

PSC 2240: Welfare, Work, and Poverty

Summer 2019, Session II
July 1st to August 10th
Mon. & Wed. 6:10pm-8:40pm
348 Phillips Hall

Instructor

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Office hours

Mon. & Wed. 5:15pm - 6:00pm
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Email me ahead of time
(even if it's only a short notice)

Course Overview and Description

What is welfare? Why are welfare programs designed the way that they are? Are welfare programs effective? These are the central questions guiding this course; and there are contrasting perspectives on how to answer these questions. Whatever your answer may be, students should walk away from this course with *their own* answer to these questions. Centrally, this course will provide students with an overview of social policy in the United States. We'll pay close attention to the historical development of the U.S. welfare state and compare it to the welfare states of other industrialized countries. We'll learn about various kinds of social policy programs: *social assistance* (programs for the poor), *social insurance* (like Social Security), and *tax expenditures* (tax deductions and credits). In addition to learning about the details of these programs, we'll discuss the experience of poverty in the U.S. and pay special attention to the liberal vs. conservative arguments about welfare.

We will only have six weeks to get through all instruction and assessment. If this were a normal semester-long course, we would have 2.5 hours of class time each week; instead, we have 5 hours of class time each week. The course will move quickly so it is imperative that students attend every class session and keep up with the assigned readings.

The course schedule provides details on each lesson and its assigned readings. In brief, this class will proceed as follows. During the first section of this course, "Poverty and Economics," we will place the U.S. welfare state in a comparative perspective, trying to understand what explains differences in poverty and social spending across countries. In addition, we will discuss economic and psychological perspectives on whether rational decision-making is possible for the impoverished. During the second part of this course, "Social Policy Programs," we will discuss the *upper tier* of the U.S. welfare state, Social Security and Medicare, as well as the *lower tier* of the U.S. welfare state, traditional welfare programs like Food Stamps and cash assistance. We'll also be discussing how the tax code is used as a social policy tool. During the final part of this course, "Politics of Social Policy," we'll assess the causes and correlates of public support for social programs.

Course Learning Objectives

1. Understand the causes, consequences, and extent of poverty in the United States.
2. Compare social policy regimes across industrialized nations.
3. Explain the difference between social insurance and social assistance (“welfare”). Assess whether there is a meaningful distinction between these two concepts.
4. Describe the eligibility and benefits for major social policy programs and assess their effectiveness at reducing poverty.
5. Evaluate and compare proposals to reform the welfare state.
6. Explain why social policymaking in the United States is so difficult.
7. Explain the determinants of policy preferences for welfare spending.

Required Texts & Readings

There are NO course texts that students are required to purchase for this course. Listed in the “Course Schedule” section of this syllabus, all required readings will be posted to Blackboard. Read each set of readings *before* lecture. Readings are listed in the order in which they are intended to be read.

Assignments

Final grades will be assessed based upon students’ performance in four categories of assignments. **The total number of points that you can earn in the course is 100.** Do not plan on me “curving” assignments or your final course grade. The four types of assignments are as follows:

1. **Quizzes (20 points / 20%):** There will be a retrospective quiz each Wednesday at the beginning of class. Each quiz is worth 4 points, or 4% of your final grade. There will be six quizzes, but your lowest quiz score will be dropped. Quizzes will cover material discussed during a previous lecture but can include questions about the readings that were never discussed during lecture. (This means that you should keep up with the readings.) Quizzes will usually be only eight questions long and include multiple choice, matching, and/or fill-in-the blank.
2. **Report/Memo & Presentation (20 points / 20%):** It’s an exciting time to be studying welfare policy amid the 2020 Democratic primary! Many primary candidates have released proposals on the creation of new social programs (or the reform of old social programs). Each student will write a one-and-a-half to two-page report/memo summarizing and evaluating a candidate’s proposal. Reports should be single-spaced using a standard 12-point font and one-inch margins. Students will also present a less-than-five-minute PowerPoint presentation. Presentations will take place on the day we discuss the relevant social program in class. Memos and PowerPoints are due at 6:00pm on the day before you present. Refer to the rubric for more details.

3. **Essay (30 points / 30%):** In six pages or less, argue whether Social Security (OASI) and Medicare are “welfare” programs. Be specific. Discuss details of both programs in light of what we know about the differences between welfare/social assistance and social insurance. Essays are due on Blackboard at Friday, August 2nd at 11:59pm. Essays should be double-spaced using a 12-point font and one-inch margins. Refer to the rubric for more details.
4. **Final Exam (30 points / 30%):** The final exam will be an open-note exam on Blackboard with short answer and long answer questions. Students will be required to answer 6 of 10 short answer questions and 1 of 4 long answer questions. (Exact number of questions subject to change.) The final exam will become available at 12:01pm (noon) on Thursday, August 8 and is due 11:59am (noon) on Saturday, August 10. You will have two hours to complete the exam once you start it.

Independent Learning Expectations

Summer courses are twice as intensive as those held during the academic year. Students will spend 6 hours per week in class and are expected to spend 12.75 hours per week doing independent learning. Over 6 weeks, students will have 36 hours of class time and spend 76.5 hours out-of-class doing coursework.

University Policies

University policy on observance of religious holidays

In accordance with University policy, students should notify faculty during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance. For details and policy, see: students.gwu.edu/accommodations-religious-holidays

Academic integrity code

Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one’s own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information. For details and complete code, see: studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity

Safety and security

In the case of an emergency, if at all possible, the class should shelter in place. If the building that the class is in is affected, follow the evacuation procedures for the building. After evacuation, seek shelter at the predetermined rendezvous location, Monroe Court (the fountain behind Monroe Hall/Hall of Government).

Support for Students Outside the Classroom

Disability Support Services (DSS)

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in the Rome Hall, Suite 102, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information, see: disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/

Mental Health Services: 202-994-5300

The University's Mental Health Services offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include: crisis and emergency mental health consultations confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals. For additional information, see: counselingcenter.gwu.edu/

Course Schedule

Part I: Poverty and Economics

1. Monday, July 1: Introduction and comparative social policy

- Béland, Howard, and Morgan, “The Fragmented Welfare State” in *Oxford Handbook on U.S. Social Policy*.
- Lynch, “A Cross-National Perspective on the American Welfare State” in *Oxford Handbook on U.S. Social Policy*.

2. Wednesday, July 3: The economics of poverty

- Murray, *Losing Ground*. Chapters 11, 12, & 16.
- Moffit, “The US Safety Net and Work Incentives” in *The US Labor Market*.

3. Monday, July 8: The psychology of poverty

- Mullainathan and Shafir, *Scarcity*. Introduction.
- Mani et al., “Poverty Impedes Cognitive Function.”
- Bradley and Corwyn, “Socioeconomic Status and Child Development.”

Part II: Social Policy Programs

4. Wednesday, July 10: Social Security Old Age and Survivor’s Insurance

- Martin and Weaver, “Social Security: A Program and Policy History.”
- Nuschler, “Social Security Primer.” (CRS Report)
- “Social Policy Change Explainer” (summary of key terms)

5. Monday, July 15: Social Security Disability Insurance and Medicare (for All?)

- Moulta-Ali, “Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI).” (CRS Report)
- Davis et al., “Medicare Primer.” (CRS Report)
- Kliff and Scott, “We read Democrats’ 9 plans for expanding health care. Here’s how they work.” (*Vox* article)

6. Wednesday, July 17: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

- Stoker and Wilson, *When Work is Not Enough*. Chapter 1.
- Falk, “The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant.” (CRS Report)
- Aussenberg, “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).” (CRS Report)

7. Monday, July 22: Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid

- Morton, “Supplemental Security Income (SSI).” (CRS Report)
- Kaiser Family Foundation, “10 Things to Know about Medicaid.”
- Michener, *Fragmented Democracy: Medicaid, Federalism, and Unequal Politics*. Chapters 1 & 8.

8. Wednesday, July 24: Presentation by affordable housing financial analyst during the first half of class, then other means-tested programs during the second half of class

- Schwartz, “Public Housing and Vouchers” in *Oxford Handbook on U.S. Social Policy*.
- Whittaker and Isaacs, “Unemployment Insurance.” (CRS Report)

9. Monday, July 29: Taxes

- Faricy, *Welfare for the Wealthy*. Chapter 1.

10. Wednesday, July 31: The “Submerged State” and assessing the welfare state

- Mettler, *The Submerged State*. Intro & Chapter 4.
- Falk, Lynch, and Tollestrup, “Federal Spending on Benefits and Services for People with Low Income.” (CRS Report)
- Falk et al., “Need-Tested Benefits.” (CRS Report)
- Maks-Solomon and Stoker, “Weathering the Storm.” pp. S119-S125.

****Essays due on Friday, August 2nd at 11:59pm on Blackboard****

Part III: Public Opinion and Social Policy

11. Monday, August 5: Class, race, and welfare

- Rehm, Hacker, and Schlesinger, “Insecure Alliances.”
- Kohler-Hausmann, “Welfare Crises, Penal Solutions, and the Origins of the ‘Welfare Queen.’”

12. Wednesday, August 7: Immigration and welfare

- Garand, Xu, and Davis, “Immigration Attitudes and Support for the Welfare State in the American Mass Public.”
- Crepaz and Damron, “Constructing Tolerance: How the Welfare State Shapes Attitudes About Immigrants.”

****Final exam available at 12:01pm on Thursday, August 8th and is due 11:59am on Saturday, August 10th****