

## MCS 2 Selective Disability and Community

Health professionals with interests in activism and public health have long performed an important role for the broader society in assessing the suitability and desirability of environments for mental health and physical wellbeing. This selective will focus on urban environments and the people – disabled and not-disabled alike – who inhabit them, are shaped *by them* and occasionally found ways to respond and reshape them in return. Our appreciation for city/body shaping proceeds through the examination of case studies selected by students and the course instructor as well as invited guests. One shared “landscape” will be the suburban sprawl of contemporary New York City, but we also look to include examples from the Rust Belt, the Sun Belt and international locales. Whether in the “walking city” or the “crabgrass frontier,” our focus will be physicians and other health professionals in the public sphere: their notions of the beautiful and the good, as well alternative visions and the communities that support them.

### Instructors

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<http://www.stonybrook.edu/bioethics/dorn.shtml>



### Syllabus

This course offers an introduction to literature and perspectives in the twin fields of Urban Planning and Disability Studies. Scholarship in field of Disability Studies asks that we rethink normative aesthetic judgments about the social locations and proper modes of interaction for bodies in civil society. Quotidian decisions and actions bring into being a new future, as each of us operates within are shared set of values, and at the same time a distinctive view of the world and its possibilities. Scholars in Disability Studies and Urban Planning share an interest in *aesthetics* as well as function. Examining environments requires an assessment of way that bodies and spaces *make other bodies feel*. Medical diagnoses and treatments are always about the handling of one body by another and thus operate according to community norms of truth and beauty, even as they claim to operate according to “objective” criteria.

Students will work with selective instructor to consider the role of health professionals in the public sphere through an examination of urban public health practice, urban communities, and the institutions that (dis-)serve them. Our guides for this review will be physicians, social historians and urban planners – veteran observers of the American scene. Demetrius Moutsiakis’ paper “Reassessing physical disability” and book *The Other Shoe Dropped* give us an opportunity to consider the fraught relations between health professionals and persons with disabilities as well as physicians to their own bodily infirmities and impairments. Changes in the organization of cities have also entailed a variety of response to human physical and mental variation. With Frumkin, Frank and Jackson’s *Urban Sprawl and*

*Public Health*, we consider the ways that early twenty-first century American society is productive of its own forms of human isolation and endangerment and how they can be distinguished from today's challenges and unmet needs.

Course materials include a jointly authored book, and a journal article by guest presenter Moutsiakis and an introductory lecture by University of Michigan professor Tobin Siebers (the last two via email).

Frumkin, Howard, Frank, Lawrence & Jackson, Richard *Urban Sprawl and Public Health: Designing, planning, and building for healthy communities*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2004.

## **Educational Objectives**

At the conclusion of this course you will have the ability to:

1. Explain the processes of urban growth and change that resulted in contemporary American suburban landscape;
2. Examine the challenges that sprawl poses to the full integration of people with disabilities in housing, transportation, and employment through the experiences of key informants and organizations;
3. Suggest the health consequences of contemporary urban design and the requirements for disability accommodation in public accommodations, housing, medical care, and employment required under the Americans with Disabilities Act and other state and federal laws;
4. Inventory an urban environment for barriers for those with disabilities and other mobility challenges, and recommend modifications to improve accessibility.

## **Topics and Dates**

- 1 (3/16) Moutsiakis, Reassessing Physical Disability (Special Guest: Demetrius Moutsiakis)
- 2 (3/30) Frumkin et al. Chaps 1 - 3: What is sprawl? Origins of sprawl, & Evolution of Urban Public Health
- 3 (4/6) Frumkin et al. Chaps 4 - 6: Air Quality, Physical Activity, & Traffic
- 4 (4/13) Frumkin et al. Chap 7 - 9: Water, Mental Health, & Social Capital
- 5 (5/4) Frumkin et al. Chap 10 -11: From Urban Sprawl to Health for All

## **Evaluation**

1. Students will be asked to conduct a disability access and/or design audit of a building, transit system, or community, and write a report of 3-5 pages including findings and suggestions.
2. All students are expected to attend each class session, read assigned material beforehand, and come prepared with at least one question or point for discussion.
3. Students will be graded on class participation (50%) and their paper (50%). Students will be graded on the standard range (Honors, High Pass, Pass, Low Pass, Fail) using the standard evaluation form. The student is evaluated based on attendance, preparation for class discussion and participation and the final paper. The grade of Honors will be awarded for a superior and well-researched paper, and contributions to class discussion that show particular insight into the subject matter and contribute to the education and understanding of other students. The grade of Pass reflects commitment and work that is appropriate for the level of training. The grade of Fail denotes deficits in attendance, performance and responsibility.

**Class Size**

Minimum 5; Maximum 10