

Brandeis University Health: Science, Society and Policy (HSSP) Program

HSSP Major: Learning Goals

Health: Science, Society and Policy (HSSP) is an interdisciplinary undergraduate major that focuses on health, health care and health policy. Launched in 2003, HSSP is a unique program that draws from three of the major strengths of Brandeis: the life sciences, the social sciences of health, and the health policy of the Heller School. There are few programs like HSSP in the country; the emphasis is studying multiple perspectives on health and health care. Many HSSP graduates eventually go on to graduate or professional school in medicine, public health, nursing, health administration, physical therapy, health law, and other health related fields. In addition, the required “hands on experience” enables students to engage academic material experientially in a setting related to either health or health care. Students may fulfill this with a summer or semester internship, a field or lab based research project, or through a study abroad program. One of the core requirements is a course in Biostatistics and Epidemiology, an important perspective rarely offered to undergraduates.

In pursuing the major, students can choose to do the BA version of the program or the more science intensive BS version. The BS students take at least four Biology courses while the BA students take one Biology course and two BISC courses (science courses for non-science majors) as part of their program. In both cases, students take four core courses, four or five electives, a “hands on experience”, and a senior capstone course. This includes courses that emphasize social science perspectives about health and illness, others that examine health policy issues, and courses that present scientific views of disease and treatment.

Knowledge: The HSSP major emphasizes knowledge and awareness of health from the perspectives of science, society and policy in both US and global contexts. Students completing the major will achieve significant competency in understanding:

- The nature of disease and illness from a basic scientific perspective;
- The social and cultural contributions to health and illness;
- The impact of health care system in diverse social and cultural settings;
- How public policies in health and health care are developed, implemented and evaluated.

Core Skills: Students completing a major in HSSP will also acquire important core analytic thinking and quantitative reasoning skills including the ability to:

- Synthesize information and perspectives from different disciplines, especially but not exclusively about health and health care;

- Critically think about and evaluate health care system organization and delivery;
- Provide a first hand experience with a health related organization; this teaches students how to function in and evaluate a “real world” situation beyond the classroom.
- Critically evaluate health issues with epidemiology, basic biostatistics and quantitative reasoning;
- Research health-oriented problems and analyze and communicate findings in both written and oral presentations.

Social Justice: The HSSP curriculum provides the tools for those committed to the Brandeis ideal of learning in service of social justice. The HSSP graduate will come away with a strong understanding of:

- The social determinants of health and disease and health disparities and the impacts of social inequality on health;
- Issues related to access of health care and health reform options;
- Social and cultural differences as they pertain to health;
- Selected major bioethical issues.

Upon graduating many of our students take different health-related routes:

- Enter graduate and professional schools for health-related professions and occupations including medicine, nursing, medical social work, podiatry, physical therapy and others;
- Seek careers in public health and in public policy related to health and health care, often ultimately pursue further education in Public Health, Law, Government, Business, and Public Policy;
- Embark on careers in health-oriented research (often beginning with entry level positions and sometimes seeking advanced academic degrees);
- Work in health-related domestic or international public sector agencies or NGOs or become involved with health services or health advocacy organizations, both domestic and international.