Overview

As the first of three parts in the first-year doctoral social welfare policy sequence, this course introduces 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.

Course activities are designed to immerse and engage students in the professional practice of thinking and talking about policy research. Course time will be allocated to a mixture of activities including seminar-style discussion, small group discussions, presentations, peer consultation, and limited lectures as necessary to explain background concepts.

The class will work best if all members 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.

There are two major assignments for this class. First, students will present an empirical article in a “conference style” presentation. See p. 7 for more information. Second, students will complete an individual project on a policy question related to their research interest. More details can be found on p. 8. 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 are strongly encouraged to consult with Jen as needed on both the research article and the presentation.

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.

Web page: Bookmark [http://faculty.washington.edu/romich/553/Fall05/home.htm](http://faculty.washington.edu/romich/553/Fall05/home.htm) This site will be a source for updates to the syllabus, links to on-line readings, and other class resources.
**Grading:** Numeric grades of 0-4.0 will be given according to 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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<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:

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<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>30%</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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<tr>
<td>Presentation of research article</td>
<td>15%</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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Readings and events</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy and income</td>
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<td>Key concept: mechanisms</td>
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<td>Key concept: tools</td>
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<td>Policy and health</td>
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<td>Peer consultation? Friday 11/4 – 5 page draft due</td>
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<td>Policy over the life course</td>
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<td>Friday 11/18 – 9 page draft due</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy and social welfare research</td>
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<td>9. Tuesday, November 29</td>
<td>Additional topics TBA</td>
<td>Readings TBA</td>
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<td>Catch up, peer consultation</td>
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<td>10. Tuesday, December 6</td>
<td>Student presentations</td>
<td>Wrap up, conclusions</td>
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<td>Course evaluations</td>
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<td>Final paper due Tuesday 12/13</td>
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1. Tuesday, October 4 - Overview and introduction


**Note:** Readings in weeks 2-8 are categorized as background, conceptual or empirical.

- Readings marked as **background** provide information about the topic or content area of the week. These are optional but may be helpful to refresh or augment prior knowledge.
- Readings marked as **conceptual** introduce key concepts about methodology or logic of inquiry. These are often difficult and dense readings that should be tackled early and may need to be read several times.
- **Empirical** articles are generally single journal-length summaries of a single study. These should be relatively straight-forward but need to be read carefully with a mind toward capturing the “intellectual plot line (Bengston & MacDermind n.d.).

**Section 1: Policy and Income**

2. Tuesday, October 11 – The labor market and earnings (condition)


3. Tuesday, October 18 – State-level welfare reform policies (action)


4. Tuesday, October 25 – Anti-poverty programs (outcomes)


Section 2: Policy and health

5. Tuesday, November 1 - Inequality and health


6. Tuesday, November 8 - Health programs


Section 3: Policy over the life course

7. Tuesday, November 15 – Child care and Head Start


8. Tuesday, November 22 – Social Security and Medicaid


9. Tuesday, November 30 – Policy and social welfare research – additional topics

Readings TBA - Special topics and student presentations

10. Tuesday, December 7 – Policy and social welfare research – Wrap-up

Student presentations and final thoughts
Research Article Presentations

Assignment - Present an empirical research article in a conference format. Presentations should be no more than 20 minutes. Handouts are appreciated and e-mail a copy of the presentation to Jen.

Your presentation will be evaluated based on i.) the extent to which you display a thorough understanding of the article, ii.) how effectively you present the intellectual plot-line, and iii.) mechanics (slide design, timing, etc.). You are invited and encouraged to consult me with any questions about the article in advance of presenting.

I work by two big rules for academic presentations:

Rule 1: "Tell them what you're going to tell them. Tell them, then tell them what you told them." Keep reminding your audience of the intellectual plot line. An overview and outline up front is very helpful, particularly if you mention the key points at every stage. In the overview, specifics are better than generics ("I'll describe the 15 years of British expenditure data" is more helpful than "then I'll talk about the data").

Rule 2: "Know more than you say and say more than you write." Audience members should be able to read slides at a glance so that they are really concentrating on what you say. Too many words on a slide are confusing; if ideas are complex, explain them.

Other advice –

- You may use any type of projection screen format (printed slides or electronic), although I strongly recommend that you use PowerPoint. It is the most commonly used electronic format at professional meetings and is available in the SSW computer lab.

- Be selective in presenting methods and findings. The articles scheduled for presentation contain too many threads to successfully convey in a short presentation, and most rely on methods that you have not yet studied at enough depth to present. It is better to pick one or two charts or graphs and present simplified versions of tables, focusing on the specific importance and meaning of one or a small number of key numbers. For the purpose of this assignment, you can trust the authors’ interpretation of the estimated values.

- If there are issues that you'd like to address but cannot fit into the presentation, feel free to make a final slide that lists suggested discussion topics. This is a good place to address larger issues such as the importance of the work, its role in the policy process or implied meta-theoretical stances.

- Read the design suggestions at http://catalyst.washington.edu/webbeats/carol_powerpoint.html. Some choices make presentations much easier to read for all and are particularly recommended for improving access for persons with visual disabilities: sans serif font, 16 point or larger font, and high color contrast between background and text.

- Rehearse the timing to fit within 20 minutes. Generally people will interrupt with clarifying questions--those questions and answers are in addition to the 20 minutes.

- I suggest that you e-mail a copy of your presentation to me and cc yourself before class. I won't generally look at it until after class, but having multiple copies out in cyberspace is a good safeguard against disk errors. If your schedule permits you to arrive a few minutes early, you can preload your presentation before class and we can make sure everything is working correctly.
Course Project and Final Paper

Assignment - Describe empirical work that answers a policy question on a topic of your choice. This assignment has two main parts. First, name a policy area and identify a specific policy, defined for now as something done by government. Following the discussion to be 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. Focus on three to five empirical articles from peer-reviewed journals.

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, and peer consultation sessions are planned. Unless otherwise noted, a hard copy of the assignment is due to Jen’s box by 4:30 pm on the following schedule.

- Friday 10/21 – Statement of policy topic and preliminary bibliography (4 pages max)
- Friday 11/4 – Description of policy area, preliminary article review (5 pages min)
- Friday 11/18 – Revised policy description and analysis of empirical articles (9 pages min)
- Tuesday 12/13 – Final version of paper due (12-16 pages)

Paper Details - Unless otherwise negotiated, all work submitted should be original analysis generated for this assignment. Mechanics, organization and style carry small but significant weight. Final papers should be between 12 and 16 pages 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.

Other advice -

- You may chose 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.

- Avoid “Law-and-Act-itus”, that is listing specific laws rather than describing meaning of policy structure.

- 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.

- As your paper evolves, it may be helpful to keep in mind that the bulk of this assignment is not about a policy per se. Rather, it is an assignment about research that answers a policy question. The most successful papers will clearly reflect this focus.