This class will explore the politics of international health. The world is becoming increasingly inter-related; trade relationships are becoming stronger and more intertwined, and travel between nations is fast and easy. The international movement of people and goods across national borders makes the emergence or re-emergence of infectious disease in one country of great importance to its region and the world community. Yet, traditional conceptions of state sovereignty can limit the ability of international organizations and foreign states to intervene.

Health threats can destabilize countries internally (for example, Stephen Lewis, the UN Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, has stated that he “wouldn’t discount the possibility, ten to fifteen years down the road, of failed states” as a result of HIV/AIDS) and can strain international relations. States often have powerful political and economic incentives to hide emerging diseases or downplay their importance. On the other hand, providing international assistance for public health disasters can strengthen international institutions and diplomatic relationships, increase stability, and save lives. This class examines international and national structures, relationships, and mechanisms that influence global health.

Course specifics:

Class discussions showing rigorous thought and an informed understanding of the subject matter will be an integral part of the learning process. Please read all of the assigned materials before class to facilitate discussions. Readings marked as optional are not required for class, but students are encouraged to read them for additional information and context. All students will be expected to actively participate in class discussions.

This class will require a 20-page term paper. Dates for submission of a thesis proposal, outline of the paper topic, and the paper are set forth in the syllabus below. Please review these various dates and requirements concerning the paper writing process. Students will be expected to meet all deadlines.

Students will make a presentation in class on a subject related to the politics of international health, which may also be the subject of the student’s paper prepared for the course. Presentations should be thoughtful and well prepared.

Students will be assigned to work with one another as student peers during the course of the writing process. Student peers should assist each other with the research and thought processes of their paper topics and be prepared to offer commentary on their assigned peer’s presentation.

Attendance for all classes is strongly encouraged. Students must attend classes in which they are presenting or serving as student peers. Each week, students will be asked to submit short written reactions to a question related to the readings.

The grade for the course will be based on: class participation (15%), your presentation (20%), your role as a student peer (10%), short reactions to the readings (20%), and the final paper (35%). Class participation will be assessed on a qualitative rather than quantitative basis.
I want to be fully available to help students whenever they need assistance with the content and reading in the class, as well as with the research and writing process. I will hold office hours on Wednesdays from 3:00-5:00 PM at a location to be determined. I am also available to students by appointment. I will be available after each class to answer any questions. My office at Georgetown University Law Center is room 5028 in the Hotung Bldg. (550 New Jersey Ave.). My office telephone number is (202) 662-9281. You can also reach me via e-mail: gable1@law.georgetown.edu.

Class 1: Introduction to Public Health Globalization and Governance (August 31, 2005)

The level of health in a community, society, nation, or the world is a political question; it depends on the amount of resources devoted to prevention and care, and the laws and policies a society (or the international community) is willing to adopt. This class will introduce the major concepts and concerns in public health and the tensions inherent in local and international health policy.

WHO definition of health: http://www.who.int/about/definition/en


A multitude of determinants affect the health of populations. Economic conditions and political decisions impact health care, services, and outcomes. Social norms influence how societies understand and protect health. This class will examine how these determinants may bolster or undermine health conditions in the population.

Paul Farmer, Social Inequalities and Emerging Infectious Diseases, 2 Emerging Infectious Diseases 259 (1996).


Class 3: Determinants of Health, Part 2: Religious and Cultural Values, Demographics, and Health (September 14, 2005)

Cultural and religious values have significant impact on the acceptability of and support for government health policies and individual health practices and decisions. In addition, changing demographic brought about by economic and scientific changes affect the health of populations and the political decisions made about providing health services.


Class 4: Health as a Human Right (September 21, 2005)
Special Guest Speaker: Javier Vasquez, Human Rights Lawyer, Pan American Health Organization

* Paper topics are due.

Major international treaties protect human rights and include provisions on the right to health and the right to benefit from scientific advancement. This class will examine the international human rights framework and the effect it has on achieving health theoretically and practically. We will also discuss the mechanisms in place to enforce human rights and their effectiveness.


OPTIONAL READING:

Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: http://www.hrweb.org/legal/cpr.html

Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights:
Class 5: Transnational Law and Health Governance (September 28, 2005)

International legal documents and governing bodies address the right to health in a variety of
texts and contexts, but with mixed efficacy. This class examines the international legal
framework, with a focus on the history, organizational structure, powers, and major projects of the
World Health Organization.

Ilona Kickbusch, The Development of International Health Policies—Accountability Intact? 51 Soc. Sci. &


Lawrence Gostin, The International Health Regulations and Beyond, 4 Lancet 606 (2004).


OPTIONAL READING: Selections from Gian Luca Burci and Claude-Henri Vignes, World Health

Class 6: Impact of International Trade on Health (October 5, 2005)

Special Guest Speaker: Professor Robert Stumberg, Georgetown University Law Center

International trade opens markets up to potentially harmful goods or services (such as tobacco or
alcohol) and trade treaties often require change to national policies (including health policies) that
are deemed to be trade barriers. This class examines how international trade directly and
indirectly affects health through intellectual property law, anti-protectionist policies, and
globalization.


Phillipe Cullet, Patents and Medicines: The Relationship between TRIPS and the Human Right to Health,
79 Int’l Affairs 139 (2003)

Class 7: The Influence of National Health Agencies and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs)
on Health Policy (October 12, 2005)

This class will examine the influence of National Health Agencies and NGOs on health. National
Health Agencies have enormous influence over health policy in their countries. We will discuss
the powers and infrastructure of these agencies as well as issues related to sovereignty,
regulation, and health outcomes. NGOs interact in significant ways with national governments to
produce and implement health policies. We will examine the influence of NGOs on government
decisions; the role funders play in international health policies; and the effect of ideological
motivation on health policy.

Selections from Andrew Green and Ann Matthias, Non-Governmental Organizations and Health in
Developing Countries.


HANDOUT: Non-governmental organizations working with health

Class 8: Emerging Infectious Diseases and the HIV/AIDS Epidemic (October 19, 2005)
Special Guest Speaker: Rudolf V. Van Puymbroeck, Lead Counsel, Public Health and HIV/AIDS, The World Bank

The taboo nature of the activities (sexual behavior and intravenous drug use) that spread HIV/AIDS has led to widespread denial of its existence by some governments and communities, especially in developing countries. This, combined with apathy and “funder burnout” on the part of the world community, has fueled the spread of the disease. This class will examine the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic around the world, as well as tensions between proven harm reduction strategies (such as condom promotion and needle-exchange programs) and policies based on religious or moral beliefs. These tensions continue to hamper effective interventions.

Infectious diseases are among the leading causes of death and disability worldwide. This class will also examine the drastic impact an influenza, SARS, or Ebola pandemic would have on the world, and how governments can prepare for such an epidemiological disaster. We will also analyze the profoundly different approaches taken to respond to different disease threats.


Michael T. Osterholm, Preparing for the Next Pandemic, FOREIGN AFFAIRS, July/August 2005.

Sharon LaFraniere and Denise Grady, Stalking a Deadly Virus; Battling a Town’s Fears, NEW YORK TIMES, April 17, 2005, A1.


OPTIONAL READINGS:


Helen Epstein, God and the Fight Against AIDS, NEW YORK REV. BOOKS, Apr. 28, 2005.
Class 9:  Chronic Disease and the Regulation of Health Behaviors (October 26, 2005)
* Thesis Statements Due

Chronic diseases comprise an increasing threat to global health. Traditionally, the effects of chronic disease were thought to be important only in affluent countries—the reality is that their prevalence continues to grow all over the world. The policy responses to chronic diseases are necessarily different from infectious conditions, and often involve the use of law and policy to regulate health behaviors. Government bodies may attempt to influence health behaviors through a number of approaches, including direct regulation, financial incentives, social pressure, the use of regulation of speech, among others. This class will examine the political components of the regulation of health behaviors, focusing on tobacco control, injury prevention efforts, harm reduction strategies, and efforts to reduce chronic conditions like obesity.


Derek Yach et al., The Global Burden of Chronic Disease, 291 JAMA 2616 (2004).


Garrett Mehl, Heather Wipfli, Peter Winch, Controlling Tobacco: The Vital Role of Local Communities, HARVARD INTERNATIONAL REVIEW (Spring 2005) 54-58.


Class 10: The Ethics and Politics of International Health Research (November 2, 2005)

Cutting edge science challenges societies with difficult questions regarding human dignity as new research areas (e.g., cloning and stem cell research) enter the international debate. This class will examine how research conducted in developing countries by entities from developed countries pose political and ethical dilemmas. Additionally, we will address the political dimensions that affect research funding decisions.


Editorial (Marcia Angell), Investigators’ Responsibilities for Human Subjects Testing in Developing Countries, 342 NEW ENGLAND J. MED 967 (2000).

CLASS EXERCISE: Case Studies on Ethical Issues in International Health Research
Class 11: Health and Global Security (November 9, 2005)  
* Outlines of Paper Due

This class will explore both the effects of disease on political stability and national security, and effects of military and civil conflict on health.


Class 12: Bioterrorism, Natural Disasters, and Complex Emergencies (November 16, 2005)  
Special Guest Speaker: Professor James G. Hodge, Jr., Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

This class will focus on the threats to health posed by bioterrorism and natural disasters. The ability of societies to prepare and respond to these types of events and other complex emergencies may have consequences for population health, civil liberties, and international relations.


CLASS EXERCISE: Dark Winter

Class 13: Peer Assistance with Papers (November 23, 2005)

Class 14: Student Presentations (November 30, 2005)

Class 15: Student Presentations (December 7, 2005)  
* Final Papers Due