

Sociology 929
Research Memo
Matthew Kearney

I am interested in researching the social economy of health care. In particular, I plan to research federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), an alternative means of delivering health care that targets the medically underserved, accepts all patients without regard to ability to pay, and is governed by a patient majority board of directors, among other intriguing characteristics. There are over 1,200 FQHCs in the United States, including one here in Madison where I have contacts, and a particularly large one in Chicago where I was an employee for three years. This research will include some study of the legislation governing FQHCs, interviews with patients, staff members, and other community stakeholders, and possibly other things. I hope this seminar will help me build towards further, subsequent research on this topic.

For purposes of a group term paper, this project could easily be combined with any research interest that is related to health, domestically or internationally. For instance, in and around Madison, there are several different types of health cooperatives, health-related organizations that are employee-owned to one degree or another, and other progressive health-related organizations that could make interesting comparative cases.

Subject to Erik's approval, this interest could also be combined with research into non-health organizations that share some salient organizational element with FQHCs. For instance, FQHCs receive both government and fee-for-service funding on a non-profit basis, combining elements of statism, market economics, and social economics. As a result, FQHCs confront a complex web of stakeholders – perhaps there are non-health organizations must balance a similarly diverse set of interests. Alternatively, FQHCs resemble consumer cooperatives in that patients nominally govern the organization, but the extent to which this governance is truly democratic is unclear and requires more information than I have so far – perhaps there are non-health organizations, including cooperatives, that are governed by their own customers and as a result confront practical issues of deep democracy. I am open to emphasizing any number of things in what I hope is a very promising area for research.