



School of Social Work

Contemporary Social Policy Analysis **WP 701**

Spring 2016

Tom Byrne
Scott Geron
Shamekka Ramirez-Kuykendall
Amanda Reich

COURSE DESCRIPTION

WP 701 (Contemporary Social Policy Analysis) is centered on the analysis of social problems and social policies in the United States today. While a number of substantive issues are addressed in the course, the primary attention is on the issue of poverty: understandings of its causes, correlates, and consequences. This analysis of poverty is followed by investigations of other social problems tied to poverty and policies related to them. These allied topics are addressed in selected course sessions and through task force projects organized by students. Each task force prepares a report on a social problem and associated policy arena and makes an in-class presentation of that report.

SOCIAL WORK COMPETENCIES

This course supports the attainment of competencies in:

Competency 2.1.3 Critical Thinking

Competency 2.1.6 Research Based Practice

Competency 2.1.8 Policy Practice

Competency 2.1.9 Practice Contexts

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, students will be able:

1. To better understand poverty, especially in urban America, including definitions, correlates, causes, and consequences;
2. To understand and be able to employ a social problem/social policy analysis model;
3. To be knowledgeable about the principal social insurance and public assistance policies in the United States and their role in the prevention and remediation of poverty;
4. To understand current intervention strategies tied to income, employment, health, housing, nutrition, mental health and social service issues;
5. To be familiar with issues and strategies for implementing and assessing social policies;
6. To be cognizant of the principal value bases associated with different social policy alternatives and the application of these values to low-income and vulnerable populations;
7. To analyze critically the contributions social work has, can, and should make to the design, implementation, and assessment of social policies related to poverty.

TEXT & READINGS

Required:

The following books are available at the Barnes and Noble/Boston University Bookstore:

Russell, J.W. (2015). *Double Standard: Social Policy in Europe and the United States* (3rd ed.). Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield.

Birkland, T.A. (2016). *An Introduction to the Policy Process* (4th ed.). Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.

All of the additional required readings for the course readings are available through e-reserves at Mugar Library.

COURSE OUTLINE

SESSION 1: ISSUE FRAMING AND AGENDA SETTING

Topics: Agenda setting: What does (and does not) get considered

Issue framing: Whose game do we play?

This session focuses on strategies for framing problems and policies in order to influence policy debate and secure policy successes. Agenda-setting is discussed. This is an early stage of the policy process that focuses on getting important policy actors to pay attention to an issue. An example of the use of language is offered in the reading by Kailes.

Readings:

Lakoff, G. (2014). Framing 101: How to Take Back Public Discourse (ch. 1), in *Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*. White River Jct., Vt.: Chelsea Green.

Kingdon, J. (1984). Wrapping Things Up, in *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policy*. New York: Harper Collins.

Birkland, "Agenda Setting, Power, and Interest Groups" (ch. 6).

Kailes, J. I. (1997). Independent living and traditional paradigms.
<http://www.jik.com/ilcpara.html>.

SESSION 2: SOCIAL POLICY SYSTEM AND PLAYERS

Topics: The context of social policymaking

The actors in social policymaking

This session provides information about the formal system of policy making via the government and the role of various actors – both within government and outside of government – on policy processes. Readings focus primarily on the federal level of policy-making. States and local level processes will also be discussed. Additionally, an example of agenda-setting (discussed in Week 1) is provided in the reading by Macnaughton & Nelson.

Readings:

Macnaughton, E. & Nelson, G. (2013). Bringing politics and evidence together: Policy entrepreneurship and the conception of the At Home/Chez Soi Housing First Initiative for addressing homelessness and mental illness in Canada. *Social Science and Medicine*, 82, 100-107.

Birkland, "Elements of the Policy-Making System" (ch. 2).

Birkland, "Official Actors and their Roles in Public Policy" (ch. 4).

Birkland, "Unofficial Actors and their Roles in Public Policy (ch. 5).

SESSION 3: DEFINITIONS AND DATA: POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

Social problems require clear and compelling definitions in order to advance on the policy agenda. Data regarding scope, trends, and correlates are also necessary. This session focuses on various definitions of poverty and associated terms such as "inequality". The official poverty measure is introduced and critiqued. Alternative measures of poverty are also presented. Data on correlates and trends are provided in the readings.

Topics: The official poverty measure

Alternative ways of measuring poverty

Relative measures of poverty and inequality

The Poor: Who, how many, how distributed

Readings:

Short, K. (2014). Supplemental Poverty Measure: 2013.
<http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2014/demo/p60-251.pdf>

Crittenton Women's Union (2014). Massachusetts Economic Independence Index 2013.
<http://www.liveworkthrive.org/site/assets/docs/MASS%20INDEX%20FINALWEB.pdf>

Meyer, D.R., & Wallace, G.L. (2009). Poverty levels and trends in comparative perspective. *Focus*, 26, 2, 7-13

Fox, L., Wimer, C., Garfinkel, I., Kaushal, N., Nam, J., & Waldfogel, J. (2015). Trends in deep poverty from 1968 to 2011: The influence of family structure, employment patterns, and the safety net. *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 1, 1, 14-34.

SESSION 4: CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING POVERTY

Topics: Poverty and its causes

Ideology and the causes of poverty

Individual-level and structural-level factors

This session builds on earlier discussion of poverty and its causes (previously in WP700 and earlier in WP701). Various ideologies (e.g., conservative, liberal) and causal factors (individual and structural) play a role in understanding poverty. Conceptual frames of a problem and its causes are critical linkages to crafting policy recommendations.

Readings:

Gilder, G. (1981). "The Nature of Poverty" (ch. 6) in *Wealth and Poverty*.

Russell, "Social Cohesion and Inequality" (ch. 8).

Blank, R.M. (2009). Economic change and the structure of opportunity for less-skilled workers. *Focus*, 26, 2, 14-20.

Cancian, M. & Reed, D. (2009). Family structure, childbearing, and parental employment: Implications for the level and trend in poverty. *Focus*, 26, 2, 21-26.

SESSION 5: POLICY DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Several considerations are relevant to the design and implementation of policies. Design of policy is directly related to policy goals and underlying values. Forethought about policy implementation issues may raise additional challenges but needs to be considered for effective public policy. Policy implementation frequently intersects with both public management and community-based practice.

Topics: Policy design: Rational and political elements
Implementing policy: Top-down or bottom-up?
Making proposals work

Readings:

Birkland, "Policy Design, Policy Tools, and Decisions" (ch. 8)

Birkland, "Policy Implementation, Failure, and Learning" (ch. 9)

Riccucci, N.M., Meyers, M.K., Lurie, I., & Han, J.S. (2004). Implementation of welfare reform policy: The role of public managers in front-line practices. *Public Administration Review*, 64, 4, 438-448.

SESSION 6: EFFECTIVE POLICY COMMUNICATION

This session reviews forms and strategies for effective policy communication. Examples of written and oral products will be reviewed and critiqued.

Readings:

Institute for Research on Poverty. (2015). The basics of SNAP food assistance. Other readings/videos TBD

SESSION 7: POLICY ANALYSIS I: EITC

Sessions 7 and 8 provide several readings focused on policy analyses. Session 7 examines the Earned Income Tax Credit and Session 8 examines some child care policies, primarily for low income families. These sessions allow for more in-depth analysis of these specific policy areas in terms of their purpose(s), design, implementation, and effects.

Readings:

Holt, S. (2006). *The Earned Income Tax Credit at 30: What We Know*. The Brookings Institution
http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2006/2/childrenfamilies%20holt/20060209_holt.pdf

Also visit the following website: Map: The Earned Income Tax Credit in Your County:
<http://www.brookings.edu/research/interactives/2014/county-eitc-map-2014>

Mead, L. (2014). Overselling the Earned Income Tax Credit. *National Affairs*, 21, 20-33.
Also available at: <http://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/overselling-the-earned-income-tax-credit>

Gordon, N. (2014). The Conservative Case for a Guaranteed Basic Income.
<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/08/why-arent-reformicons-pushing-a-guaranteed-basic-income/375600/>

SESSION 8: POLICY ANALYSIS II: Child care

Palley, E. (2012). Expected struggles: U.S. child care policy. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34, 628-638.

Russell, "Support for Child Raising" (ch. 11)

Ha, Y., & Ybarra, M. (2013). Are Strong Work-First Welfare Policies Aligned With Generous Child Care Provisions? What States Are Doing and the Implications for Social Work. *Families in Society-the Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 94, 1, 5-13. doi: 10.1606/1044-3894.4261

SESSION 9 - 13: STUDENT TASK FORCE PRESENTATIONS

SESSION 14: WRAP-UP: ANALYSIS, COMPARISON, CONCLUSIONS

ASSIGNMENTS

The primary assignment for WP701 is a Task Force Report and Presentation. We have set interim goals for completing section drafts in order to facilitate timely and reasonable completion. Individual instructors may alter these somewhat.

Week 4: 3-4 pages defining and framing the problem

Week 5: 3-4 pages identifying key sources of data, text and tables regarding: scope of the problem, trends over time, key correlates

Week 6: 3-4 pages describing a proposed conceptual framework

Week 7: 3-4 pages of text and tables describing/analyzing 2-3 relevant policies

The final product has three components:

Task Force Report: Total 30-40 pages developing the first 4 assignments (listed above) *with policy recommendations*

Task Force Presentation: One class session (one hour presentation, one hour for questions)

Task Force Poster or E-Poster: A visual representation of project must be submitted by the last class session. Posters will be displayed at the School of Social Work, students will be expected to participate in an event displaying their posters, and a prize for the best poster will be awarded by a panel of judges.

In addition to completed course readings and the graded assignments identified above, it is the expectation that students engage in significant out-of-class time focused on course-related learning activities. These activities are required; they are critical components of course objectives and learning outcomes related to policy practice.

In this course, the specific course-related learning activities conducted outside of class time include:

- Web-based research to identify relevant data sources and policy documents
- Library research to identify appropriate scholarly materials
- Group meetings to conceptualize the project, share resources, divide responsibilities, report on individual progress, problem-solve

- Attendance at NASW Legislative Advocacy Day or an alternate legislative hearing or policy event
- Development of group products for the assignment (Power point presentation, poster presentation)
- On-going reading of major national newspapers (e.g., Boston Globe, New York Times, Washington Post) regarding contemporary social policy issues
- Use of policy tools identified on next page.

COURSE GRADING CRITERIA

Students' course grade will be based (a) on their command of reading and lecture material as demonstrated in class and (b) on the quality of their oral and written work in the task force project. Each instructor will provide further detail regarding course grading.

WP 701 Task Force Assignment: The task forces follow the problem/policy template laid out early in this course around the problem of urban poverty, informed by analysis of specific profiles of urban poverty, understandings of its depth and persistence, and the array of programs in place to address it.

The WP 701 Task Force Assignment provides opportunities for you to demonstrate competence in the following areas:

- **Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments (Competency 2.1.3)**

The guiding theme of both the course and the task forces assignment is analysis. You must go beyond description to demonstrate an understanding of causal factors, political processes, and client/population outcomes. In keeping with the problem template, you must show an understanding of competing problem definitions emanating from different policy camps (e.g., are local anti-obesity ordinances a question of promoting the public health or are they a restriction on individual freedom?) A major element in assessing both the oral and written product of a task force presentation centers on the degree to which the 5-part outline (problem definition, correlates, understandings, existing policies, policy proposal) are integrated, i.e., Section 3 must show direct connection to Section 4 (in this case actual or missing congruence between problem understanding and policy response).

- **Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research (Competency 2.1.6)**

Task force presentations must provide research evidence about the scope and depth of the social problem under investigation. For example, how many individuals/groups are affected; what is the severity of the problem across groups; how have the scope and magnitude of the problem evolved over time? What are the programs relevant to the problem currently in place; who were the key stakeholders at the time of passage; have the programs been successfully implemented; what do outcome/evaluation data suggest about where we currently stand vis-à-vis the problem in question? In turn, the results of research into these key questions must form the basis of the “task force proposal,” which constitutes the final section of both the oral and written presentations. In the written report, narrative and graphical data presentations are set forth; where extensive, some materials are included in appendices.

- **Engage in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being and to deliver effective social work services (Competency 2.1.8)**

In the fifth section of the Task Force assignment – the task force group proposal – you move from the data gathering and analytical realms to propose interventions that better connect problem causality and policy response. In your proposal, you bring your own normative perspective to the policy process. In light of what you understand to be the essence of the problem and the principal factors lying behind its existence, how would you step forward to reduce its size and impact? This is an advocacy proposal: this is what should be done (and it should be done for reasons demonstrated in materials previously presented). In your class presentation, you need to convince your classmate audience that your proposal is the way to go in addressing the issue at hand (and the class is required to pose challenging questions, a grade-relevant activity). There is also a critical political element to the proposal presentation. In a social policy world where the desirable and the feasible seldom meet, how will your group move your preferred options forward? Who supports your ideas and who opposes them? What strategies and tactics can be used to mobilize support and blunt opposition efforts? What needs to be done to get your proposal addressing this problem on the political agenda in the first place? The task force exercise can play out at any level of government, and it is instructive to explore political differences (and similarities) that are found at local, state, and national levels.

- **Respond to contexts that shape practice (Competency 2.1.9)**

In your task force analysis and proposal, you will examine the various contexts of your social problem, including historical, social, political, economic, technological, and demographic trends that influence current policies and services. Your report should be responsive to the interplay between these dynamic contexts and the individuals and organizations with “agency” in the social policy world.

Policy Tools

Federal and State Legislation

Congress.gov (formerly THOMAS): Website maintained by library of Congress that provides a wide array of information about federal legislation including bills currently and previously under consideration in Congress, legislative histories of bills, full text of the Congressional record, and Committee reports/activities.

GovTrack.us (www.govtrack.us): An alternative (and arguably more user friendly) source of information about federal legislation. The website has an interesting tool that provides a prediction about the probability of each bill actually being enacted into law. It also has an interesting tool that analyses where each member of Congress ranks on an ideological scale from far left to far right. The site also has the ability to track state legislation.

The Massachusetts General Court (https://malegislature.gov/): The Massachusetts legislature (also known as the Massachusetts General Court) maintains a website that is a good starting place for getting information about state legislation. One can search for bills and laws, get information on the budget process, the work of legislative committees and other information.

Federal and State Spending

Office of Management and Budget Historical Tables (https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Historicals): Each year the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) publishes a series of Historical Tables along with the President's Budget proposal. These tables provide data on federal budget receipts (i.e. revenue), outlays (i.e. spending), surpluses & deficits and debt over an extended period of time.

USA Spending (www.usaspending.gov): provides access to more detailed information about federal spending. You can track federal spending by state, congressional district, funding recipient or by CFDA number if you are interested in spending on a specific program.

Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center (www.massbudget.org/browser): provides a user friendly way to get information about the budget and spending Massachusetts. The Budget Browser also has separate tools specifically dedicated to examining how the state budget affects children (www.children.massbudget.org) and how the budget supports workforce training and development (www.workforce.massbudget.org).

The National Priorities Project (www.nationalprioritiesproject.org): provides some interesting ways to look at federal spending. The site is not politically neutral, but still provides objective data. One thing that is particularly interesting is their State Smart tool (www.nationalpriorities.org/smart) which looks at Federal spending in all 50 states

(i.e. how federal dollars contribute to overall revenue in each state relative to other sources like state income taxes).

Population Demographic, Economic, Health & Social Indicators

American FactFinder (www.factfinder.census.gov): The U.S. Census Bureau collects a wide range of demographic, economic, housing and other indicators through the Decennial Census and the American Community Survey, among other data products. These data are available at pretty much any geographic level you can imagine (national, state, county, city/town, tract, block group) at FactFinder.

Census Reporter (www.censusreporter.org): The Census Reporter provides a MUCH more user friendly way to access data from the U.S. Census Bureau and has some really nice additional features (e.g. data visualizations, and comparisons between geographies).

Kaiser State Health Facts (www.kff.org/statedata): The Kaiser Family Foundation maintains a website called State Health Facts that makes a wide array of health-related data (e.g. health costs, health insurance coverage, health & mental health indicators) available to users.

County Health Rankings (www.countyhealthrankings.org): The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation maintains this website, which ranks counties with respect to the health of their population and also provides data on a number of specific health indicators (e.g. life expectancy, deaths due to drug overdoses, HIV prevalence rates, food insecurity).

Bureau of Justice Statistics (www.bjs.gov): A great resource for information on crime, victims of crime and the justice system at Federal, state and local levels.

Public Opinion on Policy Issues

The Pew Research Center (www.pewresearch.org): is an excellent resource for public opinion data and other research on a range of topics including: US politics, social trends, religion and the U.S. Hispanic population.

The Roper Center (www.ropercenter.uconn.edu): is an excellent starting point for public opinion data on a wide range of topics including a range of social issues (e.g. poverty, crime, illegal drugs, immigration, race relations, youth, women and work).

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance:

Students are expected to attend all class sessions and to inform the instructor in advance of any absences. Failure to attend class sessions is likely to have a negative effect on your course grade.

Academic honesty:

Papers and presentations in the School of Social Work must meet standards of academic honesty and integrity, avoiding any possibility of plagiarism or other forms of academic misconduct. For specific information about the BUSSW policy regarding academic misconduct, see *Student Handbook: Ways & Means* (http://www.bu.edu/ssw/current/stud_hb/index.shtml).

Writing style and references:

Students are expected to follow the editorial and reference standards set out in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (2010). This manual is available at the Mugar Library reference desk. A helpful *BUSSW APA Style Guide* can be found at <http://www.bu.edu/ssw/current/academic/index.shtml>.

Students with disabilities:

If you have a disability and want to request reasonable accommodation, the University requires that you consult with Boston University's Office of Disability Services for information regarding this process (<http://www.bu.edu/disability/>).

Academic writing assistance:

If you would like academic writing assistance, information can be found at <http://www.bu.edu/ssw/current/academic/assistance/index.shtml> or contact the BUSSW Office of Student Services.

Electronic devices in the classroom:

Computers may be used to support the learning activities in the classroom, with permission of your instructor. These include such activities as taking notes and accessing course readings under discussion. However, non-academic use of laptops and other devices are distracting and seriously disrupt the learning process for everyone. Neither computers nor other electronic devices are to be used in the classroom for non-academic reasons. This includes e-mailing, texting, social networking, and use of the Internet. The use of cell phones during class time is prohibited. Please turn off cell phones and refrain from taking calls unless you are "on call" and have cleared this with the instructor prior to class.

Under such circumstances, please put your phone on vibrate, sit close to a door, and step out of the room to take the call.

Religious holidays:

The school, in scheduling classes on religious holiday, intends that students observing those holidays be given ample opportunity to make up work. Faculty members who wish to observe religious holidays will arrange for another faculty member to meet their classes or for canceled classes to be reschedule.

Accessing Supplemental Course Readings via Mugar Library:

The new library catalog offers a variety of ways to find but here is the easiest way to find what you need: Go to the main Boston University Library webpage:

<http://www.bu.edu/library/>. In the center of the page is the Search box. At the right of the box is a white spy-glass on a blue field. Double clicking on the spy-glass will take you to the **Advanced Search** box. Just above that box are two tabs: **Library Resources** and **Course Reserves**. Type your course number (WP701) into the box, click on **Course Reserves**, and hit Return. This will take you to the list of all materials on Reserve for this course number.

To refine your search, click on the “**Sorted by**” tab near the top right of the page. Choose either author or title, whichever is easiest for you. Scroll through the list until you come to the needed resource, then click on the item’s blue **View It** tab. This should offer you, in blue, a link to **View Full Text**. Clicking on this link takes you to the Kerberos log in page; log in, and the resource file will open for your viewing.