



Course title:	Practicing Policy with Current Events
Course #/term:	SW 649, Winter 2021
Time and place:	Monday, 9-12, B684 SSW
Credit hours:	3
Prerequisites:	None
Instructor:	Jen Burke
Pronouns:	She/her/hers
Contact info:	Email: jenburke@umich.edu
	You may expect a response within 48 hours
Office:	2738 SSWB
Office hours:	By appointment

1. Course Statement

a. Course description

This policy skills course will help students develop an understanding of how to analyze,

formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, economic, and/or environmental justice through the application of critical thinking skills. Content area will be drawn from current events (e.g., immigration, child welfare, health care debates), and students will learn how to critically analyze the policy implications, prerequisites for any informed, professional, and ethical policy advocacy. Students will develop strategies to engage in policy practice to effect change and advocate for clients. Finally, students will gain specialized knowledge and skills in a current policy area relevant to social work practice, which will also give students the ability to advocate for their clients, the profession, and the promotion of social justice.

b. Course objectives and competencies

- Articulate framings of policy-related stories as social constructions (Essential 6, 28, 39; EPAS 1, 2, 5, 7).
- Locate policy resources (e.g. legislation, regulations, white papers) needed to understand a social welfare policy problem (Essential 14, EPAS 6)
- Analyze a social welfare policy issue in terms of contextual features (e.g., historical, political, legislative, ideological) while taking into account structural privileges and inequities (Essential 29, 30, 34, 35; EPAS 1, 2, 3, 5).
- Identify strategies for resolving a social welfare policy problem that advances human rights; social, economic, and/or environmental justice; and address power dynamics to ensure voices are included (Essential 6, 28, 39; EPAS 1, 2, 5, 7).
- Advocate for a specific solution to a social welfare policy problem in a way that acknowledges contextual and social equity issues surrounding the problem (Essential 44; EPAS 1, 5).

c. Course design

The course will utilize a combination of lectures, discussion, and in-class exercises.

d. Intensive focus on PODS

This course integrates PODS content and skills with a special emphasis on the identification of theories, practice and/or policies that promote social justice, illuminate injustices and are consistent with scientific and professional knowledge. Through the use of a variety of instructional methods, this course will support students developing a vision of social justice, learn to recognize and reduce mechanisms that support oppression and injustice, work toward social justice processes, apply intersectionality and intercultural frameworks and strengthen critical consciousness, self-knowledge and self-awareness to facilitate PODS learning.

This course encourages students to develop critical thinking skills so that they can understand the ways in which various economic and political theories are used in the policy process and how those frameworks can promote social justice or can

oppress individuals and groups (Critical Contextual Thinking; Critical Awareness). Students will use principles of social justice to examine current public policy debates and to interrogate various institutions and economic models (Critical Contextual Thinking; Critical Awareness; Conflict, Dialog, and Community). Using knowledge gained in the course, students will be able to identify points of interventions within existing institutions to promote socially just policies (Actions Toward Social Justice Vision).

2. Class Requirements

a. Text and class materials

The reading material for this course will take four forms. All of it will be available online and/or will be posted on Canvas:

- Current Media – news and educational sources of record as selected by the instructor. (E.g. print and electronic news sources such as the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*; public television or radio shows such as the *NewsHour* and NPR programs such as *All Things Considered*, or *Morning Edition*; curated podcasts or youtube videos);
- Non-governmental Organizations or Think Tank Websites as selected by the instructor and relevant to the course topics (e.g. Center for Budget and Policy Priorities; Kaiser Family Foundation, Heritage Foundation; Human Rights Watch; Brookings Institution);
- Governmental Departments, Agencies and Reports as selected by the instructor and relevant to the course topic (such as federal and state legislative information, judicial sources, executive orders, state agency policy manuals); and
- Selected readings posted on Canvas (e.g social science articles; theoretical literature; policy briefs; policy documents).

Throughout the course students will be expected to follow current events related to social welfare policy issues which impact social work practitioners and their clients. The course may focus on a topical content area as defined by the instructor before the start of the semester (e.g. immigration, child welfare, climate change, natural disaster relief, water rights). Assigned readings will be selected by the instructor accordingly. Additional pertinent short readings or podcasts might be added over the semester. The instructor will give advance notice to students or bring these additional materials to class as news events unfold. Closed captioned media

sources, audio versions, and other formats will be used with an eye toward inclusivity and accessibility of all students. However, students with any unique challenges should speak with the instructor as soon as possible to ensure adequate access to materials.

b. Class schedule

- Please note: At this time, this course will be taught in person. Should there be any changes to either the schedule or format, an announcement will be posted on Canvas as soon as possible to alert students to the change.

Date/Time	Agenda Practicing Policy Skills	Required Readings & Assignments
Session 1 3/7	Social Problem Construction: Competing Framings of Policy- Related Stories	Staller, Social Problem Construction (Canvas)
Session 2 3/14	Finding Policy: Locating, Identifying, and Reading Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Dreams and Promise Act (Canvas) • Locate one relevant policy for group project
Session 3 3/21	Consuming Policy Stories: Deconstructing Arguments and Contextualizing Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Videos on Canvas
Session 4 3/28	Identifying Advocacy Strategies: Making your Voices Heard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NACC Policy Agenda and Advocacy (Canvas)

Session 5 4/11	Synthesizing the Pieces: Policy Presentations	Prepare and Present Final Projects
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c. Assignments

Assignment	Due date	Percent of overall grade
Final Project: Policy Performance	Final Class Session	Pass /Fail

Master Assignment:

Policy Performance:

Producing a News Story, Podcast, or Public Educational Announcement

Students will work in small groups to ‘produce’ a news story, podcast, youtube video or other research-based educational segment. These will not be opinion pieces or propaganda. Rather the final product must reflect careful research, critical engagement and thoughtful analysis of a current events topic. Students will “perform” (or “present”) their projects in the final class (5-8 minutes a piece); submit a written transcript of their segment, complete compendium of references and sources consulted and attest to the equal participation of each member of the group. In addition, each assignment must be submitted with an individual attestation from each student of their unique efforts toward producing the final project and how the project elements, as well as course content, relate to mastery of the course competencies. Students must demonstrate that they can:

(these should align with course objectives)

- Contextualize the competing frames of a specific policy problem critical to social work practice;
- Critically assess the policy response using the skills developed in class;
- Synthesize material about this policy problem and response in an informative, factual, educational presentation;
- Identify a socially just policy response using critical analysis, ensuring all voices are heard;

d. Attendance and class participation

This is a one-credit, required, course. For this reason, attendance is mandatory at every class session unless other accommodations have been made with the instructor.

There are four basic requirements for this course. Each will be used in assessing the overall final grade. They are:

- Attending all five class sessions which include lectures and skill building;
- Reading all assignments and coming to class prepared;
- Participating in class discussions and activities in a substantive and meaningful way; and
- Participating in the final project, the Policy Performance Assignment (see master assignment), including final presentation, written product, and final submission.

If you need to be absent for any reason, please contact me as soon as possible at jenburke@umich.edu to make appropriate arrangements. If you have questions/concerns or needs related to participation, please contact me so we can ensure that you feel comfortable to participate.

e. Grading

Course grading is on a pass or fail basis. However, mandatory attendance, the course expectations listed above, and the final project performance will be factored into the final assessment as specified by the instructor.

Additional School and University policies, information and resources are available here: <https://ssw.umich.edu/standard-policies-information-resources>. They include:

- *Safety and emergency preparedness*
- *Mental health and well-being*
- *Teaching evaluations*
- *Proper use of names and pronouns*
- *Accommodations for students with disabilities*
- *Religious/spiritual observances*
- *Military deployment*
- *Writing skills and expectations*
- *Academic integrity and plagiarism*