

Critical Perspectives on Aging and Health

A new course to be offered in the school of Public Health.

Course target date: Spring 2010.

Instructor: Marty Martinson, MPH, MEd and doctoral candidate (DrPH); Instructor of Record: Guy Micco, MD

Description and Need: This course will draw upon contemporary theories in cultural studies, political economy, feminism and the humanities to examine aging and health in the United States. By shifting from mainstream gerontology's focus on the individual's ability to adapt to aging to a focus on the broader structural and cultural forces that influence how we experience aging, how we age differently, and how we construct meanings around aging and being old, the course will address what Stephen Katz has called the "gap in gerontological criticality." Theories of social gerontology, including micro theories such as disengagement theory, activity theory, and continuity theory will be reviewed for what they suggest about "healthy aging" and expectations for late life. The contradictory relationship between negative aging (frail, dependent) and positive aging (successful, productive) models will be examined, as will the emergence of critical gerontology as a means of investigating these contradictions and uncovering issues of power, inequality and culture as they affect aging and health. Finally, the impacts of these diverse conceptual approaches will be illustrated in terms of how they are reflected in selected aging-related programs, practices, and policies.

Objectives:

- Provide an overview of micro and macro theories of social gerontology
- Examine a range of critical gerontology inquiries into issues of aging and health, aging policy, and cultural meanings of aging
- Explore critical perspectives on positive aging models (e.g., active aging, successful aging, productive aging and civic engagement)
- Apply critical perspectives in gerontology to real world settings through a focus on selected contemporary aging related policies, practices and programs

Audience: Graduate students in Public Health and the other health professions

Note: To be offered every other year beginning in Spring 2010 contingent upon resources.