Assignment Preface

This assignment is designed to allow students to explore over the fall term a “hot topic” (one that seems to be receiving considerable new media attention at the moment) and to write three independent (but related) reports on the topic. Although students may follow a broad policy area, two written assignments will require the student to continually narrow his or her focus. In the first written assignment, the student will write a paper on selected historical antecedents of the policy debate that you are following and tie it to current specific social welfare policy (or proposal) for further investigation. In the second written assignment, the student will write a policy memo on this particular policy (or proposal). This policy memo will be written for the NASW membership and should be informed by social work values. In short, this assignment is designed to allow each student to explore a broad context of social welfare policy and to gain expertise on a single, specific, current social welfare policy within that broader domain. Students will also submit a reference list and annotated bibliography at the end of the term, demonstrating that they have been actively following the policy issue in the popular and news media over the semester.

Assignment Overview

Students may select a broad policy domain in which to situate the course assignments. These domains include, but are not limited to:

- Any presidential campaign issue of interest
- Crime, punishment, or policing policies
- Sexual assault (on college campuses, in the military etc.) policies
- Poverty and/or income inequality policies
- Disaster relief policies
- Immigration policies
- Internet policies
- Labor and employment policies (minimum wage, worker protections, etc.)
- Veteran Administration or military policies
- Health or mental Policies (Affordable Care Act, reproductive care, disease outbreaks, etc.)
- Civil rights policies which may be of interest by population (race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc.)
- Environmental policies
- Human trafficking policies
- Policies targeted at the well-being of specific populations of interest (race/ethnicity, gender, children, the aged, etc.)

The student will be required to hand in four written products over the course of the semester: The Hot Topic Preliminary Plan (topic and ideas for historical period of choice, several starting references); the
Historical Debates paper; the Policy Memo; Hot topic media and article reference list with annotations. Specific instructions for each are included below.

Assignments at a Glance:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment Task</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Grade Percentage</th>
<th>Page Length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hot Topic Preliminary Plan (with reference list and annotated bibliography)</td>
<td>Oct 11</td>
<td>Ungraded</td>
<td>1-2 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hot Topic Part 1: Policy Memo</td>
<td>Nov 22</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>5 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References and annotated bibliography</td>
<td>Dec. 6</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>List (12 articles) Annotate (4 articles)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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HOT TOPIC PRELIMINARY PLAN

The Hot Topic Preliminary Plan (Topic plan, historical period of interest for first paper, beginning reference list) must be submitted by Oct. 11, 2016. It will not be graded.

Students will begin this hot topics course of study by locating at least 3 media articles (preferably newspaper) and 4 scholarly articles (peer-reviewed journal articles, legislative documents, etc. This assignment is to let the instructor know your choice of focus, your comparative historical period, your beginning scholarly references and current news media sources. This will set the course for the hot topic exploration all semester. Select a topic of current debate, browse recent news stories, start to take notes on how this issue is currently defined, debated. Compare that with our historical readings in class and choose a particular era when the issue also surfaced and relevant policy emerged that are evolving to today.

The learning objectives for this assignment are as follows:

- Locate and cite at least three news media articles and four scholarly sources relating to a specific policy domain;
- Identify the difference between legitimate news stories and scholarly references from rogue internet resources;
- Produce and submit a beginning reference list
- Write an abstract of 1 paragraph that gives your preliminary topic and plan for the first paper's historical context

General Instructions: Each student will track news media stories on one of the policy domains listed above. In addition, they will locate scholarly writing on the policy topic area. Although the hot topic may be relatively broadly defined initially, each student will be expected to narrow his or her investigation for the following written assignments. Accordingly, students should feel free to narrow the parameters of their “hot topic” as soon as possible. Students should scan major international, national, or local news media for relevant reporting. Once they have decided on the area, they should begin to collect legitimate scholarly and academic sources from which to write their papers. This does not include general Wikipedia, Google
searches for materials produced by advocacy groups etc. Students will be expected to download or provide a viable electronic link for all the electronic sources being used for their project. Students will create a running reference list of these resources and annotate articles from this list.

**Abstract – Preliminary Plan.** Students should identify their tentative topics for the historical paper and if possible, for the second paper, the policy memo. While you are not committed to this plan (you may change your mind or modify it), faculty for this course have learned that the more firmly developed the student’s initial plan, the better their final projects will be. In part, this is because this kind of assignment often has some “false starts” and/or it takes time to settle on a topic. Students who leave this preliminary work until the last minute might risk getting stuck. The abstract should be no more than one page, and the references will add no more than a second page.

**Reference List included with preliminary plan.** Please alphabetically arrange a reference list of the “hot topic” articles you have collected in your preliminary research (You must collect at least 3 news accounts and 4 scholarly sources but you may collect more if you like). You should provide the proper citation for all sources. Be consistent with citation style, the APA guidelines are the easiest to use.

**HISTORICAL DEBATES PAPER**

**Historical Debates Paper** must be submitted by October 25th. It will constitute 25% of the student's overall course grade. The paper should be 5 pages, spacing 1.5 and 12-inch font.

The **learning objectives** for this assignment are as follows:

- Locate a specific policy discussion within your “hot topic” domain in which a debate over policy approaches or social welfare services is occurring;
- Explain the historical antecedents of these policy debates and identify prior-related policies and services;
- Conduct a scholarly investigation of the historical antecedents of this debate;
- Write a clear and concise paper summarizing the current debate and the debate in the historical time frame of choice, identifying its historical antecedents and how the policy was argued at that time.
- Identify a specific policy (or policy proposal) that you will use for your policy memo.
- Identify the relevance of these issues for social work.

**Instructions.**

In this paper students will explore a more specific policy debate or discussion that is occurring within the broad policy domain being studied. For example if the student is following:

- LGBT civil rights THEN s/he might select marriage equality;
- Sexual assault on campus THEN s/he might look at how universities process assault allegations;
- Immigration and refugees THEN s/he might look at the current “migrant children” discussion etc.
- Detroit urban issues THEN s/he might look at urban farming, water distribution, foreclosures, or underfunded pensions, etc.

The student will research and write a short academic paper that seeks to situate the current policy debate in its historical context. **The goal is to see the linkages between past and present arguments about social welfare policy and/or social welfare services.**
Elements of your Historical Debates Paper

The student's historical paper should be structured according to the following outline and please use subheadings throughout:

- Title
- Student Identification Number (no names)
- Abstract (200 words)
- Introduction (3-4 paragraphs)
- Historical Antecedents (2-3 pages)
- Relate Historical antecedents to Current debates (2-3 paragraphs)
- Conclusion and Policy (or policy proposal) Identification (2 paragraphs)
- Social work implications
- References

**Title:** The title, like a “bullion cube” should contain all of the essence and none of the bulk of the entire paper. It offers a concise summary of the paper content.

**Student Identification Number.** Please place your student identification number, and not your name, on your papers. The instructor will identify the student only after grading the paper.

**Abstract.** The abstract should be no more than 200 words and should summarize the entire content of the paper. Note that like the “title” this should be a complete summary and "bulk-free". One way of structuring an abstract is to use topic sentences from each important paragraph in the paper.

**Introduction (3-4 paragraphs).** The introduction should succinctly identify the policy debate you are following. It should describe the major arguments associated with the debate and identify their proponents. This section should be descriptive.

**Historical Antecedents (2-3 pages).** This should be the meat of your paper. Succinctly summarize the major historical debates that pre-date the current conversation. This may involve going back decades or centuries, depending on your focus. However, the more substantive your material and the more precise your historical period, the better. In other words, try to avoid sweeping and meaningless over-generalizations. Please note that in order to write this section of the paper, you must have located and seriously read scholarly sources (peer-reviewed articles, books, government documents, etc.). **An important note:** I am not looking for the history of a topic. By this I mean I am not looking for a chronological description of a sequence of events. I am looking for a history of the debates around a general issue. What have been the recurring generic arguments? Which side of the argument has predominated at various points in time? Remember to use subheadings to help organize your arguments.

**Relate Historical antecedents to current debates (2-3 paragraphs).** Briefly provide a critical analysis of how these past historical discussions are linked to the current conversation.

**Conclusion and Policy (or proposal) Identification (1 paragraph).** Discuss the implications of these conversations for social work practice. Where should professional social workers situate themselves relative to the conversations? Also, identify a specific policy (or policy proposal) that you see as particularly important for social work (either for its positive or negative impact). This policy will serve as the focus for your next assignment, the policy memo.

**References.** Provide a complete list of references used in your paper.
POLICY MEMO

Policy Memo must be submitted by Nov. 22. It will constitute 30% of the student's overall grade. The memo will be no longer than 5 pages. It should be 1.5 space and 12-point font.

The learning objectives for this assignment are as follows:

- Understand the difference between writing an academic paper and a policy memo;
- Identify a specific policy (or policy proposal);
- Identify the implications of this policy for social welfare services or social work practice;
- Decide what position social workers ought to take relative to that policy (or proposal);
- Write a formal policy memo for NASW members which clearly conveys that position in writing.

Instructions.

As noted in the Thompson Writing Program article on writing policy memos (See http://twp.duke.edu/uploads/media_items/policy-memo.original.pdf), a policy memo is not the same thing as an academic paper. In fact, its purpose and organizational structure are very different. Students will be evaluated on their ability to produce a coherent, clear, easily comprehended, and well-supported policy memo. Please note that this involves serious research and real intellectual work before you write this memo. Make sure you start early enough in the semester to accomplish this goal.

According to the Thompson article, “because of the need for quick, accurate information in the policy world, policy memos are written so that readers can efficiently access fact-based information in order to make an informed decision” and therefore, memos should “inform the audience in a concise, organized, and professional manner, while still including the most relevant content.” An effective memo, “will do its job if the reader comprehends the main points after one quick read or even after reading just the first sentence of each section” (emphasis added). Thompson urges students to pay close attention to: 1) content, 2) structure, 3) organization, 4) word choice, and 5) clarity.

For the purposes of this assignment, assume you are a policy analyst for NASW. You have been asked to write a policy memo on the policy (or policy proposal) that have selected (see above). The purpose is to inform the NASW members—which consists of social work practitioners and educators—of the official social work position on the policy (or proposal). This memo should be:

- Accurate
- Fact-based
- Informative and based on relevant information;
- Logically constructed
- Easily comprehended in one reading
- Clearly organized and structured (heading, executive summary, subheadings)
- Positions should be informed by social work values

Avoid overgeneralizations, grandiose statements, illogical arguments, misused words, and poorly written papers.

Adapted from the Thompson Writing Program at Duke University. See http://twp.duke.edu/uploads/media_items/policy-memo.original.pdf
Elements of the Policy Memo:

Memo Heading: Your memo should contain the standard headings.
To: should be addressed to the NASW or appropriate recipients of the memo.
From: should contain your student identification number.
Date: is self evident.
Re: is another chance to create a bullion cube heading that summarizes your policy position clearly and succinctly.

Executive Summary: The executive summary should be about 150 words long. It should summarize the entire content of your policy memo. In fact, after reading the executive summary the reader should know and understand your entire set of arguments. The rest of the memo will fill in the details.

Arguments. In these sections the goal is to convert your standard student research paper into a policy memo format. This means identifying each of your arguments using a subheading that succinctly summarizes it, then supporting your position with a logical and well-researched set of facts. Note that one of the major differences between what I think of as the traditional student paper and a policy memo is that in a student paper, the paper (or paragraph) often concludes with the writer’s final position. In a policy memo, each section starts with the conclusion (the position), which is then supported.

HOT TOPIC REFERENCE LIST AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Annotation included with Reference list. Turn in a list of at least 12 articles you have followed over the course of the term. This paper is due December 6th and worth 5% of the overall course grade. Select both the news stories and scholarly references from your reference list to annotate. Your annotation on 4 of these articles should be a single paragraph and should demonstrate your ability to critically read and summarize the content of the article or book. The annotation should accomplish three things. First, it should succinctly summarize the factual information contained in the source (2-4 sentences). Second, it should critique the source by commenting on the values, ideology, political leanings or other biases that might be at play in the article (1-3 sentences). Finally, it should explain the significance for your study of this hot topic and for social work or social workers (2-3 sentences).