

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A WORKSHOP ON

Building the Critical Health Social Sciences in Southern Africa

*Hosted by the Division of Social and Behavioural Sciences,
School of Public Health and Family Medicine, University of Cape Town,
in partnership with the Institute for Development Studies at Sussex University*

9 – 13 March 2015, Malmesbury, South Africa (near Cape Town)

Application deadline: 20 December 2014

Workshop overview

There is growing recognition in the health sciences of the valuable role that the social sciences play in health research, policy and practice. Social scientists have offered important insights about the production, consequences, and management of ill health. This effort has not been without difficulty, though. Critics of biomedicine have offered trenchant analyses of structural violence and the medicalization of daily life. But they have been criticized for ‘only’ providing critique rather than practical ‘solutions’. Similarly, those working within biomedical spaces increasingly recognise the cultural and political-economic dimensions of health but they have been charged with supporting institutions and discourses that privatise and medicalise human experience.

Though some individuals have bridged this gap between ‘critical’ social sciences of health and ‘applied’ health social sciences, the disciplinary and institutional landscapes remain perhaps the biggest obstacle to connecting the two perspectives. Disciplines and bureaucracies constrain powerfully the training, daily practice, and funding of researchers. Funding agencies deepen this isolation by disincentivising inter-disciplinary work. Ethics committees and academic publishing also work against creative combinations of critique and application.

These challenges are especially salient in Southern Africa where institutions are weak and the incentives and opportunities for working outside of disciplines are few. This workshop brings together early career social scientists from Southern Africa and the UK to discuss common challenges and develop new ideas for collaborations, research and training initiatives, and methodological innovations to build critical health social sciences in the region.

Participants will be early career social scientists from the UK and Southern Africa. They will be asked to bring individual ‘five-year strategic plans’ for research and teaching as well as ideas for a new research project. About half of the workshop time will be devoted to smaller ‘working groups’ where participants will intensively workshop these strategies and proposals. The other half of the time will involve plenary lectures, discussions and training/workshop sessions to be facilitated by senior health social scientists from both South Africa and the UK.

The coordinators of the workshop are:

- A/Prof. Christopher J. Colvin, Head of the Division of Social and Behavioural Sciences at the School of Public Health and Family Medicine at the University of Cape Town, and;
- Dr. Hayley MacGregor, Fellow in Health and Nutrition at the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex University.

Other senior workshop facilitators/mentors include:

- Prof. Judith Green, Professor of Sociology of Health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.
- Prof. Steven Robins, Professor of Social Anthropology at Stellenbosch University, and;
- Prof. Christina Zarowsky, Professor of Public Health, University of Montreal, and University of the Western Cape

Target audience/eligibility

We are interested in recruiting early-career—PhD students, postdoctoral fellows, and junior faculty/scholars—health social scientists working in the UK, South Africa and Southern Africa. In particular, we would like to identify people working towards a career in the health social sciences that combines in some way both critical and applied perspectives. It is this juncture—between the ‘critical’ and the ‘applied’—that we are interested in exploring in detail (including what we mean by these terms).

Participants will be expected to prepare some material before the workshop (see above) and will be expected to participate in the full five days of the workshop. We also hope that participants will work together after the workshop on collaborative projects that emerge out of our time together. The workshop starts the morning of the 9th of March. Participants would arrive sometime during the day on the 8th and lodging will be provided between the 8th and the 13th.

Funding Available

The costs of air and ground travel to and from the workshop will be covered as well as lodging and food during the course of the workshop.

How to apply

If you are interested in participating in this workshop, please send your CV and a cover letter (no more than two pages) indicating why you would make a good fit for the workshop theme. Please provide specific detail about how this workshop would fit into your professional development and research and teaching goals, as well as how you think you will be able to translate the lessons learned from the workshop more broadly, into your local institutions, networks and contexts. Please give an indication of the focus of a new area of or proposal for research that you would like to discuss and develop at the workshop.

Deadline for CVs and cover letters:

20 December 2014. We will notify successful applicants by the end of December.

Who to contact if you have questions

If you have any questions, please email Chris Colvin at cj.colvin@uct.ac.za.

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British Council’s Research Links (www.britishcouncil.org/education/science/researcher-links) and the South African Social Science and HIV (SASH) Programme (www.sashprogramme.org)