University of Wisconsin – Madison School of Social Work

Social Work 606, Social Policy
Spring 2016 – Syllabus
Tuesday, 7:45-9:40; Psychology 121

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Office Hours: Thurs 9:00-10:30 at Social Work and by appointment

I. Catalogue Description.

Analysis of policy issues as applied to such fields as poverty, discrimination, crime, physical and mental health on both national and state levels.

II. Course Overview.

This course covers U.S. social welfare policy. Students will be introduced to alternative perspectives on social problem analysis and the scope and limitations of social policy and the policy making process. While income support policy is the focus of much of the lecture content and assigned readings, other policies are also covered, and the student is exposed to another area of social policy in more depth through an individualized project. The course is required for MSW students and is a professional foundation course. It is also open to interested graduate students from other departments. No previous course work is required.

III. Course Competencies and Practice Behaviors, and Assignments

Social Work Education is framed by a competency based approach to curriculum design. At the conclusion of their education, social work students are expected to be competent in 10 core areas. Competency is achieved through the attainment of measureable practice behaviors learned through classroom and field experiences, and which are derived from social work knowledge, values and skills. Social Work students will find that this course contributes to their achievement of the core competencies as follows:

<table>
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<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>*Apply strategies of ethical reasoning to arrive at principled decisions</td>
<td>Exams, Papers</td>
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| 2.1.3: Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments | * 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 | Exams, Papers, Presentation |
| 2.1.4: Engage diversity and difference in practice | * Recognize the extent to which a culture’s structures and values may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power. | Exams, Papers |
| 2.1.5: Advance human rights and social and economic justice | * Understand the mechanisms of oppression and discrimination.  
* Advocate for human rights and social and economic justice  
* Engage in practices that advance social and economic justice. | Exams, Papers, presentation |
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<td>2.1.6: Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research</td>
<td>* Use research evidence to inform practice.</td>
<td>Exams, Papers, Presentation</td>
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| 2.1.7 Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment | * Utilize conceptual frameworks to guide the processes of assessment, intervention, and evaluation  
* Critique and apply knowledge to understand person in environment | Exams, Papers |
| 2.1.8 Engage in policy practice to advance social and economic wellbeing and to deliver effective social work services | * Analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance social well-being  
* Collaborate with colleagues and clients for effective policy action. | Papers, Presentation |
| 2.1.9: Respond to contexts that shape practice | * Continuously discover, appraise, and attend to changing locales, populations, scientific and technological developments, and emerging societal trends to provide relevant services | Exams, Papers |

The main objectives of this course are:

1) furthering the student's knowledge about the problems of populations-at-risk that might be lessened by policy intervention;
2) furthering the student's knowledge about the content, and structure of social welfare policies, programs, and services in the U.S, focusing on furthering the student's knowledge about income support policy and increasing the student's understanding of the way income support policy interacts with other social policies and affects other social problems;
3) furthering the student's knowledge about the effects of U.S. social policy, including the role of social policy in helping or deterring people in the maintenance or attainment of optimal health and well-being and in facilitating or hindering social inclusion;
4) increasing the student's skills in policy analysis through a framework for analyzing policies in light of principles of social and economic justice;
5) furthering the student's understanding of distributive justice, human and civil rights, and the global interconnectedness of oppression;
6) furthering the student's understanding of the policy-making process, developing a commitment to policy advocacy, and sharpening the student’s skills to effectively advocate for nondiscriminatory, respectful, and culturally-sensitive practices in social and economic systems.

IV. Text, Class Session Topics and Readings

There is one required text for this course:

Other materials are available at learn@uw. Students are also required to search out and read supplemental material pertinent to their specific assignments.

Because the field of social policy is dynamic, and because my assessment of what each class needs depends on factors that I cannot predict in advance, the required readings after week 7 may change somewhat; changes will be announced by email and on learn@uw.

Week 1, January 19: Introduction to social welfare policy (includes course overview and expectations, how to approach the course, definitions of social policy, and beginning discussion of why social workers should care)
- No readings

Week 2 and 3, January 26 and February 2: Frameworks for understanding US social welfare policy

* PROPOSAL FOR POLICY PROJECT TOPIC DUE 9 am, FEBRUARY 1
- DF, Chapters 1, 2, 6, 7, and 11

Week 4, February 9: Race, class, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and the relationship to social welfare policy.

Week 5, February 16: Context, part 1: Measuring social problems, with a focus on poverty
- DF, Chapter 8
Week 6, February 23: Context, part 2: History of social welfare policy and Policy in the US in global context

- DF, Chapter 3-5.

Week 7, March 1: MIDTERM #1

Week 8, March 8: Policies and programs for those who are not yet elders, part 1: Targeted on those with low incomes (TANF, SNAP, public housing, EITC, etc.)

- DF, selections from chapters 9 and 10, pages 207-219, 240-248

Week 9, March 15: Policies and programs for those who are not yet elders, part 2: Not targeted on those with low incomes (child support, minimum wage laws, child care, social services, child welfare, unemployment compensation, workers' compensation, etc.)

- DF, selections from chapters 9, 10, and 15, pages 198-207, 248-262, 264-266, 353-360

*SOCIAL PROBLEM/SOCIAL POLICY DESCRIPTION PAPER DUE, 9 am, MARCH 18*

Week 10, March 22: Spring break, no class

Week 11, March 29: Policies and programs for those who are elders and those with disabilities

- DF, selections from chapter 10, pages 186-198

Week 12, April 5: Policies and programs in health and mental health

• DF, chapter 10, pages 221-240, 262-264

Week 13, April 12: MIDTERM #2

Week 14 and 15, April 19 and April 26: Class presentations on policy issues

Week 16, May 3: Remaining class presentations, policy process, and review

• Other readings may be assigned.

FINAL EXAM DUE ON THURSDAY, MAY 12, 9:45 A.M. (BY UNIVERSITY POLICY)

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

Expectations

Students are expected to:
• Attend class each session, actively participating in the in-class exercises and discussions. If you cannot attend class, you are responsible for knowing what occurred and for getting any handouts.
• Read critically (and think about) all required assignments before coming to class. Many students find it useful to take notes.
• Complete all assignments by the due dates and times (thus you are expected to plan your life so that you can make the required deadlines in the course).
• Inform the instructor during the first week of the semester of any special accommodations the student believes will be needed for meeting class expectations. A copy of the VISA from the McBurney Center must be given to the instructor within the first two weeks of the semester so that any needed accommodations can be made. Accommodations will not be made without a VISA.
• Be respectful of the instructor and other class members—a diversity of views and opinions may be articulated during discussions. Respect includes cell phones being turned off and laptops being used in class only for taking notes.

The instructor is expected to:
• Co-create a classroom environment that facilitates learning.
• Assure that course objectives are being met.
• Hold regular office hours.
- Be available to address student questions through emailed correspondence.
- Give reasonable guidance on preparing for the exams and assignments.
- Provide prompt feedback on evaluation materials for the course

**Evaluation Methods**: Five assignments contribute to the grade, with relative weights as follows: 18% midterm #1; 22% midterm #2; 10% class presentation; 20% social problem/social policy description paper; 30% final. Not attending class can lower your grade; active participation can increase your grade if you are on the margin. Late papers will almost certainly be penalized and may not be accepted.

**Midterms**: Two in-class midterms will be given, one on **March 1** and the other on **April 12**. Missing either midterm without pre-approved permission will nearly certainly cause you to receive a zero for that assignment. (Rationale: There is a body of knowledge on this topic that I believe social workers should know, and an examination is one way to encourage you to “nail down” the knowledge base as well as a way for me to evaluate what you have mastered.)

**Policy project**: An individualized project on an approved social policy topic is a key part of this course. Examples of topics include: policies to help elders stay in their own homes, policies that assist with the affordability of child care, income support for those with severe and persistent mental illness, etc. You must propose a topic by **9 a.m., on February 1**. This project has several required products; selected information follows here, more details are found on “Interrelated Assignments on a Policy Project,” handed out in class and posted at learn@uw. (Rationale: this allows you to focus your learning in a topic area in which you are most interested; the building of these assignments requires you to take your knowledge about one area into more depth; class presentations broaden the policy areas covered for all students.)

(a) **Social problem/social policy description paper**. You are required to write a brief structured paper in which you describe the social problem you are examining and the policies currently in place to address this problem. This paper is due **9 a.m., March 18**. (Rationale: this provides an opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge of a social problem and social policies in written form; it gives you early feedback on whether you’re on track for the presentation and final exam; it ensures that you start your project in a timely way)

(b) **Class presentation**: Students are required to give a brief presentation on an aspect of your individualized project topic to the whole class, primarily focusing on the impact of policies on vulnerable populations. Class presentations are scheduled for **April 19, April 26, and May 3**, with the date assigned by the instructor. (Rationale: this provides an opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge in oral form; it gives you feedback on your presentation skills; it lets the whole class learn from about a wide range of policies)

**VERY IMPORTANT**: If you are planning to show a video as part of your presentation, please note that videos must be captioned before they can be used in classroom presentations. Please check your materials to see if they are captioned. If your materials are not captioned, then captioning production is necessary. To caption your materials, please email the McBurney Media Captioning Coordinator at mcbmedia@studentlife.wisc.edu with the following information: title, the link to the video, video length, and when the video will be shown in class. Captioning production requires at least ten business days turnaround time. Questions about captioning can be directed to the Media Captioning Coordinator. If you are planning to have us listen to an audio presentation, a transcript will be required. Questions on transcription can also be directed to the same resources at McBurney.

(c) **Final**: A take-home final will cover the same topic (and may also cover some of the material covered since the second midterm). The exam will be handed out no later than the last class and is due back by
9:45 p.m., Thursday, May 12 (due date set by university policy). The final is in essence a “capstone” exercise, drawing on everything we have learned in the course, and applied to your particular policy topic. (Rationale: the exam gives you the opportunity to demonstrate that you can apply the principles learned in class to a particular topic, and provides an evaluative mechanism that is freed of the constraints of an in-class, time-limited exam.)

More details on all assignments will be provided and are to be considered part of this syllabus.

Grading: Each assignment will be graded with a numerical score. The final grade will reflect the total points earned on all assignments. The assignment of letter grade to numerical score is based on the following general standard:
- A outstanding work, surpasses minimum expectations in most areas
- AB surpasses minimum expectations in some areas, but not in others
- B meets minimum expectations
- BC meets minimum expectations in some areas, but is below minimum expectations in others
- C below minimum expectations in most areas, not acceptable graduate-level work
- D clearly unacceptable in all areas
- F insufficient information for grading, multiple unexcused absences, or academic misconduct.

Some comments on grading:
- You may appeal a grade on a particular exam or assignment, but you must do so in writing, support your position with substantive arguments, and do so within one week of when the exam or assignment is returned.
- I expect written portions of all assignments to be typed, spell-checked, proofed for grammatical errors, and well-organized. Points will be deducted from your grade for sloppy work. If you need assistance with your writing, the Campus Writing Center is available as a free resource to all students.

VI. Code of Ethics, Professional Conduct & Plagiarism

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 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. MSW students are expected to adhere to these policies in the classroom, in the field and in the preparation of course assignments.

While adherence to the social work code of ethics is required only of social workers and social work students, issues of academic misconduct affect all students and are considered extremely serious. Academic dishonesty, including cheating, plagiarism, and misrepresentation or fabrication of assignments, can result in course failure as well as disciplinary actions. It is your responsibility to ensure that all documents and material used to inform your assignments are appropriately cited. The Writing Center has a helpful guide to the difference between plagiarism and paraphrasing – see http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QPA_paraphrase.html. The School’s plagiarism policy is posted at learn@uw. This is extremely serious.