Graduate Program in Health Care Policy

General Description

In recent decades, health care policy has become a matter of national and worldwide concern. Consider the following: life expectancy rates in the U.S. lag behind rates for other developed countries and threaten to decline for the first time in over 100 years; chronic conditions such as cardiovascular disease, obesity, and diabetes—all conditions that are largely preventable with appropriate changes in social and individual behavior—continue to increase; health care costs per person and as a percent of GDP in the U.S. outstrip figures in other developed countries and are increasing rapidly, thereby threatening to add significantly to the nation’s public debt; the U.S. remains the only developed nation that does not provide universal health care, with some 45 million citizens still uninsured and another 25 million underinsured; shifting policies and priorities that are intended to rein in increasing costs portend changes in the relationship between health care providers and patients in ways that are, at best, ambiguous; and rapid, far-reaching developments in technology produce changes in health care provision and in the relationship between providers and patients.

In light of such concerns, the Graduate Program in Public Policy at Trinity College now offers a new program in Health Care Policy, beginning in the fall of 2012. The program will focus on the public policy, economic, and ethical aspects of the delivery and administration of health care. Distinct from other graduate programs in public health or bioethics that typically concentrate on issues of clinical practice, this program will draw upon faculty expertise in public policy, law, economics, and both social and clinical ethics to provide a comprehensive approach to specific issues. Accordingly, the program seeks to engage and serve the greater Hartford community, including major health insurance providers, government agencies, legal organizations, health care providers, and not-for-profit organizations in the region. A master's degree in health care policy will benefit employees and administrators of these organizations as well as individuals and groups who are
interested in health care advocacy and who seek to enhance their knowledge and credentials.

**Degree Requirements and Curriculum**

To earn a Master of Arts degree in Health Care Policy, students must complete all requirements for a degree in Public Policy, including successful completion of 11 courses and a master’s thesis including a practicum (2 credits) with a minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.667. Those admitted to the program must satisfy all criteria for admission to Graduate Studies at Trinity College, including a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 for their baccalaureate degree, submission of official transcripts for all previous academic work, submission of two letters of recommendation and a writing sample of approximately 1,000 words. No Graduate Record Examination or other standardized test is required for admission.

**Curriculum**

**Required Courses**

**Basic Economic Principles**: The study of basic economic principles pertains to the operation of the pricing system, income distribution, national income analysis, and monetary and fiscal policy. (Requirement waived upon demonstration of sufficient educational background of economics or tested competency. If waived, a student may select another elective.)

**Introduction to Health Care Policy**: This course addresses current major U.S. health policy issues and the critical processes and forces that shape them. Major health policy issues addressed include: Medicare, Medicaid, the uninsured, public health, the impact of welfare policy on health care, managed care development and regulation, state and federal health care reform and others. The course discusses the politics of health policy in terms of legislative and executive processes at the state and federal level; key forces involved including economic, social, ethical and political factors; and central players of importance, including special interest groups, lobbyists, the press, elected officials, legislative staff and public agencies.

**Policy Analysis**: This course focuses on the problems of empirical policy analysis: defining the problem, framing the questions to be answered, picking the location and scope of the study, selecting the metrics of analysis, aligning metrics with public values, collecting evidence, and transforming the evidence into data. The readings and weekly discussions are avenues for students to inform and challenge themselves on the problems they must solve to advance their own research agendas. Students will complete a major project in empirical policy analysis.
**Research Methods:** This is a course in research methodologies. Research methodologies are the increasingly varied, highly articulated ways in which scholars and practitioners gather empirical evidence to build theories, test hypotheses, and document experiences. The course will first examine issues related to the development of research questions and concepts that lead to data collection. The course will then examine ways of data analysis, data presentation and data archiving.

**Leading Issues in Bioethics, Public Policy, and Law:** This course examines leading issues in bioethics, public policy, and law in relation to recent developments in medicine, public health, biotechnology, and the life sciences. After tracing the historical background of bioethical issues and law and deciding on methods of legal and ethical analysis, the course will consider how issues in contemporary medicine, public health, and science and technology challenge traditional ethical principles as well as existing law and public policy. Among other topics, the course will explore the tension between traditional biomedical ethics, centering on individual autonomy, and the public health model, focusing on the common good. Students will pay close attention to recent and ongoing legal cases and controversies along with other current developments in bioethics.

**Economics and Regulation of Health Care:** This course will study the characteristics of the U.S. health care system and the functioning of the health care market using the tools of microeconomic theory. The aim of the course will be to discuss specific topics in the economics of health, including: the analysis of the causes of health-related behaviors such as obesity and substance abuse; the characteristics of the health care industry and how it is affected by insurance and medical technology; and the impact of government policies on health related behaviors and the provision of medical care. The role of preventive measures and the efficient use of limited healthcare resources will be examined in light of the recent health care reform and in light of their broader implications for public policy.

**Thesis/Final Project:** Each student will be required to undertake an independent research project, including a practicum, that focuses on a significant issue of health care policy. The results will be communicated in a master's thesis and a public presentation of the project’s conclusions. (2 credits)

**Elective Courses**

**Health Care Policy Reform: The Affordable Care Act Goes to Court:** The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010, which passed without a single Republican vote in either house of Congress, was immediately challenged on constitutional grounds in several states. Several of these cases have already been argued before the Supreme Court. The purpose of this course is to familiarize students with both the legal and policy dimensions of the new health care law and the constitutional challenges to it. To achieve that end, we will examine the policy rationale for reforming the American health care system, analyze the law itself, and discuss the principal criticisms of the law. In addition, we will study the constitutional arguments made by opponents and supporters of the law, and we will evaluate the Supreme Court's decision in the three cases that it heard. (The decision is expected to be issued during our summer session.) Readings will include relevant statutes, analysis and commentary by policy analysts, legal briefs submitted by the parties to the cases, and the Supreme Court's decision. Students will write one 6-8 page policy memo on health care reform and a final research paper on a topic related to the legal and policy implications of the Court's decision.
**Critical Health Issues Facing the U.S.:** Is the attempted entry by the U.S. into the community of nations which provide universal health care a moral imperative that will enhance and save millions of lives, or is the Affordable Care Act of 2010 an unnecessarily costly and unconstitutional program that will destroy free enterprise? Are Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security sustainable or will they bankrupt the nation? Have we reached the reasonable limits of life expectancy, and will new and epidemic health issues, such as diabetes, obesity, and lack of physical activity, actually reverse the advances made in the quality and length of life? These issues, along with health disparities and discrimination that still exist among a number of groups, are the focus of this course. Students will be given the opportunity to research and present a major topic of interest relevant to these issues, in addition to participating in lively discussions generated by diverse readings and guest lecturers.

**Descriptions for the following elective courses to be supplied by the instructor:**

- Public Policy of Health Research
- Public Health Issues
- Environmental Science and Health
- Law of Health Care
- Health Care in Hartford
- Reproductive Rights
- Health Care after 2014
- Health Care and Information Management
- Gerontology: the Aging of America
- Neuroscience and Health
- Modular course including topics such as neonatal care, death and dying, genetic medicine, etc.

**Benefits to Students and the Community**

The Health Care Policy program is designed to benefit professionals with a wide variety of backgrounds in relation to health care:

- Administrators and officials of organizations providing direct health care
- Officials and other professionals employed in governmental regulatory agencies
- Attorneys employed in organizations specializing in health care
- Professionals employed by health insurance providers
- Advocates of health care reform working in or with community organizations
- Employees of not-for-profit organizations dealing with health care and health care policy
- Educators at the college or secondary level who are interested in health care issues
- Individuals seeking enhancement of career opportunities in health care policy
Because students will undertake research projects in regular courses and, especially, their theses, community organizations involved in health care can gain from and provide resources for such research. Moreover, the program intends to work with organizations in creating internship opportunities of mutual benefit. From time to time, senior officials of health care organizations will be invited to serve as participants in graduate symposia on specific issues, advisors in evaluating and improving the program, and as visiting instructors in their area of expertise. The program's ultimate goal is to undertake an interactive, mutually profitable discussion of health care issues in the Greater Hartford area and the region, as well as to produce a continuing cadre of graduates who will be instrumental in helping to address the health care challenges of the community.

**How Organizations Can Become Involved**

To help realize the goals of this new program, Trinity College proposes the following ways that organizations can become involved and, thereby, benefit from the program.

- Promote the program to current employees and officials, including subvention of expenses if possible
- Provide internship and research opportunities for Trinity graduate students
- Participate as experts in public symposia on health care issues
- Serve as guest speakers on specific issues in selected graduate classes
- Serve as outside, expert evaluators for selected master’s theses
- Serve as members of a program advisory board
- Include Trinity faculty and graduate students, as appropriate, in on-site conferences
- Communicate the organization’s educational needs to the health care policy program

Questions regarding this and other graduate programs at Trinity College should be addressed to:

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