SOPA 200: Approaches to Social Policy

Fall 2022
Tues/Thurs 1:00-2:25 pm
Instructor: Dr. Elizabeth Vann
email: evann@rice.edu
Student drop in hours: Mondays 4:00-5:00pm (Zoom), Thursdays 11:30am-12:30pm in person (Kraft Hall 467), and by appointment

Course Description

Social policy is a multidisciplinary field concerned with the ways in which societies allocate and mobilize resources for the wellbeing of their citizens. Scholars of social policy examine whether and how well education, work, health, housing, welfare and related policies redress inequalities and inequities between often-intersecting social group categories such as socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, migration status, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and age. They are interested not only in how policies respond to social problems but also in how policies can create opportunities for individuals, families, and communities to flourish. Social policy employs theoretical and methodological approaches from sociology, political science, economics, psychology and other disciplines, and takes a critical and analytical approach to the design and evaluation of policy interventions. In this course we will focus on US social policy and explore the ways in which governments, nonprofits, the market, and other stakeholders shape policies of welfare and wellbeing at the local, state, and federal levels.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

- Understand social policy as a multidisciplinary pursuit, with sociology, economics, political science and other fields of study contributing important concepts to how we view and frame it
- Be able to apply high level concepts from multiple disciplines to real world social policies to better understand their operations, incentives, public perceptions, etc.
- Understand how legislative bodies, executives, governmental agencies, and other stakeholders create, shape, and influence policy solutions
- Understand how socio-demographic, political, economic, and attitudinal factors shape social problems and policies designed to address them
- Have a working, ground-level knowledge of key terms, players, and ideas in real-world policy making

Teaching Pedagogy

Much of the learning in this course will happen while you are working with other students in the class on projects, exercises, activities, and discussions. This course design asks students to actively engage in their learning by thinking, discussing, investigating, applying, and creating.
Although there will be days when I or a class guest either leads discussion or provides a lecture or presentation, a lot of the time you will be actively engaged in work with other students. You will work with the same group throughout the semester.

**Course Design**

This course is organized into seven modules:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>dates</th>
<th>topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Module 1</td>
<td>8/22-8/29</td>
<td>What is Social Policy?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Module 2</td>
<td>8/31-9/7</td>
<td>Institutionalist and Conservative Approaches to Social Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Module 3</td>
<td>9/12-9/19</td>
<td>Income and Employment Policies</td>
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<td>Module 4</td>
<td>9/21-9/28</td>
<td>Welfare Policy</td>
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<td>Module 5</td>
<td>10/3-10/12</td>
<td>Healthcare Policy</td>
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<td>Module 6</td>
<td>10/17-11/2</td>
<td>Housing Policy</td>
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<td>Module 7</td>
<td>11/9-11/28</td>
<td>Education Policy</td>
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**How to use the course Canvas site**

On the Canvas site for this course you will find the resources and activities that complement our class meetings. In each module, you will find an introduction that provides an overview of what we'll be doing in that section. Each module also contains links to assigned readings, information about class guests, homework and in-class activities, as well as larger assignments. Please start each module by reading the "Introduction" page.

**Required Texts**

All course materials are available on the course Canvas site except: Desmond, Matthew. 2017. *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, which is available through the Rice Bookstore, Amazon, and other booksellers.
Assignments and Grading

Your grade in the course will be based on the following assignments, which are described in detail below the table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossary</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Midterm check, final due 11/30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy tools essay</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>9/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social policy debate</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9/19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Op-ed</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Process assignment</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10/22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fact sheet</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Scheduled finals period</td>
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**Participation** (10% of course grade): The participation portion of your grade includes daily and semester-long opportunities for you to build a wide set of participation skills, including both personal and group-oriented ones. Participation is not just whether you talk in class or contribute to class discussions, but includes a range of activities.

Personal participation skills you can develop include those related to:

- Being fully present for yourself and others during class time
- Preparing for each class meeting (readings and other assigned materials, out of class assignments, etc.)
- Contributing to productive and inclusive class discussions and activities
- Other activities such as attending student drop-in hours, going to the Center for Academic and Professional Communication, using working groups, and discussing course materials outside of class with others, including peers, friends, and other faculty

Group participation skills include:

- Communicating openly, effectively, and in a timely manner with your group members
- Attendance and tardiness at group meetings
- Contributing to group discussions that value the ideas and contributions of all members
• Facilitating collaborative and productive group work
• Fulfilling your individual and group responsibilities and supporting your group members in theirs

At the beginning of the semester, you will complete a participation self-assessment related to personal and group participation. Your self-assessment will establish where you think you stand on different dimensions, allow you to create three goals for yourself to improve particular personal and group participation skills, and identify actions that will help you develop these skills over the course of the semester. You will reflect on your progress during the semester and then complete a final end-of-semester evaluation of your progress. This will include a self-assessment on how you improved your participation and what letter grade you believe you deserve for personal and team participation.

In addition to providing you with insights into your own practices, the self-diagnostic and subsequent assessments will allow me to support the development of your participation skills. I will use these materials, along with my own observations and feedback, to determine your final participation grade. I am always available for a consultation about improving any aspect of your class participation or to discuss how to improve your group’s dynamics.

Student Working Groups

At the beginning of the semester, you will form a working group with 3-4 other classmates. You will work together throughout the semester. First, as you get to know each other, you will work on “low stakes” activities and assignments. Over the course of the semester, as you become more effective communicators and experienced collaborators, your interdependence will increase and you will co-produce two significant course assignments.

Social policy glossary (10% of course grade; individual assignment): A glossary is a list of terms in a special subject or field with accompanying definitions. Every discipline has its own terms and concepts, and social policy is a field of study that draws (“like a magpie,” as LSE Professor of Social Policy, Hartley Dean, put it) from many different academic disciplines, including economics, sociology, political science, and psychology, among others.

Over the course of the semester, you will build a social policy glossary that includes terms that originate from a range of academic disciplines, but that operate together in the field of social policy. Creating your own social policy glossary will enable you to become a literate and engaged participant in social policy discourse and practice.

Throughout the semester, I’ll prompt you to add certain terms to your glossary using a shared list. All the terms will come from the readings, and your glossary entries should reflect the information presented in those readings. Sometimes an explicit “definition” will be presented in the text; in other cases, you will have to build your own entry from the available information.
Regardless, your entry should enable your understanding of the term. If the definition in the text does not enable your understanding, you should add additional information such as examples, “glosses” (a translation or explanation that you create for the purposes of enhanced understanding), or other devices that you find useful.

I will create opportunities in class to discuss challenging or unclear terms, and you are always welcome to drop by my weekly student hours with questions. I'll also do a mid-semester check and give you feedback about the quality of your glossary so far. In addition to building your general knowledge of and literacy in the discipline of social policy, your glossary will be an essential resource in several major course assignments. Due November 30.

**Policy tools short essay** (15% of course grade; group discussion; individual papers and grades): In module 2 we learn about two major policies that supplement the earnings of low-wage workers: the federal minimum wage and the earned income tax credit (EITC). Although the objectives of these two policies are quite similar, they are very different types of policy instruments, or tools.

You will work together with your groupmates to enhance your understanding of the relevant materials and to discuss and analyze the minimum wage and the EITC as policy tools. Each of you will then write an essay of 750-1000 words in which you compare the target efficiency of the minimum wage and the EITC as policy tools for addressing poverty through income supplements for low-wage earners. Your analysis must engage some aspect of your discussion with your group members. You may or may not agree with the ideas and interpretations of your group members, and you are welcome to confer with each other throughout the process. However, your essay writing should be your own, and should include 1-2 data visualizations (not included in essay word count) that help to illustrate your arguments. Due September 17, 11:59pm.

**Debate between Institutionalists and Conservatives** (5% of course grade; group preparation; individual grade): In module 3, we learn about the two major approaches to social policy in the US: Institutionalist and Conservative. We’ll conclude this module with a class debate to help bring to life these different approaches by applying them to specific policy proposals. You and your group mates will serve as representatives of either the Institutionalist or Conservative approach to social policy (approaches that weave together particular economic theories, social and moral philosophies, and political positions) during an in-class debate on September 19.

Representatives will consider two bill proposals—one regarding the minimum wage and another regarding the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Drawing on resources and materials from modules 2 and 3, you will prepare to defend, oppose, and/or suggest modifications or compromises to the proposed bills. You will have time in class on 9/14 to confer with your teammates and fellow representatives and map out your arguments. Your grade on this activity will be based on your preparation materials (which you will submit before class on 9/19) and the quality of your participation in the class debate.
Op-ed (15% of course grade; individual assignment): In module 4 we learn about the expanded Child Tax Credit (CTC) program that was part of the 2021 American Rescue Plan under President Biden. Some researchers and policy experts think the expanded CTC is a superior welfare program to the existing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. You will write an op-ed of 700-725 words in which you take an evidence-based position on whether you think the expanded CTC should be made a permanent social program in the US and whether you think the TANF program should continue to operate. Due October 8, 11:59pm.

Policy process assignment (15% of course grade; group assignment): In module 5 we explore healthcare through the lens of maternal health. Throughout this module we will pay special attention to the intersection of structural racism and health and to what many have deemed a crisis of Black maternal mortality in America. We ask who is part of the maternal health policy community and how they have worked to get Black maternal morbidity and mortality on the policy agenda.

You and your group members will draw upon resources from the course -- including our panel discussion with local and state representatives working in this policy space -- to create a map of the diverse stakeholders who make up the maternal mortality policy community in Harris County, Texas. Your policy community map should consist of a spreadsheet of 10-15 policy community members with their affiliate institutions and organizations as well as a visual representation of those actors. Your aim will be to represent the diversity of stakeholders who make up that policy community and the relations between them. In addition to creating your policy map, your group will craft written responses (150-200 words each) to two questions about the maternal mortality policy community and the policy process. Policy map and response questions due October 22, 11:59pm.

Fact Sheet (15% of course grade; group assignment): In module 6 we explore the complex issue space of housing policy with a focus on housing insecurity and eviction. This module will enable us to build on skills and knowledge introduced in earlier modules and add to those a discussion of the relationship between externalities, market failures, and social policies. We will gain a better understanding of the intersectionality of affected communities as well as interconnections between different social issues and social policies. We will also consider some of the ways in which qualitative (e.g., ethnography) and quantitative (e.g., census) data are created, accessed, and employed for the purposes of social policy analysis.

At the conclusion of this module, you and your group members will create a fact sheet on housing in Harris County. A fact sheet is a short (usually 1-4 page) document used to inform policy makers about the basics of an issue or program. Fact sheets focus on a specific issue and include an overview of the problem as well as key concepts, data, and other facts. You will be introduced to a range of data sources on housing throughout the module that you can draw upon to create your fact sheet, including the US census and the American Community Survey. Fact
sheets include visual aids, so make sure to review the resources on creating visuals from the policy tools short essay assignment. Your fact sheet should be at least 2 pages, but no longer than 4. Due November 17, 11:59pm.

Course synthesis paper (15% of course grade; individual assignment): Our final course module focuses on education through the lens of policies governing affirmative action in college admissions. In this module, we ask: What have been the goals of affirmative action policies in college admission processes?; Who benefits from those policies and what kinds of benefits result from affirmative action college admission practices?; What do we mean by "diversity" on college campuses, and are there alternative policies for ensuring that colleges are "diverse"? You will engage in this discussion through an essay of 750-1000 words that uses key concepts and materials from this and other course modules. Due during scheduled course finals time.

Grading Scale

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<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>A-</th>
<th>B+</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>B-</th>
<th>C+</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>C-</th>
<th>D+</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>D-</th>
<th>F</th>
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<tr>
<td>100-94</td>
<td>93-90</td>
<td>89-87</td>
<td>86-84</td>
<td>83-80</td>
<td>79-77</td>
<td>76-74</td>
<td>73-70</td>
<td>69-67</td>
<td>66-64</td>
<td>63-60</td>
<td>59 or below</td>
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Course Resources and Policies

Communication: Maintaining clear and open lines of communication with each other will be essential for your personal success, the success of your working group, and the success of our class work together. Email (evann@rice.edu) is the best way to contact me about course related matters, but I would be happy to set up a time to talk with you by phone, Zoom, or in person.

Student drop in sessions and scheduling appointments: Drop in sessions are scheduled times I set aside each week to meet with students. These are not just opportunities for addressing issues you might be having in the class; I encourage you to come by to talk about anything of interest to you in or outside of the course. If my scheduled drop in sessions don’t match up with your schedule, reach out to me via email so that we can find another time to talk virtually or in person. This semester, my scheduled drop in times are: Mondays 4:00-5:00pm (on Zoom) and Thursdays 11:30am-12:30pm in my office, Kraft Hall 467. You can join virtual drop-in sessions using the Zoom feature on our course Canvas site.

Late Assignments: I will not accept any assignments after the due date unless you have made prior arrangements with me. Make sure to contact me before an assignment is due to request an extension.
**Honor Code:** Rice University Honor Code is in effect for all work done in this course. For more details, see [http://honor.rice.edu/honor-system-handbook/](http://honor.rice.edu/honor-system-handbook/). This means that all written and oral work for this course must be your own. Students must obtain permission from me before using AI composition software (like ChatGPT, GPT-4) for any assignments in this course. Using these tools without my permission puts your academic integrity at risk.

Since you will be doing research for a number of assignments that involve summarizing and/or characterizing arguments of others, proper citation and attribution is imperative. Please consult with existing resources on proper citation and plagiarism. If you have additional questions, consult with the course instructor. Plagiarism is not tolerated in this course, and any work that has been plagiarized will receive an F grade.

**Student Mental Health:** The wellbeing and mental health of students is important; if you are having trouble completing your coursework, please reach out to the Wellbeing and Counseling Center. Rice University provides cost-free mental health services through the Wellbeing and Counseling Center to help you manage personal challenges that threaten your personal or academic well-being. If you believe you are experiencing unusual amounts of stress, sadness, or anxiety, the Student Wellbeing Office or the Rice Counseling Center may be able to assist you. 713-348-3311 (24/7).

**Title IX Responsible Employee Notification:** Rice University cares about your wellbeing and safety. Rice encourages any student who has experienced an incident of harassment, pregnancy discrimination or gender discrimination or relationship, sexual, or other forms interpersonal violence to seek support from The SAFE Office. At Rice University, unlawful discrimination in any form, including sexual misconduct, is prohibited under Rice Policy on Harassment and Sexual Harassment (Policy 830) and the Student Code of Conduct. As the instructor and a responsible employee, I am required by Title IX to disclose all incidents of non-consensual interpersonal behaviors to the Title IX Coordinator on campus. Although responsible employees are required to make this notification, it is the student’s choice to pursue a formal complaint. The goal is to make sure that students are aware of the range of options available and have access to the resources when in need. For more information, please visit [safe.rice.edu](http://safe.rice.edu), [titleix.rice.edu](http://titleix.rice.edu), or email [titleixsupport@rice.edu](mailto:titleixsupport@rice.edu)

**Religious Accommodations:** Both Rice's policy of non-discrimination on the basis of religion and our core values of diversity and inclusion require instructors to make reasonable accommodations to help students avoid negative academic consequences when their religious obligations conflict with academic requirements. Please be in communication with me prior to any religious holidays that may affect your coursework.

**Accommodations:** if you have a disability that requires accommodation, please contact both the course instructor and the Disability Resource Center in the Allen Center.