University of Wisconsin – Madison School of Social Work

Social Work 606, Social Policy
Spring 2015 – Syllabus
Tuesday, 1:20-3:15; 265 Materials Science

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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. Objectives, Core Competencies and Practice Behaviors

<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</td>
<td>Exam</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 | Exam  
Paper project |
| 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. | Exam  
Paper project |
| 2.1.5: Advance human rights and social and economic justice | *Understand the mechanisms of oppression and discrimination.  
* Engage in practices that advance social and economic justice. | Exam |
| 2.1.6: Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research | *Critically evaluating and utilizing theoretical and empirical research relevant to the problems and/or populations addressed. | Exam, Paper project, Presentation |
| 2.1.7 Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment | *Utilize conceptual frameworks to guide the processes of assessment, intervention, and evaluation | Exam, Paper project |
| 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. | Paper project, 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 | Exam, Paper project |
| 2.1.10: Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with groups, organizations and communities | *Substantively and affectively prepare for action with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities  
*Select appropriate intervention strategies. | Exam, Paper project, Presentation |
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 may change somewhat; changes will be announced by email and in learn@uw.*

**Week 1, January 20: 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 27 and February 3: Frameworks for understanding US social welfare policy**

*PROPOSAL FOR POLICY PROJECT TOPIC DUE 9 AM, JANUARY 30*

- DF, Chapters 1, 2, 6, 7, and 11

**Week 4, February 10: Race, class, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and the relationship to social welfare policy. GUEST SPEAKER: PROFESSOR MARAH CURTIS**

Background Readings for week 4; these two chapters offer historical policy reviews to properly contextualize the differential impact of policy across race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity. This may be repetitive for some and new to others. Read thoroughly if this is new, skim if you have this background


Week 5, February 17: Context, part 1: Measuring social problems, with a focus on poverty

- DF, Chapter 8

Week 6, February 24: Context, part 2: History of Social Welfare Policy, with a focus on income support policy, trends in social welfare spending, and US in global context

- DF, Chapter 3-5.

Week 7, March 3: MIDTERM #1

Week 8, March 10: 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 17: 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

Week 10, March 24: Policies and programs for those who are elders and those with disabilities

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

*SOCIAL PROBLEM/SOCIAL POLICY DESCRIPTION PAPER DUE, 9 am, MARCH 27

Week 11, March 31: Spring break, no class

Week 12, April 7: Policies and programs in health and mental health

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

Week 13, April 14: MIDTERM #2

Week 14 and 15, April 21 and April 28: Class presentations on policy issues

Week 16, May 5: Remaining class presentations, policy process, and review


FINAL EXAM DUE ON TUESDAY, MAY 12, 12:05 P.M. (BY UNIVERSITY POLICY)

V. Evaluation of Student Outcomes: Expectations, Evaluation Methods, and Course Grades

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.
• 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.
• Clarify the relationship between the “contract” (syllabus) and policy practice skills.
• Hold regular office hours.
• Be available to address student questions through emailed correspondence.
• Give reasonable guidance on preparing for the exams and assignments.

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 3 and the other on April 14. 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 January 30. This project has several required products; selected information follows here, but more information on each component will be distributed. (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.)

(a) **Social problem/social policy description paper.** Your 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 27. (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 21, April 28, and May 5. (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)

(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 by the last class and is due back by 12:05 p.m., Tuesday, 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.

**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.
- Issues of academic misconduct 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.