Course Syllabus

SW 671 Social Policy Development and Enactment
Fall 2014
Thursday 9am-12pm
Room B684 SSWB

Instructor: Vincent A. Fusaro, MSW
Office: 3764 SSWB
Office Hours: Tuesday, 10AM-noon or by appointment
Email: vafusaro@umich.edu

“Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”
–Frederick Douglass

I. Course Description

This course will review the overall design of human service systems, how to plan for and design such systems, how to develop the legislative mandates and regulations that operationalize these designs, and how to facilitate their formal enactment. Students will learn both the analytic and interactional skills associated with the development and enactment of policies that give specification to human service systems.

II. Course Content

Policy, both legislative and otherwise, provides the framework in which human service systems operate. “Human service systems” here refers not to individual programs, but to the collection of programs, agencies, etc. that seek to address a social issue. Policy creates systems, defines the problems these systems seek to address, and sets the boundaries for actors within the systems. The content and processes of policy are therefore important to social workers in all practice modalities, including clinical practice. This course will present beginning level skills associated with social policy development and enactment. Development requires tools such as problem assessment, policy idea creation, and coalition building. Enactment, in turn, involves advocacy for (a major focus of this course) and management of policy. While the class will generally consider government policy, such as legislation, policy is also produced by organizations. The applicability of policy skills to organizational practice will also be considered.

In addition to examining the tasks associated with policy development and enactment, more general skills for policy practice will be discussed. Clear and concise communication of complex information is a prerequisite for effective practice. A heavy emphasis will therefore be placed on both written and oral presentation. Written assignments are designed to mimic documents (e.g.,
memos, briefing papers) that might be produced by the policy practitioner. Class discussion and presentation assignments will be structured to develop effective oral communication. Finally, meetings are to policy practice what clinical sessions are to individual practice; they are the milieu in which much of the most important work is done. Skills for facilitating effective meetings will therefore be covered.

Evidence-based practice need not be limited to clinical settings, and a wealth of scholarship from academic fields such as political science and sociology and from applied fields such as social work and management can guide policy practice. Social science is infused throughout the course, being a focus of the readings, lectures, and class discussions. Similarly, social work values and ethics in the context of policy practice will be discussed. Ethical dilemmas in policy practice will be identified and evaluated.

III. Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1) Apply beginning level skills in the use of the major analytic tools most commonly used to assess and evaluate complex (policy) systems of human and social services
2) Apply beginning level skills in the use of interactional tools and techniques for facilitating group process and decision-making
3) Design a procedure for reviewing and assessing a social service (policy) system that encompasses a wide variety of separately mandated programs
4) Develop and evaluate a reasonable set of options and policy recommendations for changing a particular system
5) Design a preliminary political strategy for facilitating enactment of the preferred option
6) Organize and prepare different types of policy documents or policy recommendations
7) Discuss typical ethical concerns related to social policy development and enactment

IV. Course Design & Expectations

A variety of activities, including lectures, videos, discussions, role-plays, short written assignments, papers, and student presentations, will be used to understand the material and apply it to social work practice. In a class such as this, we are all both teachers and learners, and your peers depend on your contribution. I therefore expect you to attend class, be prepared to discuss the material, and to actively participate in in-class discussions and assignments. Written work should be submitted by the date it is due. Late assignments will be penalized as discussed below.

V. Relationship of the Course to Four Curricular Themes

1) Behavioral and Social Science Research

The course will make extensive use of social science research. All policy analysis and implementation begins with an assessment of where we are. Students will, in assignments, consider academic literature on, for example, the changing demographics that affect demand for
services and the impact of particular types of services on clients. Social science research on the policy process will be a focal point of the course. Finally, evaluation of policy change efforts—essentially applied social science—will be discussed.

2) Multiculturalism and Diversity

Multiculturalism and diversity will be addressed through discussion of client populations served by the service systems discussed in the course, the design of programs and policies so that they will be responsive to the cultural circumstances of their clients, and policies related to issues of ethnicity (e.g., international and transracial adoption).

3) Social Justice and Social Change

The differential impact of policies and programs on those experiencing poverty and those identifying as members of disadvantaged groups will be addressed. The participation of these individuals in the political process will also be discussed. Finally, policy design and implementation is fundamentally about social change—policy defines much of the social environment.

4) Promotion, Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation

Policies discussed in class are intended to alleviate social problems using any or several of these modalities. Varying approaches to policy design, such as community based versus individually targeted intervention, will be examined.

VI. Relationship of the Course to Social Work Ethics and Values

The Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers explicitly calls on social workers to engage in policy and political activities to enhance well-being for all people. This course enhances skills and knowledge for conducting such efforts. Ethical dilemmas in policy practice will be evaluated using the NASW Code of Ethics as a guide. Self-determination, respect for cultural and religious differences, and social justice will be discussed.

VII. Textbook & other readings

The main text for this course is Jansson’s (2013) excellent textbook:


While I will be basing class activities on the 7th edition, a recent older version will likely also be acceptable. I have included chapter titles as well as numbers to harmonize across editions. If your edition is missing a given chapter, please obtain the required material from a classmate. A copy of the 7th edition is also on reserve at the library.
Books are available at Ulrich’s, Barnes and Noble at the Michigan Union, and through online retailers such as Amazon (note that electronic editions and rentals are available online at a much-reduced cost).

Other required readings will be placed on our course CTools site in the “Resources” folder. Note that some weeks list recommended readings. You are not expected to read these for class. They are provided for you as helpful resources should there be a topic you would like to learn more about or if you eventually pursue policy work and would like to get more depth on some aspect of the course.

**VIII. Attendance**

Class attendance is important to both your own learning and, in an active classroom, the learning of your peers. Attendance is worth 10% of your final grade. You are allowed one unexcused absence no questions asked (though I do appreciate notice via e-mail that you will not be in class). Additional absences will reduce your final grade by 5 points up to a total of ten points (that is, three unexcused absences result in an attendance grade of zero). Routine tardiness will also reduce the attendance grade. If personal or professional circumstances require your absence from more than one class, please contact me as soon as possible. Note that, even if you are absent from a class, you are still responsible for submitting any assignments due that day. A sign-in sheet will be used to maintain a record of class attendance.

**IX. Assignments & Grading**

Final grades are based out of 100 points. Letter grades are assigned to point totals according to the following schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>97-100</td>
<td>A+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94-96</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-93</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87-89</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>84-86</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-83</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73-76</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-72</td>
<td>C-</td>
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<tr>
<td>68-69</td>
<td>D+</td>
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<td>65-67</td>
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<td>&lt;65</td>
<td>E</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Point values are the total amount of points received on the following assignments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation (includes policy articles)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participation

Students are expected to be engaged in all in-class activities, including contributing comments and questions in class discussions. Some people naturally speak up in class more than others. If you are at all concerned about your ability to participate in this way, please see me. We will develop strategies to get you engaged in class.

Your participation grade also includes bringing an article from a newspaper (e.g., New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Detroit Free Press), current affairs magazine (I highly recommend The Economist), or trade publication to six class meetings of your choosing. These articles could be on a social work-relevant policy issue or the policy process. Be prepared to briefly summarize the topic of the article for your classmates. Please provide me with a print copy with your name on it or, if you access the resource electronically, e-mail me a link prior to class.

Memos

You will submit five brief writing assignments. These should take the form of 1-2 page memos. Unless otherwise noted in the assignment description, these assignments should follow a standard memo format as outlined on Purdue University’s OWL website: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/590/1/ (as an aside, OWL is an excellent resource for general writing and formatting advice). Memos are worth 10 points. I will count only the top 3 when calculating your final grade, though you should submit five (failure to submit a memo will result in a 10 point penalty). In order to incorporate your memos into class discussion, these are due electronically (CTools dropbox) by 5 PM the day before class.

Specific instructions for memo assignments will be announced, via CTools, at least one week before they are due.

References should be placed on a separate page. The references list does not count toward the page limit.

Policy Paper

Pick a policy issue of interest to you. This issue could emerge from your field placement or it could be a topic you want to know more about. Any level of policy—from agency rules to federal legislation—is an acceptable topic for this assignment.

In 10 to 12 pages, write a paper that does the following:

- Analyzes current policy (if there is no formal policy around your issue, describe standard practice)
• Recommends policy changes  
• Describes a policy implementation strategy

I will provide a rubric for paper grading. You should have a preliminary topic by class session 4. We will take time in class to workshop paper ideas.

The paper is due by noon on December 15, 2014.

Presentation

During one of the last two class sessions (we will assign dates in class), you will prepare a presentation of approximately 10 minutes summarizing your policy analysis, proposal, and implementation strategy. Please provide copies of your PowerPoint slides or other visual aids for your classmates. Following each presentation, we will have a brief discussion to provide feedback on one another’s presentations. Suggestions may be incorporated into your paper.

Late Assignments

Please submit all work on time. Late assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade for the first day past the due date and time and a full letter grade for each additional day thereafter. This policy will be waived only under exceptional circumstances.

Grade Dispute Process

If you feel you have been graded unfairly on an assignment, I ask that you please wait 24 hours before contacting me. Write a paragraph listing the grade you believe you deserved and outlining your reasons for requesting that grade. Then, schedule an appointment with me.

Expectations for Written Work

Development of professional writing is a goal of the course, and writing quality will be considered in grading. Proofread written work carefully; it can be helpful to have a colleague (ideally not in this course) read your documents for clarity, typos, omitted words, etc.

If you would like assistance with your writing, there are excellent resources available at the University. Within the School of Social Work, Career Services can provide writing advice (contact micwoods@umich.edu). Sweetland Writing Center can also aid in development of writing, http://www.lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/.

X. Accommodations
If you require an accommodation to facilitate your participation in class, please schedule a private appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss your specific needs. This information will be kept strictly confidential. For more information and resources (including how to obtain official documentation for any accommodations you may require) please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities office at G664 Haven Hall, (734) 763-3000.

**XI. E-mail Policy**

E-mail ([vafusaro@umich.edu](mailto:vafusaro@umich.edu)) is the best way to reach me outside of office hours. I will generally respond within 24 hours during the school week. If you e-mail me after 5PM on Friday, I will respond by the following Monday.

**XII. Electronic Devices**

Laptops, tablets, and other electronic devices are fantastic resources—you can instantly access information in ways past generations of students could only imagine. This capability may come in handy during certain class activities. Electronic devices also provide many distractions, however. Laptops and tablets may be used provided you are using them for class activities such as note taking. Please wait until break to check e-mail or use social media. I reserve the right to change this policy at any time and for any student. I also may periodically conduct a “screen check” whereby I ask you to turn your computer around to face me.

All cell phones must be off or on silent.

Misuse of electronic devices will be factored into your participation grade.

**XIII. Plagiarism**

Please review the Student Guide section on “Ethical Conduct in the University Environment.” Plagiarism and academic dishonesty are not tolerated in this class or at the University broadly. Evidence of plagiarism will result in a grade of “0” on the given assignment. Please use citations in written work. While you may use any official citation style you are comfortable with, APA is the standard style in social work and it may be useful for you to be familiar with it.

Guidelines for APA style can once again be found on Purdue’s excellent OWL website:

https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/

**XIV. Schedule**
Session 1, Sept. 4  
Introduction and course overview

Readings

Syllabus

Jansson Ch. 1 (Joining a Tradition of Social Reform)

Jansson Ch. 2 (Articulating four rationales for participating in policy advocacy)

Session 2, Sept. 11  
Overview of policy practice

Required Readings

Jansson Ch. 3 (Obtaining skills and competencies for policy advocacy)


Session 3, Sept. 18  
Policy venues and processes

Assignments

Memo Assignment 1 (due electronically by 5PM on 9/17)

Required Readings

Jansson Ch. 4 (Understanding the ecology of policy in governmental, electoral, community, and agency Settings)

Jansson Ch. 5 (Expanding policy advocacy across national borders)

One of the following (we will assign in class):


**Recommended Readings**


**Session 4, Sept. 25**

**Agenda building & issue framing**

**Assignment**

Please be prepared to discuss a potential paper topic or topics. You may already have a very clear idea of your topic, have only a rough idea of your area of interest, or you may be choosing among two or three topics. Any of these is fine, but have some ideas you can discuss with classmates. There is no written assignment for this task, but it may be useful to you to have notes or bullet points.

**Required Readings**

Jansson Ch. 6 (Committing to an issue: Building agendas)


**Recommended Readings**


**Session 5, Oct. 2**

**Problem Identification**

**Assignment**

Memo Assignment 2 (due electronically by 5PM on 10/1)

**Required Readings**

Jansson Ch. 7 (Analyzing problems in the first step of policy analysis)


Session 6, Oct. 9
Developing policy proposals

Required Readings

Jansson Ch. 8 (Developing policy proposals)


Recommended Readings


Session 7, October 16
Skills: Running meetings, facilitating decision-making, and managing coalitions

Assignment

Memo Assignment 3 (due electronically by 5PM on 10/15)

Required Readings


Recommended Readings

**Session 8, Oct. 23**  
**Skills: Presenting Proposals**

**Required Readings**

Jansson Ch. 9 (Presenting and defending policy proposals)


**Recommended Readings**


**Session 9, Oct. 30**  
**Power**

**Assignments**

Memo Assignment 4 (due electronically by 5PM on 10/29)

**Required Readings**

Jansson Ch. 10 (Developing and using power)


**Recommended Readings**


**Session 10, Nov. 6**  
**Advocacy Strategy**

**Required Readings**

Jansson Ch. 11 (Developing political strategy and putting it into action)

Jansson Ch. 12 (*skim*) (Engaging in ballot-based policy advocacy)


**Recommended Readings**


**Session 11, Nov. 13**  
**Policy implementation & policy management**

**Assignments**

Memo Assignment 5 (due electronically by 5PM on 11/12)

**Required Readings**

Jansson Ch. 13 (Troubleshooting the implementation of policies)


Recommended Readings


**Session 12, Nov. 20**
Topics in policy practice: Political polarization, neoliberalism, & income inequality, Presentations I

Required Readings


THANKSGIVING NOV. 27: No Class

**Session 13, Dec. 4**
Evaluation, Presentations II

Required Readings


**Classes end Tuesday, Dec. 9**

**Exam period begins Dec. 10**

**Final policy paper due Dec. 15**