Social Security in a Changing America

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When many people think of Social Security, they only think about the benefits that will be paid to them when they retire. Yet Social Security is more than simply a retirement benefits program. It is a series of programs that provides benefits to millions of Americans of all ages and is the foundation of America’s economic and social safety net. But even more than a collection of benefit programs, Social Security is the fundamental way that Americans provide for some of their most vulnerable fellow citizens.

This seminar will allow students to examine key questions related to the development, operation, and future of the Social Security system. However, this will not be merely a political science, history, or economics course. The issues that led to the creation of Social Security and the issues that challenge the program today cut across traditional academic disciplines and often revolve around fundamental and changing questions on the nature of family, work, disability, and opportunity in American society. It is expected that this course will be attractive to students from throughout the university community and the active participation of a diverse group of students will help the class come to a greater understanding of many of the issues surrounding Social Security.

Students will be evaluated based on seminar attendance and participation, weekly assignments focusing on reading and course discussions, and a final policy project. The final project will focus on a challenge currently facing the Social Security system and will consist of a policy paper similar to what would be prepared for a policy conference and a policy briefing before the class.

Course readings will include selections from:

- Blahous, *Social Security: The Unfinished Work*; and

as well as policy reports from the Government Accountability Office, Social Security Advisory Board, Congressional Research Service, National Academy of Social Insurance, and Social Security Administration.

There will be two off-site sessions for this seminar. One will be on Capitol Hill and will feature presentations from key Congressional staff who work on Social Security issues. The other will be in Washington, DC and will focus on the interaction between Social Security research and policy.