I. Catalogue Description

This course provides an awareness of problems and concepts of the policy process in the U.S., exploring the political, economic, and institutional frameworks which structure public social welfare choices.

II. Course Overview

Social Work 206 is an undergraduate survey course available to undergraduate social welfare majors and other interested students. Students will be introduced to alternative perspectives on social problems and how a particular formulation informs policy proscriptions. The act of defining a social problem that requires public action necessitates an understanding of various political, economic, and institutional perspectives involved in this process. We will also focus on the ethical responsibilities and social justice charge inherent in the social work profession. A major focus of this course is to help students develop an understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty, demographic scope (how poverty is distributed across groups); alternative explanations (racism, sexism, social change, economic organization, public policy and the welfare system) as well as heighten awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of different policy responses to poverty. Students will also review major economic security programs in the U.S., who benefits from them, their history and structure within the larger U.S. social safety net, with particular emphasis on the distinction between social insurance and welfare programs. Discussion of select current issues in social policy will be integrated throughout the course.
### III. Course Competencies and Practice Behaviors and Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competencies addressed in course</th>
<th>Practice behaviors addressed in course</th>
<th>Assignment(s) measuring behavior</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1.2: Apply SW ethical principles to guide professional practice</td>
<td>• Weighing values, principles of ethical decision-making, and the NASW code of ethics in order to address ethical dilemmas related to practice in the children, youth and families area.</td>
<td>Exam 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1.3: Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments</td>
<td>• Distinguish, appraise, and integrate multiple sources of knowledge, including research-based knowledge, and practice wisdom. • Analyze models of assessment, prevention, intervention, and evaluation. • Demonstrate effective oral and written communication in working with individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities and colleagues.</td>
<td>Exam 1 Exercise 1 Exercise 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1.4: Engage diversity and difference in practice</td>
<td>• Recognize the extent to which a culture's structures and values may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power.</td>
<td>Exam 1 Exercise 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1.5: Advance human rights and social and economic justice</td>
<td>• Understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination. • Engage in practices that advance social and economic justice.</td>
<td>Exam 2 Exercise 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1.6: Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research</td>
<td>• Critically evaluating and utilizing theoretical and empirical research relevant to the problems and/or populations addressed.</td>
<td>Exam 2 Exercise 1 Exercise 2 Exercise 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1.7: Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment</td>
<td>• Utilize conceptual frameworks to guide the processes of assessment, intervention, and evaluation.</td>
<td>Exam 2 Exam 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1.8: Engage in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being and to deliver effective social work services</td>
<td>• Analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance social well-being. • Collaborate with colleagues and clients for effective policy action.</td>
<td>Exam 2 Exam 3 Exercise 2</td>
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<td>2.1.9: Respond to contexts that shape practice</td>
<td>• Continuously discover, appraise, and attend to changing locales, populations, scientific and technological developments, and emerging societal trends to provide relevant services.</td>
<td>Exam 2 Exam 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1.10: Engage, assess, intervene and evaluate with groups, organizations, and communities</td>
<td>• Substantively and effectively prepare for action with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities. • Critically analyze, monitor and evaluate interventions.</td>
<td>Exam 3 Exercise 2</td>
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IV. Class Session Topics and Readings

Week 1: September 3: COURSE OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL POLICY

- What is social welfare policy?
- How do we decide what a “problem” is?
- How do professional values impact policy positions?
- How to approach this course?
- How to develop your information system

Week 2: September 8 & 10:

STRUCTURE OF THE WELFARE STATE AND POLICYMAKERS

Ways of understanding the welfare state
- How do we think about the welfare state?
- What is the difference between a social welfare state and social policy?
- Influences on U.S. social policy development

Policymaking, power and agenda setting
- What is the role of problem formulation in social welfare policy?
- What is the policymaking process?
- How does it work?
- Why do some issues move up the agenda while others languish?
- How is understanding this process useful to social workers?

Readings:


Week 3: September 15 & 17: VALUES, IDEOLOGY AND POLICYMAKING

How does our history influence our policy conversation?
- Who are we as a nation?
- On-going struggle about the size, role and proper functions of government

Economic reasoning and public policy
- The role of economic theory in policymaking

Readings:


Week 4: September 22 & 24: THEORIES OF POVERTY

What you don’t know might hurt you. Why understanding how policy framers explain poverty is pivotal. This week we will look at the major theories suggesting explanations for observed poverty. Synthesizing the theories and data will help us to come to our own understanding and, therefore, be in a position to thoughtfully view current policy options.

The discipline of the market, family and institutions to cause “good behavior”
- Belief: Individual explanations for observed poverty
- Belief: The market place is essentially sound, individual skill building or opportunity is needed
- Belief: Demographic changes, labor market dislocations and neighborhood context have become increasingly important (underclass debate)

Structural forces drive poverty and inequality
- Belief: Structural inequities (discrimination, entrenched corporate power, strength of labor) drive poverty and inequality and the conditions will not be ameliorated without structural change
- Belief: Individual change does not target that which must be changed and therefore, will never alter this fundamental dynamic

Readings:

Week 5: September 29 & October 1: POVERTY AND SOCIAL POLICY

Now that we have some context around how various actors understand poverty, let's turn our attention to who is poor. What groups are most likely to be poor? Have trends changed over time? Are there particular lifecycle stages that are particularly vulnerable to poverty?

**What does it mean to be “poor” in America?**
- How is poverty defined?
- Who is poor?
- Variation in poverty across groups, lifecycle, family type and geography
- How do poor families make do?

**Readings:**


Week 6: October 6 & 8: THE U.S. SAFETY NET: WHAT WE PROVIDE AND FOR WHOM?

We will examine the development of major social welfare policies and how the circumstances surrounding their creation; macroeconomic, political as well as social factors influence the resulting policy. We will focus on the legislative intent, the major provisions of the policy as well as how well the policy met its intended goal.

The U.S. safety net has been described as “patchwork” and “confusing”. Indeed, there are many programs with various acronyms to address certain needs: income supplementation, nutrition, medical care, early childhood intervention. The trick to understanding our social welfare state is being able to answer some core questions about any program. This will enable you to “get your head around” a particular program quickly by asking the most useful questions:

- Who does the program serve?
How is the program funded?  
How is the program administered?  
What are the income or asset tests to determine eligibility?

**Means-tested cash programs**: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); Social Security Income (SSI); Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC); General Assistance (GA).  
**Means-tested, “near cash” or in-kind benefits**: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), WIC, Medicaid, Head Start.

Readings:


**Week 7: October 13 & 15: THE U.S. SAFETY NET: WHAT WE PROVIDE AND FOR WHOM?**

**Social Insurance Programs**: Old Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI), Medicare, Unemployment Insurance (UI)

- **Putting it all together. Why do we have the system we do? Are there gaps? If so, for whom?**

Readings:


**October 20: EXAM 1 [in class] – true/false/multiple choice/possibly short answer**

**Week 8: October 22 & 27: TAX TRANSFERS AND EXPENDITURES**

The tax system is a less visible but highly effective tool for income transfers to citizens across the population. Ignoring tax transfers, deductions and expenditures does a disservice to understanding the fullness of the welfare state and obscures transfers from higher earners to lower earners, from renters to home owners and from individuals to industry.
What do we need to know to think usefully about the tax system?

- What is a tax expenditure?
- What is a tax deduction?
- Using the tax transfer system
- Nuts and bolts: what this means for different types of households

Readings:


**Read up until “Social Security and Reducing Poverty among the Elderly” on p. 208


Urban Institute. (2011). Five questions for Donald Marron on about how cutting tax preferences is the key to tax reform. Washington, DC.


We have just undergone one of the most serious downturns since the Great Depression. What happened? What are the implications for social welfare policy? What policy mechanisms were employed?

The Great Recession and Housing Collapse

- What does the Great Recession mean for states and their ability to deliver core social services: police and fire protection, public education, corrections, sanitation?
- The wealth of most Americans is the equity in their homes. What is unique about a recession that is fundamentally a collapse in housing prices?
- Why does housing matter? What is it about housing that matters?

Readings:


Week 10: November 10 & 12: RACE, ETHNICITY AND SOCIAL POLICY

How should we think about culture, race, ethnicity, and immigration status in relation to policy in the U.S.? In what ways do social policies recognize these differences? What are the implications of discrimination, marginalization, and oppression for specific subgroups and for the larger society? What are the costs of discrimination? Who bears them? What is the relationship to policy?

Readings:


EXAM 2 [take home] – GIVEN AT THE END OF CLASS ON NOVEMBER 10

Week 11: November 17 & 19: SEXUAL ORIENTATION, SEXUAL IDENTITY, AND SOCIAL POLICY

How does sexual identity and orientation affect the distribution of welfare benefits in the U.S.? What are the costs to individuals and to society of discriminating based on such factors? Marriage equality – now what?


EXAM 2 DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS ON NOVEMBER 17

THANKSGIVING RECESS: November 26 –29

Week 12/13: November 24 & December 1: SOCIAL POLICY AND SUPPORTING FAMILIES

What are different policy models for supporting parents and families in caring for their members? What are the implications of changes in family structure and characteristics for social policy? What are the policy implications of recognizing how families live and earn in the 21st century?

Readings:


Week 14/15: December 3 & 8: POLICY SOLUTIONS BOTH DOMESTIC AND ABROAD – WHAT MIGHT WORK IN THE US AND WHY?

Readings:


Week 15: December 10: WRAP-UP: EVALUATION AND REVIEW

Student driven review of major themes based on Exercise 3: What is the “take-away” from our review of U.S. social policy? What are some of the key points to keep in mind?

FINAL EXAM: 12/18, 5:05-7:05, 1800 Engineering Hall

V. Texts and Reading Materials for the Course

There is no required text for this course.

• ARTICLES: All articles are available in electronic (PDF) form on the SW206 “Learn@UW” web-page. A hard copy of course readings is available (on reserve) in the Social Work library.

Recommended, but not required:


Course Web Site

Articles and additional class materials will be available on the class web site available through Learn@UW, which can be accessed from the academic tab in My UW (near the course descriptions) or https://learnuw.wisc.edu/. Use your net ID and password to log on to the class website. The web site includes:

• Readings
• Lecture Outlines ("slides") – these will generally be posted by 1:30 on the day of the lecture
• Class Announcements

VI. Evaluation of Competencies and Practice Behaviors: Assignments, Grading and Methods

Students are expected to:
• Attend class weekly and read required material prior to the lecture class;
• Attend and actively participate in class exercises and discussion sections;
• Regularly check your university email account and the course website for communication from instructor and discussion leader;
• Turn off all cell phones and beepers during the class
• Refrain from using laptops for purposes other than taking electronic notes during class and discussion section times;
• Complete all assignments required for the lecture and discussion sections; and
• Complete three exams; Exam 1 in class (true/false, multiple choice, short answer), Exam 2 take-home (short essay questions) and Exam 3 (true/false and multiple choice).

Exams: There will be three exams on the following dates:

1. In class Exam 1 (true/false/multiple choice/possibly short answer) – 10/20.
2. Take home Exam 2 distributed on 11/10 and due at the beginning of class on 11/17. Emailed and late exams cannot be accepted.
3. In-class Exam 3 (true/false, multiple choice) – 12/18.

Exam questions may be drawn from lectures, discussion sections, and readings.

Final grades will be calculated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exam</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exam 1 (in-class)</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam 2 (take-home)</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam 3 (in-class)</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and participation in lecture and discussion sections</td>
<td>15%</td>
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</table>

Grading
There are not extra credit or make-up assignments. Grades on each assignment and your final grade will be assigned as follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-100</td>
<td>outstanding; surpasses expectations in all areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>88-93</td>
<td>surpasses expectations in most areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>82-87</td>
<td>surpasses expectations in some areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>76-81</td>
<td>meets expectations in most areas; above in others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>70-75</td>
<td>meets expectations in most areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>64-69</td>
<td>below expectations in all areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>&lt;64</td>
<td>fails to meet minimal expectations in all areas, not acceptable work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Section Grades**

Grades for discussion sections will be 15% of your total grade. They will be based on your Teaching Assistant’s assessment of the following four components:

1. Attendance (in both lecture and discussion)
2. Attentiveness and participation in section discussions
3. Quality of participation in section discussions
4. Completion of exercises in section discussions

**Discussion Section Exercises**

Discussion sections will include exercises designed to reinforce and deepen content covered in lectures. Exercises will include but not be limited to the following:

*Exercise 1:* Themes informing the development of the U.S. welfare state (Why did we develop as we did? Why did we develop differently from our European counterparts?) Explore political, philosophical and practical differences (based on content covered in Weeks 2 and 3)


*Exercise 3:* Each student is to submit 3 questions to their TA by 5:00pm on Tuesday, December 8th. These questions will be used as the basis for our class on December 10. Questions should be well-thought out and clear. Draw your questions from lectures and reading materials. What are you struggling to understand? Constructing a well-posed question is a critical skill.

Engagement in exercises for discussion section is, in part, what determines your section grades. TA’s will provide structure and detail on exercises. TA’s will introduce further exercises as needed to facilitate learning.

**Note to Students**
Your goal for this and other courses should be to make the most of your learning experience, and not simply “get an A”. Your expectations about the grades you receive on assignments and exams should be wholly based on (1) the extent to which you respond accurately to assignment or exam objectives, (2) the quality of your writing (to include grammar and spelling, organization and clarity), (3) the extent to which you demonstrate critical thinking related to course readings and topics, and (4) the extent and quality of your participation in class and discussion sections. If there is something about an assignment that is unclear to you, it is your job to bring this to the attention of your discussion leader or to the professor. Grade expectations should not be based on what you have received in other courses. If you have an issue with a grade you receive in this course, please document the reasons for your appeal in writing with specific attention to the four points raised above.

**Student Behavior Policy**

Respect, cordiality, patience and openness to the ideas of others are expected in lectures, discussion sections and exercises. Learning requires the willingness to risk, the ability to listen as well as bravery to venture a reasoned opinion. We will create and maintain a climate where this is possible for all participants.

**Disability Accommodations**

Those students who are registered with the McBurney Center must give the instructor a copy of their VISA within the first two weeks of the semester so that any needed accommodations can be made. If the student has not given the copy of the VISA to the instructor, an accommodation will not be made.

**Academic Honesty**

Academic honesty is required and expected in this course and all other courses offered by the School of Social Work. If you are found to have plagiarized a written assignment or cheated on an exam, you will receive a failing grade for that assignment/exam and be subject to further disciplinary action consistent with the university and School of Social Work policy.

Academic honesty is based on the premise that each student has the responsibility to: (1) uphold the highest standards of academic integrity in the student’s own work; (2) refuse to tolerate violations of academic integrity in the University community; and (3) foster a high sense of academic integrity and responsibility on the part of the University community.

Academic misconduct is often thought of as “cheating” in the pursuit of one’s academic endeavors. Academic misconduct rules are found in UWS 14. Information on academic misconduct rules and procedures and plagiarism can be found at the following websites:

[http://students.wisc.edu/saja/index.html](http://students.wisc.edu/saja/index.html)
College of Letters & Science Handbook definition of plagiarism as academic misconduct:
http://www.ls.wisc.edu/handbook/ChapterSix/chVI-11.htm

“Avoiding Plagiarism” from The Writing Center:
http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QuotingSources.html

There are two major forms which plagiarism takes:

1. The use of direct quotes from others’ written or spoken work and presenting them as one’s own words without using proper quotation marks or offsetting.
   Direct Quote: To repeat verbatim or to copy verbatim the words of another.

2. The other major form of plagiarism where a student (or someone else) paraphrases the ideas or research findings of another person(s), but fails to identify the source of the ideas.
   A paraphrase is a restatement of a text or passage in another form or other words (i.e., putting into your own words the ideas of another person).

Code of Ethics, Student Rights and Responsibilities & Plagiarism
BSW and incoming MSW students read and signed electronic forms of the NASW Code of Ethics, the School of Social Work Plagiarism Policy and the Student Rights and Responsibilities. In doing so, they agreed that while in the BSW or MSW Program they would honor the NASW Code of Ethics and Student’s Rights and Responsibilities, as well as adhere to the Plagiarism Policy and that should they not do so, sanctions would be imposed. BSW and MSW students are expected to adhere to these policies in the classroom, in the field and in the preparation of course assignments.