Community Health 110  
Fall, 2012  
Psychoactive Drugs: Issues, Policies, and Interventions

Instructor:  
Professor Edith D. Balbach  
Director, Community Health Program Tufts University  
112 Packard Ave., 2nd Floor  
Medford, MA 02155  
Office: 617-627-2517  
617-627-3072 (fax)  
Office hours: Tuesdays, 3:30 p.m. to 5 p.m. and by appointment  
email: edith.balbach@tufts.edu

Course Description

Within the United States, our policies around seven major drugs – alcohol, cocaine, Ecstasy, heroin, marijuana, oxycodone, and tobacco – have largely been driven by considerations other than public health. In the case of the three drugs that are largely legal – tobacco, oxycodone, and alcohol – economic concerns have heavily influenced policymaking. For the four that are largely illegal – cocaine, Ecstasy, heroin, and marijuana – criminal justice concerns have heavily influenced policymaking. In an interesting “cross-over,” for those who are underage, policy making around tobacco and alcohol also ends up being influenced by criminal justice frameworks, often with the support of the alcohol and tobacco industries. For oxycodone, the pharmaceutical industry has a substantial interest in its legal sales but illegal use of this otherwise legal drug is a criminal justice matter.

This course will consider how the use of public health frameworks would lead to different kinds of questions being asked about drug use and might lead to different types of policies around drugs. Such frameworks are used in other countries. In some other countries, such as Mexico, our supply side strategies have had a major negative impact on public health. In this course, we will use the criminal justice and public health frameworks to analyze policy making around drugs and to consider what kinds of improvements would make sense in drug policy, particularly if our goal is to create healthier people.

Required Book:


Supplemental readings will be distributed in class or are at the Trunk website.

Assignments:

1. Research Essays. Each student will write two research essays. The first essay will focus on an issue/problem and the second will focus on an intervention. I will give you a list of possible research questions, but you are not limited to questions on this list. If you do decide to write on a topic of your own choosing, please discuss it with me first. A research essay requires that you read a lot about a topic and then synthesize what you have read into an intelligent answer to your research question.

Your first essay will be due on October 9 by 4 p.m., and the second is due on November 19 at 4 p.m. Please hand in your papers on the turnitin website. Final papers should be 4-6 pages long (each will count for 20% of overall grade).

2. Exams. We will have two exams, one on October 24 and the other on December 18, the final exam slot for this class. Each will count for 20% of the course grade. The first will be all short answer. The second will be half short answer and half essay. The essay will be a take home assignment and will be due when you come to class for the exam. For the essay exam, you will write a critical assessment of one chapter in the Grim book; you may choose which one. You are welcome to take the second exam early. I will offer several alternate slots.
3. **Class Participation.** Classes are most interesting if everyone has done the reading and contributes to the class discussion. For this reason, I take class participation seriously. It counts for 20% of your course grade. I expect you to attend class and to be prepared to participate in class discussion. “Being prepared” means that you have done the readings and thought about the “questions for discussion” contained on the syllabus.

**Grading Summary:** Your research essays will count for 40% of your grade. Each exam will count for 20% of your grade. Class participation will count for 20% of your grade.

**Late work:** All work is expected to be on time. You will lose half a grade per day if it is late. If you have a valid reason why you need more time, you must discuss this with me before the due date. Computer/printer failures, in general, are not valid excuses.

**Skills**
1. Students can understand how multiple disciplines bring unique perspectives to cross-cutting questions of health and societies.
   a. Integration of learning disciplinary perspectives
2. Students can explain and assess social and behavioral interventions to improve the health of populations
   a. Research skills
   b. Oral and written communication skills
   c. Intercultural skills and abilities

**Processes**
1. Students can evaluate complex arguments related to public policy and law
   a. Critical thinking

**Fields**
1. Students can identify the role that public health plays in improving global health
Class Schedule and Readings

September 5. Thinking About Drug Policy


Questions for Discussion:

1) What is the intoxication instinct? How does the possibility of us having an “Intoxication Instinct” make policy making more complex in drug areas?


Bertram et al., Chapters 1


Questions for Discussion:

1) Some have claimed that the current drug war fills political, economic, ideological, moral and religious functions for some sectors of the U.S. What are these? Who benefits?

1) What is addiction? Is it bad? How does drug use differ from drug misuse differ from drug abuse?

2) How does the social ecological model appear in Edwards’ introduction? Does anyone remember this model from CH 1?

3) Bertram et al. discuss “collateral damages” of the war on drugs, which are negative effects the war itself has on societies, users, and nonusers. These are separate from the effects of the drugs. What are some of these collateral damages?


Questions for Discussion

1) What is the Controlled Substances Act? What are some key problems with it?

2) What disparities are indicated by the differences between who is using and who is incarcerated? How does this reflect the social determinants of health?

September 17. The Current State of U.S. Drug Policy - Pleasures

Grim, Chapters 1 and Chapter 14

**Questions for Discussion**

1) In the first week, we discussed the intoxication instinct and how it complicates drug policy making. How does omitting pleasure as a value further complicate policymaking?

2) How does Grim expressly bring pleasure into his narrative? Why might his book be controversial?

**September 19. History**

Grim, Chapters 2 and 3


**Questions for Discussion**

1) How has scientific evidence been incorporated (or not) into U.S. drug policy? What values have been important historically?

2) What is the Harrison Act of 1914?

3) How do key elements of Grim’s story appear in the story of syringe exchange programs in New York?

**September 24. History**

Viewing in class: Reefer Madness

**Questions for Discussion:**

1) What “truths” are presented in Reefer Madness? Why was the story told in the way it was?

**September 26. U.S. Drug Politics**

Grim, Chapters 4 and 5

**Questions for Discussion:**

1) What are the political dynamics surrounding illegal drugs? Around “legal” ones?

2) What values are represented by those political dynamics?

3) How do arguments about the dangers of drugs themselves become entwined with arguments based in the dangers of drugs being illegal? Who is harmed in this process?

**October 1. Newer Epidemics**


Grim, Chapter 9


**Questions for Discussion:**
1) What are the similarities between Klam and Grim? What do you learn about Ecstasy from the Klam piece? What more would you like to know before making policy around Ecstasy?

2) What are the implications for that the Vince article holds for policy making? How is this reflected in Grim?

**October 3. Current U.S. Policy - Youth**

Grim, Chapter 6

Burnett, John (2008), “Cheese Heroin,” from NPR.

**Questions for Discussion:**

1) How is drug use among youth different from that among adults? Why might policy making around youth differ?

2) Why is prevention programming challenging among youth? Why is it important?

**October 9. College Students and Alcohol**

Guest Speaker: Gene Buonacorrsi, Tufts senior and Summer Scholar

Wolfson, Mark et al. (2012), “Impact of a Randomized Campus/Community Trial to Prevent High-Risk Drinking Among College Students,” Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research.

**First Essay Due**

**October 10. Looking Internationally - Implications of the U.S. Drug War - Colombia**

Grim, Chapter 10 and 11


**Questions for Discussion:**

1) Did drugs cause violence in Colombia? What is the interrelationship between drugs and violence? Who is a narcoterrorist? How do we decide?

2) What is crop substitution? Why is this challenging in Colombia?

3) Remember Bertram’s hydra effect? How do you see it in these readings? How might U.S. policy lead to outcomes opposite from what it was trying to achieve in Colombia? That is, what are the unintended consequences of U.S. policy and how does this reflect a flawed problem definition?

**October 15. Looking Internationally - Implications of the U.S. Drug War - Afghanistan**


**Questions for Discussion:**

1) What is the role of opium in the Afghan economy?
2) What is the role of opium in the Afghan war?

3) How might eliminating opium complicate the effort to stabilize Afghanistan?

4) Why is crop substitution difficult in Afghanistan?

October 17. Looking Internationally - Implications of the U.S. Drug War - Mexico

Grim, Chapter 7


Questions for Discussion:

1) How has the U.S. criminal justice affected Mexico?

2) What is the future of the drug war in Mexico? Why is legalization under consideration?

October 22. Looking Internationally - Implications of the U.S. Drug War - Africa


Questions for Discussion:

1) What is the nature of the drug trade in Africa? Did this surprise you?

2) How is this an unintended consequence of U.S. drug policy and the U.S. economy?

October 24. First Exam

October 29. Policy Options: Harm Reduction


Questions for Discussion:

1) How might individual harm reduction differ from population-based harm reduction? Might these conflict?

2) Does harm reduction imply normalization? Is normalization important?

3) Why is harm reduction controversial?

October 31. Policy Options: Drug Testing in Schools

Grim Chapter 8


**Question for Discussion:**

1) You’re the principal of a school in Texas and have heard about the cheese heroin problem (reading from October 5). First, why might you agree to have drug testing in your schools? Second, why might you change your mind, based on further study? Based on the Grim reading, what would be the likely response of your community to your change of position?

2) Why does DARE remain so popular in the face of evidence that it doesn’t seem to have an impact on drug use? What other policymaking values are at play?

3) Why is evaluating these kinds of treatment programs so difficult?

**November 5 – Policy Options: Treatment**

Guest Speaker: Jacob Borodovsky, Tufts alum working in addiction research


**November 7 – Policy Options: Treatment**


**Questions for Discussion:**

1) What is the reciprocal obligations framework? How does it reflect the public health paradigm?

2) Jacobson et al. lay out a public health approach to substance misuse by pregnant woman. Read “Drinking for Two.” Is the reciprocal obligation’s approach adequate to protect fetuses?

3) Is the reciprocal obligations framework really coerced treatment?

**November 14. Policy Options: Drug Court and Treatment**


**Questions for Discussion:**

1) Can coerced treatment be effective? What are the arguments against it? Why is it controversial?

2) Why do we pursue coerced treatment? Should we?
3) Are drug courts coerced treatment? Why and why not?

4) What are the controversies surrounding drug courts? How might you mitigate these?

**November 19. Policy Options: Legalization**

**SECOND ESSAY DUE**


**Questions for Discussion:**

1) What are the arguments for and against marijuana legalization?

2) What parts of Walters’ arguments does Nadelmann ignore and vice versa?

3) What might be the long-term consequences, pro and con, to marijuana legalization?

**November 26. Policy Options: Medical Marijuana**

Grim Chapter 12

**Questions for Discussion:**

1) Is medical marijuana a back door move toward legalization?

2) How sure must we be that marijuana has medicinal value before we allow people to use it?

3) Ecstasy is currently a Schedule I drug. Should it remain there? Should oxycodone be there, too? Why?

**November 28. Policy Options: Medical Interventions**


**Questions for Discussion:**

1) Read Acocella. Why no hangover drug? How does this help us understand the war on drugs?

2) What is the brain disease argument? What are the implications for research, treatment modalities, and policy?

**December 3 - Other Approaches/ International Models**


**Questions for Discussion:**
1) What is Dutch cannabis policy? How could people for and against easing restrictions on marijuana use the information in this book chapter? In this paper?

December 5 – Other Approaches/International Models


Hughes, Caitlin Elizabeth and Alex Stevens (2010), “What can we learn from the Portuguese Decriminalization of Illicit drugs?, British Journal of Criminology 50, 999-1022.

December 10. Class summary

Exam: Tuesday, December 18, 3:30 – 4:45 p.m.