Overview

As the first of three parts in the first-year doctoral social welfare policy sequence, this course will introduce students to contemporary empirical research in policy analysis and evaluation. The objectives of this course are:

- to build on MSW-level macro practice understandings of American social policy;
- to provide a conceptual grounding for macro-level research on social conditions, public solutions and program or policy impacts;
- to further students' understanding of contemporary empirical policy research through discussion and critique of data-based studies; and
- to develop doctoral-level analytic and communication skills.

Specifics

**Academic Accommodations:** If you would like to request academic accommodations due to a disability, please contact Disability Resources for Students, 448 Schmitz, 206-543-8924 (V/TTY). If you have a letter from the office of Disability Resources for Students (formerly Disabled Student Services) indicating you have a disability that requires academic accommodations, please present the letter to me so we can discuss the accommodations you might need for this class.

**Format:** This course is designed to immerse and engage students in the professional practice of thinking and talking about policy research. As such, course time will be allocated to seminar-style discussion, presentations and limited lectures as necessary to explain background concepts. The seminar will work best if all contribute both comments and listening in a thoughtful manner. I expect you to have read and thought about the readings before the class in which they are to be discussed. Bring copies of the readings and/or detailed notes to class.

**Web page:** Bookmark [http://depts.washington.edu/sswweb/courses/romich/553/](http://depts.washington.edu/sswweb/courses/romich/553/). This site will be a source for updates to the syllabus, links to on-line readings, and other class resources.

**Discussion starters:** Beginning in the second week, each seminar member is expected to prepare a question, series of questions or comment based on the week’s readings. Please post to the on-line discussion board no later than noon on the day before class (students are exempt from this requirement the week that they present). Questions/comments should be substantive discussion-launchers, but the discussion board may also be used as an opportunity to ask for clarification on details from readings.

**Research article presentations:** Students will present empirical research articles in a conference format. Presentations should be no more than 20 minutes (practice this). Handouts are appreciated and an electronic copy of the presentation or slides should be e-mailed to Jen the day of the presentation. Details will be provided in the first session.
**Course project:** Students will complete an individual project on a policy question related to their research interest. The project is planned in several stages, with opportunities to reflect on the process of research and writing. Students will present findings to the class and write a formal final paper. Peer consultation and editing activities will be scheduled during the various phases of the project. Students should consult with Jen as needed. The attached memo provides more detail.

**Grading:** Numeric grades of 0–4.0 will be given according the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A/A-</td>
<td>4.0 – 3.7</td>
<td>Mastery of content, demonstration of critical analysis, creativity and/or complexity in completion class assignments. The difference between an A and an A- is based on the degree to which these skills are demonstrated.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>3.6-3.2</td>
<td>Mastery of subject content and skills at expected competency.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B/B-</td>
<td>3.1-2.8</td>
<td>Mastery of content and/or skills at near-adequate competency, demonstrates learning and potential for mastery.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-, C, E</td>
<td>2.7 - 0</td>
<td>Demonstrates sub-doctoral level skills and/or understanding of content. Significant areas need improvement to meet course expectations.</td>
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Assignment due dates and times are designed to facilitate feedback from Jen and classmates. To motivate promptness, late assignments will lose one point (1.0 on a 4.0 scale) per day or fraction thereof. Grades will be calculated with assignments and activities weighted as follows:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation (including contributions to in-class discussion and posted discussion questions)</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<td>Course project (including preliminary parts, revisions, the presentation, and the final draft)</td>
<td>55%</td>
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<td>Presentation of research article</td>
<td>10%</td>
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**Background knowledge**

This is a doctoral-level course designed for students with a master’s degree in social work or comparable preparation. As such, I assume that you are familiar with the history of American social policy (anti-poverty policies in particular), major contemporary social programs, and the mechanisms by which programs are created and implemented; as well as basic principles of the academic research process. The following readings are suggested for students who wish to augment or refresh their background policy knowledge. Additional background readings are included in most weeks.

An overview of the tension between “retail” (case-management) and “wholesale” (social policy and reform) modes of social work practice in the 19th and 20th centuries.

A helpful and balanced overview of American poverty and anti-poverty policy written on the eve of the 1996 welfare reforms.

An MSW textbook. Part III (Chapters 8-12) contains a helpful march through the major social programs. Blau covers programs and policies in the following areas: income support; jobs and job training; housing; health care; and food and hunger.

This website and the parallel printed text are used in the MSW research methods course.
# Course Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Readings and events</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Tuesday, October 5</td>
<td><strong>Overview and introduction</strong></td>
<td>Gordon, Lewis &amp; Young (1993), Bengtson and MacDermid (n.d.), Lundberg, Pollak &amp; Wales (1997)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Guest presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Policy and income</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Key concept: mechanisms</td>
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<td>Key concept: tools</td>
<td>Friday 10/22 – policy description due</td>
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<td>Key concept: causality</td>
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<td><strong>Policy and health</strong></td>
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<td>Friday 11/5 – 5 page draft due</td>
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<td>Possible peer consultation</td>
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<td>Possible peer consultation</td>
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<td><strong>Policy and child well-being</strong></td>
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<td>Friday 11/19 – 9 page draft due</td>
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<td><strong>Policy and social welfare research</strong></td>
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<td>9. Tuesday, November 30</td>
<td><strong>Student presentations</strong></td>
<td>Catch up, peer consultation</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Tuesday, December 7</td>
<td><strong>Student presentations</strong></td>
<td>Wrap up, conclusions</td>
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<td>Course evaluations</td>
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<td>Final paper due Tuesday 12/14</td>
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1. Tuesday, October 5 - Overview and introduction

Section 1: Policy and Income
2. Tuesday, October 12 – The labor market and earnings (condition)

3. Tuesday, October 19 – State-level welfare reform policies (action)
4. Tuesday, October 26 – Anti-poverty programs *(outcomes)*


**Section 2: Policy and Health**

5. Tuesday, November 2 - Inequality and health


6. Tuesday, November 9 - Health programs


Section 3: Policy and child well-being

7. Tuesday, November 16 – Neighborhoods as a context for human development


8. Tuesday, November 23 – Child care and early education


9. Tuesday, November 30 – Special topics and student presentations

10. Tuesday, December 7 – Student presentations and final thoughts
Course Project

Assignment
Describe some empirical work in a policy area of your choice. This assignment has two main parts. First, name a policy area and identify specific policies, defined for now as things done by government. Following the discussion started in Week 3, describe the specific policies as types of tools. Second, identify some recent empirical research in this area and describe how this research relates to the social condition, policy action and/or policy outcomes.

Suggestions
- You may choose to limit your coverage of empirical research to part of the condition-action-outcome framework, for instance only research about policy outcomes. As the focus of this course is on policy, research that describes a social condition without reference to policy intervention is insufficient. This means including research on policy actions or outcomes OR research that posits policy as part of the mechanism that creates a given problematic social condition.
- Beware being overwhelmed by too much information. This is not intended to be an exhaustive review of all research on a topic, but rather a thoughtful presentation of how a selection of empirical research contributes to understanding. Focus on articles that have appeared in peer-reviewed journals (see class website for a guide).
- Beware being stalled by too little information. If you have a narrowly-defined interest or are looking at a specific population, there may be little recent research. If this is the case, think about your interest as one example of a more general policy area. Then look for research done in that more general area. Note areas in which there appear to be problematic gaps in the literature.

Process
Thinking and clearly communicating research ideas take time. Intermediate products will allow for feedback and reflection during the process. Jen is available for consultation at any time. Peer consultation sessions are planned as well. Drafts are due to Jen’s mailbox by 4:30 pm on the following schedule:
- Friday 10/22 – Description of policy area and preliminary bibliography (4 pages max)
- Friday 11/5 – Description of policy area, preliminary article review (5 pages min)
- Friday 11/19 – Revised policy description and analysis of empirical articles (9 pages min)
- Tuesday 12/14 – Final version of paper due (12-16 pages)

Paper Details
Mechanics, organization and style carry small but significant weight. Final papers should be between 12 and 16 pages of text not including references or tables. Use a standard 12 point font such as Times Roman or Arial (not Courier or Bookman, please). Double-space text and leave margins of at least an inch on all sides. Any consistently-applied citation style is fine although you should strive to master the format used in a journal in which you aspire to publish. Students are strongly advised to use Endnote or a comparable bibliographic program. Number pages and staple in the upper left hand corner.