major health care providers and issues in health care policy and health services in the U.S. The course will mainly focus on health care delivery and quality of care and also introduce the issues of costs and access. The course will be interactive and use studies published in the scientific literature. Students will be required to critique and present research articles related to the topics studied while developing conceptual frameworks, hypotheses and key measures of quality, cost or access for their own research papers.

### **HCPR 703. Health Economics: Theory and Principles. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. A doctoral-level course in health economics with a focus on the theory and principles forming the basis of the field. Students will study foundational theory and research as well as recent applied studies contributing to the current knowledge in the field. Upon completing the course, students should have the theoretical grounding to allow them to frame applied research questions in health economics in terms of past theory and research as well as a sense of where further evidence is needed.

**HCPR 720. Economics of Health Disparities. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. This doctoral-level survey course is designed to study the causes and consequences of population health disparities from an economic perspective. In addition to studying theories and current approaches from health, labor, public and stratification economics, students will also integrate perspectives from other disciplines, including sociology and psychology. Students will be expected to complete problem sets, in-class presentations and a research paper that will demonstrate the ability to use theoretically grounded approaches to the empirical study of health inequality. After completing this course, students should have an understanding of the economic approaches to health disparities and how to apply these approaches to empirical research.

**HCPR 730. Survey Research Methods and Analysis for Health Policy. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Prerequisite: ECON 612 or equivalent or permission of instructor. This course is intended to familiarize students with the design and use of surveys for health services research and health policy; to understand the strengths and limitations of health surveys; and to compare and contrast health surveys with other data sources such as administrative records, claims data and electronic medical records. The course is designed to focus more on the applied use of health surveys for research and less on the theoretical aspects of survey and sample design. Class lectures and assignments are designed to guide students incrementally through the actual development and completion of a research project using publicly available survey data.

**HCPR 732. Research Design and Proposal Preparation. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Focuses on the design of experimental, quasi-experimental and nonexperimental studies in the healthcare field. Issues related to measurement will be stressed. Specific learning objectives include exploring the methodological issues in health services research; assessing scientific research and casual inference; evaluating a research problem and developing testable hypotheses; conducting data collection and assessing the sampling process; evaluating variable definition in terms of validity and reliability; assessing the various facets of experimental, quasi-experimental and observational designs; and preparing a healthcare research proposal.

**HCPR 733. Statistical Methods in Analysis of Healthcare Research. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Prerequisites: BIOS 553; ECON 612; and one of BIOS 625, BIOS 631, BIOS 646 or ECON 642; or permission of instructor. Exposes students to large survey and administrative databases that are commonly used in health services research. Students will learn how to organize files, protect data and link databases from multiple sources by applying state-of-the-art deterministic and probabilistic linkage methods. Students will check the quality of merged datasets and learn the advanced techniques used in handling common problems such as missing data, selection bias and handling extreme outliers. Students will also apply the statistical methods that meet the qualities of these data in order to evaluate healthcare interventions and policies. This will be a hands-on course requiring students to download and manipulate data. While the primary emphasis is not on mathematical theory, a certain amount of theoretical background may be presented for some topics.

**HCPR 734. Economic Evaluation and Decision Analysis in Health. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Enrollment requires an introductory course in probability and statistics. Introductory economics is recommended but not required. Introduces doctoral students to the methods, theory and growing range of applications of economic evaluation and decision analysis for health care technology assessment, health policy analysis, medical decision-making and health resource allocation.

**HCPR 899. Directed Research. 1-9 Hours.**

Semester course; 1-3 variable hours. 1-3 credits. Prerequisites: completion of required course work and comprehensive examination. Students are required to conduct and prepare a written dissertation under the guidance of a faculty committee. The dissertation is written in traditional academic style, consists of three papers and must be orally defended. Students must be continually enrolled in this course until the dissertation is successfully completed and approved. A minimum of nine dissertation credits must be taken. Graded S/U/F.

**Social and behavioral health****SBHD 605. Introduction to Social and Behavioral Health. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. This course addresses the influence of social and behavioral factors impacting public health, covering both historical perspectives and current issues. Topics covered include the theoretical foundations of social and behavioral health; the sociocultural context of health, health promotion and disease prevention interventions; and special populations and topics.

**SBHD 608. Health Communication. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Basic course for students in public health with limited experience conducting public health research. Focuses on the history and theories of health communication, social marketing and media advocacy, audience research and segmentation, entertainment education, e-health, provider/patient communication, technology transfer to service providers, media relations and media monitoring, emergency risk communication, and evaluating communication campaigns. Students plan an entire social marketing campaign.

**SBHD 609. Research Methods in Social and Behavioral Health. 3 Hours.**

I Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Enrollment restricted to graduate students. Recommended preparation: SBHD 605. A didactic and experiential course that provides an introduction to applying social and behavioral qualitative, quantitative and evaluation research methods to public health issues.

**SBHD 610. Behavioral Measurement. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Recommended preparation: SBHD 605. Introduces students to theories and applications of measuring constructs in social and behavioral sciences. Examines test theories, processes involved in developing tests and the standards against which tests are compared.

**SBHD 611. Health Literacy. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Designed to provide doctoral students an overview of health literacy and its relationship to health outcomes and health disparities. Class material will cover the research and theories in contemporary literature in health literacy.

**SBHD 619. Research Methods in Social and Behavioral Health II. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Prerequisite: SBHD 609. Enrollment restricted to graduate students. Advanced application of social and behavioral qualitative, quantitative, intervention and evaluation research methods to public health issues.

**SBHD 630. Theoretical Foundations of Social and Behavioral Health. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. This course addresses the theoretical foundations of social and behavioral health, discussing both classic and emergent theories. The course begins with an overview of theoretical concepts, constructs and variables; how to construct theoretical statements; and how to evaluate social science theories. The majority of the course is spent describing theories and models at the individual, interpersonal and community level and evaluating their utility in changing health behavior. The course concludes with a discussion of the state of the discipline and future directions in health behavior change theory and research.

**SBHD 631. Disseminating, Adopting and Adapting Evidence-based Prevention Programs. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Preventive interventions that have been evaluated and found to be effective should serve as the standard for community-based public health practice. This advanced seminar will examine theories relevant to the diffusion of these evidence-based interventions (EBI), EBI dissemination procedures and policy, and evaluation of EBI adoption, fidelity monitoring and adaptation.

**SBHD 632. Health Disparities and Social Justice. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. This seminar is designed to provide students with an understanding of the concept of health disparities, reasons for disparities and how social factors contribute to disparities in health care and outcomes. The material will cover the research and theories in contemporary medical, epidemiologic and social justice literature.

**SBHD 633. Structural Equation Modeling. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Introduces students to principles and applications of structural equation modeling for testing theories in social and behavioral sciences. Examines latent variables with continuous and discrete distributions, multimethod measurement modeling under the latent variable framework, latent variable modeling of longitudinal measurement designs and testing mediation and moderation using structural equation modeling.

**SBHD 634. Patient-Provider Interaction. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Enrollment is restricted to students in the social and behavioral sciences or healthcare policy and research Ph.D. programs or with permission of the instructor. This course will cover theories, principles and applications used to produce high quality research in patient-provider communication. The course will educate students on communication theories that support this research, practical applications of these theories and different methodologies to guide research. The course will provide an overarching focus on health disparities and research conducted in particular topic areas to ameliorate disparities in the experience of minority patients including, but not limited to, racial, sexual and gender, and socioeconomic equality and the intersection between these domains. Students will have the opportunity to analyze published research as well as develop their own plans for a research project.

**SBHD 635. Anthropology and Public Health. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Prerequisite: doctoral student or M.P.H. student or permission of instructor. Provides students with an advanced introduction to anthropology as a means for exploring public health. Through ethnographic case studies (articles, books and films), the course examines cultural dimensions of illness experience and diverse models of healing and treatment, paying particular attention to political, economic, spiritual and other cultural factors that influence health inequalities, treatment and health behaviors. Approximately 80 percent of the course material focuses on international health. The course is a readings seminar rather than a methodological course; however, students will be asked to think critically about the ways that anthropological methods can contribute to public health practice.

**SBHD 636. Community-based Participatory Research. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Prerequisite: doctoral student in social and behavioral health or permission of instructor. This seminar provides students with an understanding of the theories, principles and strategies of conducting CBPR. This class will meet once a week for approximately three hours. Although some lectures will be presented, the main format for the class will reflect the participatory as well as critical reflectiveness required to conduct CBPR. Co-learning will be emphasized against a backdrop of health research. The second major component of this class will be an interactive and hands-on field experience where students will experience the context and learn the methods to use when conducting participatory research for health. Students will work closely with a community partner and will use participatory research methods to address a community partner need.

**SBHD 637. Program Evaluation. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Enrollment is restricted to students admitted to the doctoral program in social and behavioral sciences or with permission of the instructor. This course examines the evaluation methods used to determine whether – and how – health-related programs are achieving their objectives. Several types of evaluations will be covered, with a focus on process and outcome evaluations. Topics relevant to evaluation practice, including evaluation design and result dissemination, will be addressed. Students will learn how to judge the quality of evaluation designs, distinguish appropriate from inappropriate evaluations and be given the opportunity to apply the principles and techniques of evaluation science to the creation of a detailed evaluation plan. Materials will be presented in several ways, including lectures, guest lectures, in-class exercises, student presentations, classroom discussions and written assignments.

**SBHD 638. Applications in Qualitative Research Methods. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Prerequisite: doctoral student in social and behavioral health or permission of instructor. This course will cover theories, principles and applications to enable high quality research using qualitative research methods. This course will educate students on theories of qualitative research, different methodologies used to gather qualitative data and practical applications of these theories and methods to guide research development in this area. Students will be given the opportunity to analyze published research, conduct qualitative analyses using previously collected data, code and quantify qualitative data, and develop their own plans for a research project.

**SBHD 639. Intervention Development and Implementation. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Prerequisites: doctoral-level course work in research methods and health behavior theory; permission of instructor. The goal of this course is to provide students with knowledge and applied skills in the development and implementation of behavioral interventions to promote health and prevent disease. Students will receive training in evidence-based behavioral medicine approaches and best practice methods for effectively promoting behavior change in individuals and families. The course takes a sequential and hands-on approach in which students will learn about each step of the intervention development and implementation process and will gain experience applying what they learn to the development of their own intervention. Relevant methodological issues will be covered, with an emphasis on design and methods for randomized controlled trials testing individual-level behavioral interventions across settings. Students will learn to think critically about how to balance theory, empirically supported strategies and pragmatic considerations in the development and execution of intervention trials, with an emphasis on achieving maximum impact in their work. Course objectives will be achieved through lectures, experiential in-class activities, informal Q&A with PIs about their experiences developing and implementing intervention trials, student presentations, classroom discussion and written assignments that map on to key sections of a grant proposal.

**SBHD 640. Seminar in Mixed Methods Research. 1 Hour.**

Semester course; 1 lecture hour. 1 credit. Prerequisites: SBHD 609, SBHD 619 and SBHD 638, or permission of instructor. This course provides an overview of best practices in mixed methods research in the social and behavioral sciences and serves as a methods capstone course for SBS doctoral students who have completed the foundational research methods and applications in qualitative research methods courses.

**SBHD 690. Departmental Seminar. 1 Hour.**

Semester course; 1 lecture hour. 1 credit. Students will attend seminars presented by faculty and invited guests on topics and trends within health policy and health services research. Students and faculty will meet weekly to discuss the theoretical concepts and papers presented and other related topics. Graded as S/U/F. Crosslisted as: HCPR 699.

**SBHD 691. Special Topics. 0.5-4 Hours.**

Semester course; 0.5-4 lecture hours. 0.5-4 credits. Lectures, tutorial, workshops and/or library assignments in selected areas of advanced study which are not available in other courses or as part of the research training. Graded as S/U/F.

**SBHD 692. Special Topics. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. This letter-graded course will include lectures and other activities in areas of advanced study which are not available in other courses or as part of research training.

**SBHD 693. SBHD Internship. 1-3 Hours.**

Semester course. variable hours (60 hours per credit). 1-3 credits. Students will spend 60 to 180 hours in a planned, supervised experience with a community agency. Such agencies might include a local free clinic or other nonprofit organization, such as the American Cancer Society, or a local, state or federal public health agency. Graded as S/U/F.

**SBHD 694. MPH Project. 1-6 Hours.**

Semester course; variable hours. 1-6 credits. Each student will complete a research project that demonstrates the application of the knowledge acquired in the M.P.H. program. The student will answer one or more relevant research questions. The final product is a scholarly written report of publishable quality. A proposal must be submitted for approval and credits are assigned commensurate with the complexity of the project. Arrangements are made directly with the faculty adviser. Graded as S/U/F.

**SBHD 695. Independent Study. 1-3 Hours.**

Semester course; 1-3 independent study hours. 1-3 credits. Provides the opportunity for students to explore a special topic of interest under the direction of a faculty member. A proposal for a course of study must be submitted to and approved by the program director of the social and behavioral science doctorate; credits will be assigned commensurate with the complexity of the project. Arrangements are made directly with the appropriate faculty member and the program director. Graded as S/U/F.

**SBHD 697. Directed Research in Social and Behavioral Health. 1-15 Hours.**

Semester course; variable hours. 1-15 credits. Requires students to conduct and prepare a written dissertation under the guidance of a faculty committee. The dissertation is written in traditional academic style and must be orally defended. Students must be continually enrolled in this course until successfully completed and approved. A minimum of 9 credits of this course must be taken to complete the degree. Graded as Pass/Fail.