

NEW GRADUATE COURSE FALL 2003

Public Affairs 974: Topics in Public Affairs--Public Policy Implications of Aging Societies

Thursday 3:30p-5:25 pm

Professor Karen Holden, Professor of Consumer Science and Public Affairs

Prerequisites: Graduate Student Status.

World wide, public policy makers are dealing with policy and budget implications of an aging population. This course uses the tools from demography, policy analysis, and tax and budget analysis to look at how the U.S. and other countries can meet the challenge of a population in which the share of persons over 65 is expected to grow. It will first look at the evidence of population aging and projected variations across nations and geographic entities. While it is quite certain that national populations in the developed world (and in many developing countries) are aging, there is considerable controversy about the certainty of predictions of mortality and population structure. This uncertainty in turn leads to considerable uncertainty about the predicted long-run financing of public programs (including Social Security systems), their tax capacity and benefits requirements. Some argue, for example, that mortality is declining much faster than foreseen in most countries and that the uncertainty of these declines indicates greater uncertainty in long-range program planning and budgeting at all levels of government. At the same time, leading policy makers argue that "Demography is Not Destiny" and that this challenge can be met with well thought out and carefully reasoned policy choices.

The core of the course will deal with the implication of an older population for support and provision of public programs, both to older and younger populations. The course will examine key public programs that serve elderly groups, how governments, both in the U.S. and elsewhere, at the federal and local levels, are dealing with projected demands on public resources, and what challenges to government taxing and benefit policies lie ahead. That examination includes discussion of how trust fund accounting, used to fund Social Security programs in many countries, affects apparent and actual budget balances. Attention will be given to how responsibility for programs and financial risks (e.g., stock market risks) are shifting between the public and private sector, between families and governments, general revenue and fees as means of providing services. Readings will come from professional journals and books as well as from publications of international organizations. Assignments will include several short policy papers and a final paper the topic of which will be selected based on student interests in topic and country.

If you have questions about the course, please contact Karen Holden by email, holden@lafollette.wisc.edu.

Note: the course is found in the timetable under "La Follette School of Public Affairs." Prerequisites listed in the printed timetable are not binding, though some basic statistics and public policy background is useful.