



Course title:	Theories and Principles of Socially Just Policies	
Course #/term:	SSW 638 001, Winter 2023	
Time and place:	Tuesdays, 9am-noon Room 2752 SSWB	
Credit hours:	3	
Instructor:	Kristin Seefeldt	
Pronouns:	She/her/hers	
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	You may expect a response within 48 hours (unless otherwise noted)	
Office:	2726	
Office hours:	By appointment- please email me or contact me in class- meeting with you is a priority for me!	

1. Course Statement

a. Course description

In this course, students will be exposed to various theoretical frameworks informing policy development, delve deeply into the role of different institutional actors in the policy process, and gain an understanding of basic economic principles frequently employed in policy debates and discussions. With this knowledge, students will be able to identify, in a more sophisticated and nuanced way, policies that promote social justice and those that do not; understand how certain theoretical frameworks and ideas have been used to oppress and to empower different groups, and identify points of interventions within existing institutions.

b. Course content

This course will cover different concepts of justice, fairness, and equity as they apply to public policy, including Rawls' theory of justice. Students will also interrogate ideas about neoliberalism through an introduction to concepts from economic theory that often used to promote or thwart the development of certain policies. This includes the

concepts of supply and demand; market failure; and public goods. Finally, drawing upon various theories of justice, students will examine processes that can be used to promote socially just policy making.

c. Course objectives and competencies

In this course, students will learn how to:

- Identify how economic theories inform public policy debates and describe the consequences for social justice
- Understand the basic nature of supply and demand, markets, public goods, and other economic concepts;
- Describe and identify various theoretical frameworks of social justice and how they relate to public policy;
- Identify and explain processes that would promote socially just policy making;
- Apply the principles of social justice to critically analyze public policies;
- Determine opportunities to advance social justice within existing political and policy institutions;

d. Course design

This course will use multiple methods including but not limited to: lectures, case studies, readings, guest speakers, discussions, written assignments, individual and group exercises.

e. 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

All readings and videos are posted in modules on Canvas, by session. Within the module, the readings are under the folder titled “Readings,” while any videos will be in a folder labeled “Videos.”

In order for us to have in-depth and meaningful discussions, students are expected to come to class having read/watched the assigned material. Some of the readings are dense and contain ideas about which you may be unfamiliar- just try your best and come to class with lots of questions!

b. Class schedule

Date/Time	Agenda	Required Readings & Videos
Session 1 January 10	What do we mean by “socially just” in the context of public policy? What are your criteria for “justness?”	Read This: Syllabus Michael Reisch, “Defining Social Justice in an Unjust World”
Session 2 January 17	Overview of Western theories of justice: utilitarianism; Rawls’ principles; libertarianism; others	Read This: Rawls, “A Theory of Justice” (excerpt) Watch This: Crashcourse-What is Justice?
Session 3 January 24	Microeconomics and understanding economic theory. Efforts to promote social justice are often constrained or	Read This: Wheelen, “The Power of Markets” Kahloon, “The War on Economics” – also available

Date/Time	Agenda	Required Readings & Videos
	<p>hampered by economic systems. Moreover, public policy in much of the Western world is deeply influenced by economic theory. We'll spend 2 sessions examining some of the fundamental principles of microeconomics.</p>	<p>to listen here:</p> <p>https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/05/23/the-war-on-economics-elizabeth-popp-berman-thinking-like-an-economist</p>
<p>Session 4 January 31</p>	<p>Alternative Economic Views Modern Monetary Theory (MMT) and Stratification Economics (bringing critical race theory to economics) are two alternative views of macro and micro economic functioning- do these views do a better job of promoting social justice?</p>	<p>Read This: "What if the Federal Deficit Actually Didn't Matter?"</p> <p>Ritz, "MMT Isn't Taking a Victory Lap- It's on its Last Legs – also available to listen here:</p> <p>https://www.forbes.com/sites/benritz/2022/02/10/mmt-isnt-taking-a-victory-lap--its-on-its-last-legs/?sh=4b9dd3572ad5</p> <p>Watch This: Interview with Darrick Hamilton</p>
<p>Session 5 February 7</p>	<p>Human rights and the capabilities approaches What are the strengths and weaknesses of a human rights-based approach to public policy? How can the capabilities approach be translated into policy?</p>	<p>Read This: United Nations Declaration of Human Rights</p> <p>Mende, "Are Human Rights Western?"</p> <p>O'Hearn, "Amartya Sen's Development as Freedom Ten Years Later</p> <p>Optional: Sen,</p>

Date/Time	Agenda	Required Readings & Videos
		<i>Development as Freedom</i> , intro and chap. 1
<p>Session 6 February 14</p> <p>Applying Theory to Current Events, Part 1 due</p>	<p>Anti-colonial thought and social justice This week we will read the work of Frantz Fanon, one of many thinkers whose work is rooted in the anti-colonial movement. We'll consider the Black Panthers (who were heavily influenced by Fanon) and their social policies as anti-colonial responses and discuss how such approaches are relevant to policy today.</p>	<p>Read This: Fanon, <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i>, chapter 1</p> <p>Optional- Summary of Fanon</p> <p>Watch This: The Black Panthers and Social Policy</p>
<p>Session 7 February 21</p>	<p>Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Policy Paulo Freire's seminal book is frequently used within education circles, but we will discuss its application to policy.</p>	<p>Read This: Freire, <i>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</i>, chapters 2 & 4</p> <p>Watch This: Theater of the Oppressed NYC</p>
<p>Session 8 March 7</p>	<p>Intersectional Lenses What happens when we consider policy through an intersectional lens? What are the limitations?</p>	<p>Read This: Bonsu, "Black Queer Feminism as Praxis"</p> <p>Trochmann, "Identities, Intersectionality, and Otherness: The Social Constructions of Deservedness in American Housing Policy"</p>
<p>Session 9 March 14</p>	<p>Theories of policy change What do different theories of policy change tell us about the possibilities for socially just policymaking?</p>	<p>Read This: Feldman, "Making the Connection between Theories of Policy Change and Policy Practice"</p> <p>Flint, "How Bipartisanship</p>

Date/Time	Agenda	Required Readings & Videos
		and Incrementalism Stitched the Child Health Insurance Safety Net (1982–1997)”
Session 10 March 21 Applying Theory to Current Events, Part 2 due	Radical Social Work and Abolition Calls to “defund the police” and abolish the child welfare system are grounded in beliefs that these systems are inherently unjust and cannot be reformed. What would policymaking through an abolitionist lens look like?	Read This: Dettalff et al “It is not a broken system, it is a system that needs to be broken: the upEND movement to abolish the child welfare system” Jacobs et al, “Defund the Police: Moving Towards an Anti- Carceral Social Work”
Session 11 March 28	Transformative Policy Processes Are real utopias possible? How can Afrofuturism inform policy? We’ll consider these questions in our final session as well as revisit other theories and frameworks we’ve covered during the semester	Read This: Olin Wright, “Real Utopias I: Social Empowerment and the State” Visit the Participatory Governance Toolkit website: https://www.civicus.org/index.php/es/centro-de-medios/recursos/manuales/611-participatory-governance-toolkit Watch This: Afrofuturism and Politics
Session 12 April 4	Class wrap up	TBD
Session 13 April 11	Class presentations/ discussions on final projects	
Session 14 April 18	Class presentations/ discussions on final projects	

c. Assignments

You have two assignments for this course, one of which has two parts, the other three parts.

Assignment	Due date	Points
Applying Theory to Current Events essays	February 14	25 points each (50 total)
	March 21	
Final Project	In Class presentation April 11 or 18	10 points
	Final written document April 23	30 points
	Feedback on two other presentations April 23	10 points

Applying Theory to Current Events - Part 1

This assignment has two parts, each worth 25 points, for a total of 50 points. Students will write a 2-4 page (double-spaced) essay or record a 6 to 10-minute audio/video recording that applies theories and frameworks we have read about and discussed in class to a story from the news.

For this assignment, you will apply Economic Theory to the article “Will Southwest’s Debacle Finally Spur Congress to Act?” (Article is found on Canvas in the description of the assignment under the “Assignment” tab).

Students may structure the essay in any format they choose. The essay should highlight:

- Instances that illustrate the theoretical perspective(s) in action;
- Examples of how the theoretical perspective or the authors we read would respond to the story;
- Other reactions or critiques that demonstrate an ability to make connections between theory and the story/event.

Applying Theory to Current Events - Part 2

Students will write a 2-4 page (double-spaced) essay or record a 6 to 10-minute

audio/video recording that applies theories and frameworks we have read about and discussed in class to a story from the news.

For this assignment, you will apply any of the theories discussed since February 7 to the article “Race Question in Supreme Court Adoption Case Unnerves Tribes” (Article is found on Canvas in the description of the assignment under the “Assignment” tab).

Students may structure the essay in any format they choose. The essay should highlight:

- Instances that illustrate the theoretical perspective(s) in action;
- Examples of how the theoretical perspective or the authors we read would respond to the story;
- Other reactions or critiques that demonstrate an ability to make connections between theory and the story/event.

Proposal for a Socially Just Policy

Part 1 (30 points)

Develop an alternative or new public policy that would address an issue in a socially just manner. In doing so, you will need to:

- Describe the issue, why it needs attention, and why and how it is socially unjust
- Describe your socially just alternative
- Reference at least three of the theories explored throughout the semester and how they relate to this policy issue
- Be conscious of how the policy cuts across race, ethnicity, ability status, socioeconomic status, gender identity, and sexual orientation
- Articulate why this proposal promotes social justice

For the next part of the paper, you have two options:

Option 1

Imagine it is 50 years in the future (2070) and we have continued moving down a path towards liberation and justice as a nation. Write a journal entry or use another medium to reflect on life now, commenting on how different things are as a result of the policy you developed having been in place over these last 50 years.

Option 2

Describe your experience and process in developing your proposal. Questions you

may want to consider include:

- Why did you choose the selected theories?
- What challenges did you experience in developing your proposal?
- What did you learn by completing this assignment?

Expected length of the proposal, 4-6 pages double spaced (may also have appendices)

Expected length of option 1 or 2, 1-2 pages double spaced

Part 2 (10 points)

Our final two class sessions will be spent on students presenting their Socially Just Policy Proposals. While not designed to be high stakes (i.e., if you do the presentation, you will get 10 points), clear and concise verbal communication is a skill that will serve you well professionally. Each student will discuss their policy proposal for no more than 5 minutes, being sure to articulate 1) the problem they are covering, 2) why it needs to be addressed, and 3) how their policy proposal advances social justice. Slides are optional.

Part 3 (10 points)

Finally, each student will provide feedback on two other students' presentations. As a class, we'll develop a feedback form, and we'll discuss how to provide constructive and affirmative feedback.

d. Attendance and class participation

Learning takes place when you can engage with the material, and part of that engagement occurs in discussions with each other- and this is a discussion heavy course. Missing class deprives you of this opportunity and also affects your colleagues when they are not able to learn from you. Student attendance is therefore expected at every class session, but I also understand that you may need to miss class, and I urge you to please stay at home if you are ill. I will attempt to record the class, but because this class will rely heavily upon discussion (both large and small group), the recordings may not pick up everything. If you miss a class, Please do feel free to contact me, and we can find a time to get you caught up.

e. Grading

Your letter grade will be based on the number of points you accumulate over the course of the semester. The breakdown is as follows

100	A+
93-99	A
90-92	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
80-82	B-
77-79	C+
73-76	C
70-72	C-
Etc.	

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*