



Maternal and Child Health Policy and Advocacy

PHLT 234W/PSCI 231W

If we don't stand up for children, then we don't stand for much.

Marian Wright Edelman, Founder, Children's Defense Fund

Tuesdays & Thursdays 2:00 – 3:15 pm

Hylan Building Room 305

Prof. Molly McNulty

Spring 2026

This course applies public policymaking models to government decisions, laws, and policies for mothers, children, and adolescents. This course focuses on the public policymaking process in government, and the role of advocacy in the policymaking process. This course is an Upper-Level Writing course, as well as a Level III community-engaged course. Development of this course was supported by an Innovative Teaching Award 2019-2020 from the Association of Teachers of Maternal Child Health, www.atmch.org.¹

The Center for Community Engagement supports classes that connect students and communities in the classroom. This is a community-engaged course that counts toward the Certificate of Achievement in Community-Engaged Learning. If you are interested in learning more about community-engaged courses, you can check out the course list. Any questions can be emailed to cel@ur.rochester.edu

This course emphasizes research and writing skills essential for those seeking to bring health justice through reform of public health policies affecting women, children, and adolescents. We will follow hot topics in maternal and child health policymaking, including the mental health needs for infants, debates about requiring COVID vaccinations for school entry, racial disparities in maternal mortality, and more.

This course will be co-taught by public policy and leaders from Common Ground Health. Common Ground Health is a Rochester area non-profit agency whose mission is described as "Through regional collaboration and partnerships, we bring greater focus to community health issues via data analysis, resident engagement and solution implementation." Prof. Stephanie David, JD, MPH, IMH-E, Director of Early Childhood Policy will be leading classes focused on current advocacy campaigns: [fill in the blanks]

¹ Grateful thanks to Drs. Arden Handler, Joan Wightkin, and Sonya S. Brady, for making their Syllabus available; this Syllabus is based in part on their work. Special thanks to Kay Johnson for the background materials and guest talks, and to U of R undergraduates Devin Hott, Madeline Bordo, Meg Curtis, Tommy Oddo and Onika Phillips for their teaching assistance.

Instructor

Prof. [Molly McNulty, JD](#), Associate Professor of Public Health Law and Policy

Email: m.mcnuilty@rochester.edu

Office Hour: Available by Zoom, Weekdays 9am-11am, or 6:30 – 8:pm

Community Partner

Prof. Stephanie David, JD, MPH

Email:

Available by appointment via Zoom

Teaching Assistant

Leo Zambrano-Tapia

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify the **health needs** of MCH population (by Assignment 1 MCH Data; Assignment 2 Framing/Using Data in Policymaking)
- Identify leading MCH **policy challenges and proposed equitable solutions** (by Assignment 3 legislative analysis and by Assignment 4 equity prediction),
- Create an **advocacy strategy** (by Assignment 5 Coalitions; Assignment 6 Fact Sheet)
- Improve quality of **oral and written communication** (by Writing Practice, Peer Reviews, and Discussions)

COURSE ASSESSMENTS**Assignments (#, Title, Weight, Deadline)**

Assignment 1, Collecting data (MCH Data), 15%, due 2/15/2026

Assignment 2, Framing/Using Data in Policy, 15%, due 3/1/2026

Assignment 3, Legislative Analysis, 20%, due 3/22/2026

Assignment 4, Equity Prediction, 15%, due 4/5/2026

Assignment 5, Creating a community coalition (Coalition), 5%, due 4/12/2026

Assignment 6, Creating an educational fact sheet (Fact Sheet), 5%, due 4/26/2026

Assignment 7, Blackboard Discussions (Discussions 1-10), 10%, 10, TBA

Assignment 8, Writing exercises (Exercises 1 & 2), 5%, 2, TBA

Assignment 9, Peer Reviews (Peer REVIEWS 1 & 2), 5%, 2, TBA

Assignment 10, Participation, 5%, due 4/30/2026

Writing Exercises (2)

Writing Exercise 1, Framing Poverty, 2.5%, due 2/28/2026

Writing Exercise 2,

Discussions (10)

Discussion 1, Poverty, 1%, due 2/8/2026

COURSE MATERIALS

Required

Smith Writing Public Policy: A Practical Guide to Communicating In the Policymaking Process
 Kirby [Kotch's Maternal and Child Health](#) ([link to Rush Rhees online textbook](#))
 New York Times subscription - Activate your free student subscription to The New York Times

Recommended

Snyder [Advocacy For Public Health Policy](#)
 Tobin-Tyler [Essentials of Health Justice](#)
 Wilensky [Essentials of Health Policy and Law](#)

COURSE TEACHING MODE

This course will be taught in a unique mode *for the first half of the semester only*. During these weeks, there may be some *asynchronous* scheduling, which means that classes will not be held. Instead, there will be pre-recorded lectures, readings, and graded Blackboard Discussions. The weekly schedules will be posted on Blackboard, and weekly announcements/emails will also be sent out. Read them.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND TOPICS

Module I Foundations

1/20/2026 Introduction to the Course
 1/22/2026 Global MCH
 1/27/2026 History of MCH Programs and Politics
 1/29/2026 Poverty
 2/3/2026 A Life Course Perspective on Maternal and Child Health and Health Inequities

Module II The Art and Craft of Defining the Problem

2/5/2026, Intro to MCH Policymaking
 2/10/2026, Intro to MCH Policymaking and Advocacy
 2/12/2026, How to Use Data in Maternal Child Health Policy & Advocacy (TCA PPT)
 2/17/2026, Indicators: Selection and Problems
 2/19/2026, "Framing" the Problem
 2/24/2026, What Makes Effective Report Cards?

Module III Finding Policy Solutions

2/26/2026, Connecting MCH Status Gaps to Policies and Programs
 3/3/2026, How to Find and Analyze Legislation
 How to Identify Policy Options (population specific)
 3/5/2026, How to Identify Policy Options (population specific)
 3/17/2026, How to Identify Policy Options (population specific)
 3/19/2026, How to Identify Policy Options (population specific)
 3/24/2026,

Module IV Advocacy for MCH System Change

3/26/2026, Rights, Justice, Equity
 3/31/2026, MCH Health System Overview

4/2/2026, Gaps in the Safety Net
 4/7/2026, Access, Insurance, National Health Reform
 4/9/2026, Medicaid and CHIP
 4/14/2026, Current Policy Challenges: Safety Net Cutbacks
 4/16/2026, Current Policy Challenges
 4/21/2026, Community Coalitions in MCH Policymaking
 4/23/2026, Successful Community Coalitions (CGH)
 4/28/2026, Educational Fact Sheets
 4/30/2026, Wrap-Up

COURSE POLICIES

Honesty and Ethics: I take cheating and plagiarism very seriously; it constitutes theft of ideas and unfair advantage over other students. (I used to sit on my College's Academic Honesty Review Board). Please take [Honesty Quiz # 1](#) to test your knowledge of the [University's Academic Honesty code](#). This includes refraining from copying and pasting material written by others without explicit attribution (e.g., footnotes). **This is a particular temptation when studying law and policy, which can be confusing to the novice.** Ask when you are confused. This is what office hours are for. As Albert Einstein said, "If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough."

- The University requires this language in a syllabus:
- "At Rochester, we are committed to academic excellence, which depends on academic honesty. Academic honesty means being truthful in our academic pursuits, maintaining ownership of our own work, and acknowledging our debt to the work of others. All assignments and activities associated with this course--including, but not limited to, collaboration, citation, and use of outside resources--must be performed in accordance with the University of Rochester's Academic Honesty Policy.
- Please review the [Academic Honesty policy](#)"
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Time Students are expected to do extensive reading and writing in this course; to direct their own acquisition of knowledge through this reading and writing and should budget **a minimum of 9 to 12 hours per week** (including class time) (per NYS Education legal standards for 4 course credits).

Participation Students are expected to be autonomous and "active" learners. This means completing all reading before class, asking questions if you do not clearly understand the "key takeaways" of that reading, speaking up in class, managing your time so that you submit your best work before the deadlines. Your participation grade will be based on class attendance (tracked by the TA), and responses to the assignments, even those graded as Complete/Incomplete)

Attendance Required attendance - Something to think about if you're thinking of skipping - each class costs students (or your parents - or the government) **\$270**. In general, you're expected to **attend every class** and complete each assignment on time. With that said, please communicate to Prof. McNulty (NOT THE TA) 24 hours in advance if you need to miss class or turn in work late for any reason. Extensions will be given for illness and emergencies only (e.g., for medical emergencies, but not for poor time planning). You will receive an email in response to your extension request notifying you whether your request is granted without penalty, or whether a penalty will be imposed.

Disability Statement Your success in this course is important to me, and it is the policy and practice of the University of Rochester to create inclusive learning environments consistent with federal and state law. If you have a documented disability (or need to have a disability documented), and need an "accommodation," please contact me (m.mcnulty@rochester.edu) *privately* as soon as possible so that we can discuss with the relevant office how to meet your specific needs and the requirements of the course. If you're not sure what counts as a disability, check out this page:

<https://www.rochester.edu/college/disability/faculty/common-disabilities.html> General information about disability support services is here: <https://www.rochester.edu/college/disability/>. PLEASE NOTE: Mental health problems, such as anxiety or depression, *do count* as disabilities and the University is legally required to accommodate these disabilities through provisions such as extended testing times, and notetaking assistance.

Technology and Devices Please bring a laptop to class, as you'll use it for various **Writing Lab** activities. However, **cell phones must be turned off** (not just silenced), and I will be monitoring your usage to make sure you are paying attention. I will call upon individual students in class who are violating this policy.

Late Work Policy

There will be a .5 point deduction for every day that the assignment is late out of the total points available for that assignment. After 7 days, your submission will not be accepted, and you will be given a zero for that assignment. If you feel that your situation might warrant an extension, please email Dr. McNulty **ahead of time** to request an extension with the reason for your request. You will receive an email in response to your extension request notifying you whether your request is granted without penalty, or whether a penalty will be imposed.