COURSE INSTRUCTOR: Greg Gabrellas, MA, Drexel University College of Medicine

PURPOSE: Government reformers and private enterprise transform the medical profession, stirring physicians’ uncertainty and apprehension about their role in American society. In whispered tones, well-established physicians warn students: the profession is 'not what it used to be.' Even as medical students suffer an historically unprecedented burden of student debt, they perceive and react to the prevailing mood of anxiety as though it were communicated—sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously—from one generation to the next. All of this threatens to curb the social consciousness of the rising generation of physicians. Where is the medical institution going, whose interests are being served, and what challenges will the new generation face? This course will introduce concepts from social theory to allow students to reflect on their own future role as physicians in a changing world: by beginning to recognize how the medical institution works, we begin to learn how to work to make things better. We start the course by defining the "sociological imagination," and read short papers to sketch a connection between the personal lives of health care workers and the social forces that determine how they work: from the dreams of medical students, to deferred dreams of health care reform, to the high price of cost-control at a prestigious academic hospital.

FORMAT: The course will consist of 5 core seminars throughout the year. We will discuss pre-assigned readings: expect about 30 to 40 pp. of reading for each session on your own. Remaining sessions will consist of guest faculty lectures followed by discussion.

REQUIREMENTS: Satisfactory participation in 4 of the core seminars with completion of most assigned readings. (Make-up assignments are available for a missed session.)

SCHEDULE: Meets at QL unless specified otherwise. Room location TBA. Core seminar meets 6:00-7:30 p.m. unless otherwise noted.

Session I. Tuesday, September 8  Introducing the Sociological Imagination
Readings: “Social conditions as fundamental causes of disease,” by Bruce G. Link and Jo Phelan; “The promise,” by C. Wright Mills; Introduction to One Nation, Uninsured: Why the U.S. Has No National Health Insurance, by Jill Quadagno

Session II. Monday, September 28  Health Care Reform and the Drug Companies
Readings: “The truth about the drug companies,” by Marcia Angell; “Drugs for life,” by Joseph Dumitt; Selection from One Nation, Uninsured

Session III. Tuesday, January 12  Medical Errors and Physician Training
Readings: Selections from Forgive and Remember: Managing Medical Failure, by Charles L. Bosk

Session IV. Monday, February 15  Social Perspectives on the Doctor-Patient Relationship
Readings: Selections from The Politics of Medical Encounters: How Patients and Doctors Deal with Social Problems, by Howard Waitzkin

Session V. Monday, March 14  Winners and Losers in the Business of Health Care
Readings: Selections from Code Green: Money-Driven Hospitals and the Dismantling of Nursing, by Dana Beth Weinberg

*Limited to 10 registrants from each of the Classes of 2018 and 2019 (total 20) on a first-come basis.
Students in the Classes of 2017 and 2016 are welcome even if they can attend only one or two of the sessions.

Advance registration is required by emailing the instructor at greg.gabrellas@gmail.com by Sept. 1st. Please indicate Class and track.