



SW382R Social Policy Analysis and Social Problems | Spring 2017

- Instructor: Diana DiNitto
- Course Unique Number: 61975
- Meeting Time: Wednesday 2:30PM - 5:30PM
- Meeting Place: Room 2.118



[Course Description & Objectives](#)



[Teaching Methods & Readings](#)



[Course Policies](#)



[Course Assignments](#)



[Course Calendar](#)



[Additional References](#)



[Appendices](#)



[Contact Information](#)

I. Course Description

This course critically examines, from both historical and current perspectives, the overall structure of the American social welfare system with a focus on the disproportionate social, economic, and political problems of vulnerable populations. The course also considers the parallel historical development of the profession of social work, including the ways in which it responded to social problems across key periods of social welfare policy development.

II. Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Understand the dominant historical themes that have shaped social welfare policy in the United States;
2. Understand the economic and political constraints and opportunities in the development of social welfare problems and policies;
3. Understand the relationship between the history of the social work profession and the development of social welfare policy;
4. Apply social work values to critically analyze social problems;
5. Gain knowledge and skills as a background for analyzing major policies that form the foundation of social welfare and analyze organizational, local, state, national and international issues in social welfare policy and social service delivery;
6. Understand social welfare policy arenas impacting service delivery, social work practice, and attainment of individual and social well-being;
7. Understand how social policies differentially affect diverse populations in American society;
8. Gain knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of social workers in the policy process, including advocacy, leadership, research, and community organizing, with the goal of promoting and advocating for social and economic justice through both organizational and social change.

[Go Back](#)

III. Teaching Methods

The teaching methods used in this course are interactive lectures (students are encouraged to ask questions and make comments); involvement in policy processes; attendance at policy-related lectures (e.g., sponsored by the School of Social Work); participation in conferences/trainings (e.g., sponsored by advocacy organizations); viewing films, video clips, and other media; guest presentations; readings; class discussions; in-class exercises; and student presentations. Student participation is critical to the learning process. As professional advocates, social workers must be able to articulate ideas clearly and persuasively. Therefore, all students are encouraged to actively engage in the opportunities this course provides to learn about social welfare policy and policy practice.

IV. Required Readings

Textbook

DiNitto, D. M. & Johnson, D. H. (2016). *Social welfare: Politics and public policy*, 8th ed. Boston: Pearson.

Other readings

Other readings may be assigned throughout the semester, and you will be selecting readings specific to your course project and brief policy assignments described later in the syllabus.

[Go Back](#)

V. Policies Specific to this Course

- 1. Professional conduct:** Your attendance, attention, and participation are expected for all class sessions (see Appendix A for reporting your attendance at the end of the term). Attendance includes arriving on time and remaining for the entire class session. Participation includes reading all assigned materials prior to the class session and engaging in class discussions and exercises. Lively class discussion is encouraged. Respectful communication is necessary to the learning environment. Attention includes turning off cell phone ringers and refraining from text messaging and other non-class activities. Students are also expected to observe professional codes of conduct with regard to confidentiality, dress, language, and other matters and exercise good judgment during class and while working with agencies, organizations, and other entities on assignments for this course.
- 2. Submitting assignments:** (a) Written assignments should generally be typewritten in 12-point font with reasonable margins; however, the format may be different for certain assignments such as policy briefs described later in the syllabus; (b) Assignment due dates are noted in the course calendar. **All** assignments are due at the start of the class period. Assignments turned in after the start of class will be considered late for that day unless **prior** arrangements have been made with the instructor. Except in the case of serious illness or emergency, **five points** will be deducted for each day an assignment is late (weekend days included); (c) The *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA) is the style manual to be used unless another referencing style is more appropriate for the assignment. Appropriate referencing of citations (authors, titles, page numbers, etc.) is required. This includes giving due credit to others when indirect quotes (paraphrasing) and direct (verbatim) quotes are used. Short direct quotes (usually of 5 or more words but less than 40 words) must be placed in quotation marks. Long direct quotes (40 or more words) must be indented. Paraphrasing requires more than changing a word or two in a sentence. Failure to give due credit to others will result in a **“0” for the assignment and/or an “F” for the course. Plagiarism is a form of scholastic dishonesty and will be addressed as such (also see items on scholastic dishonesty below and in section VI). If you do not know how to cite appropriately, please learn before you submit any assignments.**
- 3. Scholastic dishonesty:** Scholastic dishonesty in any of its forms may result in a report to the Assistant Dean for Master’s Programs in the School of Social Work, the Dean of the School of Social Work, the Dean of the Graduate School, and/or Student Judicial Services. Students may receive an “F” for the course and other sanctions in accordance with UT Austin policies, including dismissal from the university. Also see information on UT’s scholastic dishonesty policy at <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/>
- 4. Course modifications:** Course modifications may need to be made for various reasons such as weather that may result in cancelled classes. There are always many policy-related events such as conferences and presentations taking place on campus and in Austin and others that can be accessed via social media. We may want to take advantage of some of them, and this may also require modifying the course schedule. Should any modifications be made to the course schedule related to activities, content, assignments, etc., students will be notified in class and/or by e-mail. Other course communications may also be done via e-mail (also see UT’s policy on e-mail below in section VI). Students should check their e-mail frequently, and students who are absent from class should check on announcements made in class during their absence.
- 5. Canvas:** The Canvas website may be used for various class functions such as posting course documents and grades.

VI. University/School of Social Work Policies

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS HONOR CODE. The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward

peers and community.

PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT AND CIVILITY IN THE CLASSROOM. The professor expects students to act as professionals in class. This means students should arrive on time for class, be prepared to participate in the class discussion, and show respect for one another's opinions. A course brings together a group of diverse individuals with various backgrounds. Students are influenced and shaped by such factors as ethnicity, gender, sex, physical abilities, religious and political beliefs, national origins, and sexual orientations, among others. We expect to learn from each other in an atmosphere of positive engagement and mutual respect. Social Work also deals with complex and controversial issues. These issues may be challenging and uncomfortable, and it would be impossible to offer a substantive classroom experience that did not include potentially difficult conversations relating to challenging issues. In this environment we will be exposed to diverse ideas and opinions, and sometimes we will not agree with the ideas expressed by others. Nevertheless, the professor requires that students engage one another with civility, respect, and professionalism.

DOCUMENTED DISABILITY STATEMENT. Any student who requires special accommodations must obtain a letter that documents the disability from the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (471-6259 voice or 471-4641 TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing). A student should present the letter to the professor at the beginning of the semester so that needed accommodations can be discussed and followed. The student should remind the professor of any testing accommodations no later than five business days before an exam. More information may be found at <http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>.

UNANTICIPATED DISTRESS. Students may experience unexpected and/or distressing reactions to course readings, videos, conversations, and assignments. If so, students are encouraged to inform the professor. The professor can be responsive and supportive regarding students' participation in course assignments and activities, but students are responsible for communicating clearly what kind of support is desired. If counseling is needed, students may contact a service provider of their choosing, including the UT Counseling Center at 512-471- 3515 or online at <https://cmhc.utexas.edu/>.

POLICY ON SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, the student may refer to the Web Site of the Student Judicial Services, Office of the Dean of Students (<http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct/>).

POLICY ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION. Public social networks are not private. Even when open only to approved or invited members, users cannot be certain that privacy will exist among the general membership of sites. If social work students choose to participate in such forums, please assume that anything posted can be seen, read, and critiqued. What is said, posted, linked to, commented on, uploaded, subscribed to, etc., can be accessed and archived, posing potential harm to professional reputations and prospective careers.

Social work students who use social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and other forms of electronic communication (i.e. blogs, etc.) must be mindful of how their communication may be perceived by clients, colleagues, faculty, and others. Social work students are expected to make every effort to minimize material which could be considered inappropriate for a professional social worker in training. Because of this, social work students are advised to manage security settings at their most private levels and avoid posting information/photos or using any language that could jeopardize their professional image.

Students are asked to consider the amount of personal information posted on these sites and are obliged to block any client access to involvement in the students' social networks. Client material should not be referred to in any form of electronic media, including *any* information that might lead to the identification of a client or compromise client confidentiality in *any* way. Additionally, students must critically evaluate any

material that is posted regarding community agencies and professional relationships, as certain material could violate the standards set by the School of Social Work, the Texas Code of Conduct for Social Workers, and/or the NASW Code of Ethics.

Social work students should consider that they will be representing professional social work practice as well as The University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work program while in the classroom, the university community, and the broader area communities.

USE OF COURSE MATERIALS. The materials used in this course, including, but not limited to exams, quizzes, and homework assignments, are copyright protected works. Any unauthorized duplication of the course materials is a violation of federal law and may result in disciplinary action being taken against the student. Additionally, the sharing of course materials without the specific, express approval of the professor may be a violation of the University's Student Honor Code and an act of academic dishonesty, which could result in further disciplinary action. This sharing includes, among other things, uploading class materials to websites for the purpose of distributing those materials to other current or future students.

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS. By UT Austin policy, students must notify the professor of a pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If the student must miss a class, examination, work assignment, or project in order to observe a religious holy day, the professor will give the student an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

CAMPUS CARRY POLICY. The University's policy on concealed fire arms may be found here: <https://campuscarry.utexas.edu>. You also may find this information by accessing the Quick Links menu on the School's website.

USE OF E-MAIL FOR OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE TO STUDENTS. Email is recognized as an official mode of university correspondence; therefore, students are responsible for reading their email for university and course-related information and announcements. Students are responsible for keeping the university informed about a change of e-mail address. Students should check their e-mail regularly and frequently—daily, but at minimum twice a week—to stay current with university-related communications, some of which may be time-sensitive. Students can find UT Austin's policies and instructions for updating their e-mail address at <https://cio.utexas.edu/policies/university-electronic-mail-student-notification-policy>.

CLASSROOM CONFIDENTIALITY. Information shared in class about agencies, clients, and personal matters is considered confidential per the NASW Code of Ethics on educational supervision and is protected by regulations of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) as well. As such, sharing this information with individuals outside of the educational context is not permitted. Violations of confidentiality could result in actions taken according to the policies and procedure for review of academic performance located in sections 3.0, 3.1, and 3.2 of the Standards for Social Work Education.

TITLE IX REPORTING. In accordance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the University of Texas at Austin is committed to maintaining a learning environment that is free from discriminatory conduct based on gender. Faculty, instructors, staff, and/or teaching assistants in their supervisory roles are mandated reporters of incidents of sex discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual violence, or sexual misconduct. Students who report such incidents will be informed of University resources. Incidents will be reported to the University's Title IX Coordinator and/or the Title IX Deputy for the SSW, Professor Tanya Voss. Students, faculty and staff may contact Professor Voss to report incidents or to obtain information. Further information, including student resources related to Title IX, may also be found at <http://socialwork.utexas.edu/dl/files/academic-programs/other/qrg-sexualharassment.pdf>.

SAFETY. As part of professional social work education, students may have assignments that involve working in agency settings and/or the community. As such, these assignments may present some risks. Sound choices and caution may lower risks inherent to the profession. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of and adhere to policies and practices related to agency and/or community safety. Students should notify the professor regarding any safety concerns.

BEHAVIOR CONCERNS ADVICE LINE (BCAL). If students are worried about someone who is acting differently, they may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone their concerns about another individual's behavior. This service is provided through a partnership between the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://operations.utexas.edu/units/csas/bcal.php>.

EMERGENCY EVACUATION POLICY. Occupants of buildings on the UT Austin campus are required to evacuate and assemble outside when a fire alarm is activated or an announcement is made. Please be aware of the following policies regarding evacuation:

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors in the classroom and the building. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building.
- If you require assistance to evacuate, inform the professor in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow the professor's instructions.
- Do not re-enter a building unless you are given instructions by the Austin Fire Department, the UT Austin Police Department, or the Fire Prevention Services office.

Go Back

VII. Course Assignments and Student Evaluation

Students will be evaluated on (a) a series of seven short policy assignments, and (b) a legislative analysis project.

A. Short Policy Assignments

Students will complete seven short assignments designed to complement the class readings and enrich class discussions. Each should be single spaced and at least one page but no more than two pages long. Be prepared to discuss your assignments in class. These papers will be worth a total of 50% of the final grade.

1. Paper 1, due Week 4, Feb. 8: Increasing understanding of poverty and public assistance. Before doing this assignment, make sure you have read chapters 4, 7, 9, and pages 427-432 of chapter 11 in the textbook, then do **one** of the following (of course, you can do more than one if you wish).
 - a. If you volunteered for the ECHO Point in Time Count (noted below in the VIII. Course Calendar) and want to use the experience for this assignment, describe the experience, compare and contrast it with what you read in the chapters about homelessness and poverty and a recent news article you select about homelessness, and, finally, suggest policy and practice solutions that you think would make the greatest differences in ending homelessness in the Austin area and/or the United States at large. Be sure to specifically reference points in the text chapters and the news article; you may also refer to other readings you may have done on this topic. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development is a good source of information on policy approaches to homelessness and there are several coalitions that offer a great deal of information on issues of homelessness and solutions to homelessness (see chapter 4 of the textbook).
 - b. Nutrition assistance: In addition to the required text readings, read a recent news article about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and do one of the following: attempt to eat on a SNAP budget for one week OR using a SNAP budget, map out what you would eat for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks for one week and develop a shopping list for the week noting what food items you would purchase and their cost at a typical grocery store. Your paper should reflect on the experience you chose, especially in regard to your views of the adequacy or inadequacy of SNAP benefits. Compare and contrast your experience with the chapter readings, a news article, and other information you have read or know about SNAP. End your paper with your suggestions for improving SNAP with regard to factors such as the program's goals, eligibility requirements and procedures, or other features. A list of resources about SNAP will be provided.
 - c. Public assistance for families with young children: Learn more about the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program in Texas or another state (benefit levels, eligibility requirements, length of benefits, work requirements, etc.) and read a recent news article about the program. Describe that state's program you chose and compare and contrast it with points made in the text readings, especially chapter 7. You may wish to focus on aspects such as the adequacy of benefits and the fairness of the eligibility requirements and program rules. End with suggestions for improving the state's TANF program.
 - d. Child support: If you wish to focus on child support, learn more about the Child Support Enforcement (CSE) program in Texas or another state and read a recent news article about child support enforcement. Describe the method(s) used to determine child support payments in the state you chose and that state's CSE program. Find information that may be available on that state's CSE outcomes, for example, in the House of Representatives publication known as the "Green Book" at <http://greenbook.waysandmeans.house.gov/>. In reflecting on and citing this information, describe the major problems you see with CSE and suggest solutions for addressing them.
2. Paper 2, due Week 6, February 22: Increasing understanding of the Social Security retirement program. After reading chapter 5 and a recent news article of your choosing on Social Security, develop three questions or state three concerns you have about the program, and pose these questions/concerns to two or three of your family members, friends, or colleagues (try to include

someone who is currently receiving Social Security and others currently paying into the system but not yet receiving benefits, perhaps someone who is in their twenties and thirties and someone who is in their forties or fifties to get perspectives across generations). In your 1 to 2-page paper, note the three questions/concerns you developed. Reflect on them and the information you gleaned from the readings and discussions with family, friends, and colleagues. Discuss points such as the adequacy of benefits, the fairness of the programs, how you view Social Security's future, and what measures you think may be needed to improve the Social Security retirement program.

3. Paper 3, due Week 7, March 1: Increasing understanding of disability policy. After reading material in the textbook, especially Chapter 6, and a recent news article on disability policy, do the following: comment on three things you may not have known about disability policy or surprised you about disability policy citing the reading material. Go to three of your favorite places or take note of three different locations you are at during the week. For each location, note how accessible the location would be to a person with a mobility, visual, hearing, and/or other disability. If possible, speak with people who have a disability and ask them what policy or policies they would especially like to see changed about disability policy. Conclude your paper with three ideas you think are especially important for changes that should be made with regard to disability policy and note your rationale for selecting these three.
4. Paper 4, due Week 10, March 22: Increasing understanding of healthcare policy. Read material in the textbook, especially chapter 8, and a recent article on the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA, also referred to as "Obamacare") and how it is faring under President's Trump administration. In your 1 to 2-page paper, describe the ACA's current status and address the following question: If the United States was going to scrap its current approaches to healthcare and was going to develop an entirely new system with the goal of *improving the health of all Americans*, what type of healthcare system/s and approaches to healthcare delivery would you want to see enacted and why? Reference your readings in the paper.
5. Paper 5, due Week 11, March 29: Increasing understanding of child welfare policy or policy regarding abuse and neglect of older adults or people with disabilities. Do **one (or more)** of the following.
 - a. After reading chapter 10 of the textbook, read the Austin American-Statesman series entitled "Missed Signs, Fatal Consequences" at <http://projects.statesman.com/news/cps-missed-signs/> and a current news article on the state of child welfare policy reform in Texas. From the perspective of an aspiring professional social worker, use the first part of your 1- to 2-page paper to summarize the points you thought were most critical from a social work practice point of view, citing the sources. Using these and any other readings you may wish to cite, follow the first part of your paper with a discussion of what might be done through social welfare policy to improve Texas' child welfare system.
 - b. After reading chapter 10, read a scholarly article and a current news article on abuse/neglect of older adults or people with disabilities. From the perspective of an aspiring professional social worker, use the first part of your 1- to 2-page paper to summarize the points you thought were most critical from a social work practice point of view, citing the sources. Using these and any other readings you may wish to cite, follow the first part of your paper with a discussion of what might be done through social welfare policy to improve the protection of older adults or people with disabilities from abuse and neglect.
6. Paper 6, due Week 12, April 5. This assignment is dedicated to thinking about increasing the participation of underrepresented groups in policy processes, including elective office. Read a news and/or scholarly article on this topic and reflect on what you learned from participation in legislative advocacy events (these will be discussed in class), the Wendy Davis lecture (see the Course Calendar), and other experiences you had during this semester and previously. Devote your 1 to 2-page paper to describing your experiences and readings and present your ideas for increasing the political participation of members of underrepresented groups.

7. Paper 7, due Week 13, April 12. This assignment is dedicated to helping you learn to write opinion editorials. It is a common assignment across sections of SW382R (see the rubric in Appendix B that has been developed as a guide for assessing this assignment in all course sections).

Each student will write an opinion editorial related to her/his major course assignment (Legislative Analysis and Action Project described below). Opinion editorials, or "op-eds," are short commentary pieces. An op-ed is an excellent way to communicate your message and advocate directly to a broad audience. Op-eds appear each day in almost every newspaper and address current issues, express a viewpoint, and frequently offer policy or other solutions to social problems. If printed in newspapers, elected officials and other decision makers, opinion leaders, and a wide range of community members may read them. Your op-ed should do the following as articulated in the Council on Social Work Education's 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), competency 5: "Engage in policy practice": (1) "Identify social policy [and/or a social problem] at the local, state, and [or] federal level that impacts [human] well-being, service delivery, and access to social services"; (2) "Assess how social welfare and economic policies impact the delivery of and access to services" [and/or otherwise affect human well-being]; and (3) Demonstrate that you have "appl[ie]d critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, economic, and[or] environmental justice." Be sure to offer viable policy alternatives to improve human well being and suggest actions that policymakers and/or members of the public should take.

Class time will be dedicated to teaching you how to write a traditional op-ed piece, and you will be provided resources to assist in the process. Examples will also be provided of editorials and commentaries in electronic formats. You may submit your editorial in traditional, written form or in video or other electronic format. If you chose to write a traditional op-ed, it should be 500 to 750 words, single spaced. If you chose an electronic format, the number of words you use in written or spoken form should probably be similar and the op-ed should not exceed 3 or 4 minutes (depending on factors such as your use of graphics). Be sure your op-ed is based on solid evidence and sources and that you cite sources in a manner appropriate to an editorial. In preparing to write your editorial, study the op-ed page of newspapers such as the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Austin American-Statesman*, or your hometown paper, and read the paper's instructions for submitting an editorial. We will also discuss how to write an editorial in class. **If you decide to submit your editorial to a newspaper and it gets published prior to the end of the semester, you will receive 5 extra points toward your final grade.**

B. Legislative Analysis and Action Project

The legislative analysis and action project is designed to provide opportunities to learn more about the legislative process and an important current legislative issue of interest to the student; develop skills in policy analysis, writing, and presenting that are critical to the profession of social work; and learn more about different roles that social workers and others play in the policy process. **This project is worth 50% of the final grade.** It will include (1) a 5-page, single-spaced policy brief (not including references), (2) a letter to the editor AND/OR a one-page letter to an elected official, and (3) a brief (approximately 10-minute) class presentation in the form of legislative testimony. You can do this assignment alone or in pairs. All three parts of the project will be evaluated and graded as a whole.

Appendix B contains a form for writing up your plan for the legislative analysis and action project. Bring this form **to class on February 8 (Week 4)**. Turn in a draft of your brief and letter to the editor or elected official no later than **March 29 (Week 11)** (you may turn in your drafts earlier than the due date if you wish). You will receive feedback so that you can revise your work as needed. **The drafts are required (not optional) and are subject to the same penalties as final assignments if turned in late. More thorough drafts are likely to result in feedback that will be more useful in revising and finalizing the work. All final products are due on April 26 (Week 15). Submit all drafts reviewed by the instructor and/or TA with your final products along with the project form found in Appendix D and your attendance report found in Appendix A.**

To begin:

- Select a bill or two or more closely related bills on a social welfare topic of major concern (e.g., health care, mental health, child welfare, substance abuse) filed during the current regular (85th) Texas legislature session, which began on January 10, 2017. Suggested topics will be discussed in class. Students are encouraged to meet with the instructor and/or teaching assistant to discuss topics and plans for the project. A major source of help in selecting a bill is the Texas Legislature Online (<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/>). You may also select a bill from another state legislature or the U.S. Congress.
- Investigate the history of the issue and the bill; become familiar with the bill and related proposals/bills and their purpose (e.g., to introduce new legislation or modify existing legislation); and learn about the actions the legislature takes on the bill during the session/semester.
- Identify particular legislators, organizations, groups, committees, and individuals that are working to pass, amend, or defeat the bill, their positions on the bill, and the methods they are using to influence the legislation. Also identify groups that may be neutral or not taking a formal position on the bill and why.

It may help to approach this project, particularly the policy brief, as if you were working as a staff member of a legislative committee, an aide for a state legislator, or a policy analyst for a governmental or private social welfare agency or another organization concerned about social welfare policy such as a think tank, a membership organization like the National Association of Social Workers, or an advocacy group such as a human services coalition. In any case, prepare the policy brief so that it will thoroughly familiarize your "employer" or others, such as an organization's constituents or a broader public audience, about the issue and the bill(s) and help them decide what modifications, if any, are needed and why.

1. The 5-page policy brief should be organized in a manner that is relevant to the bill(s) you have chosen and written in the third person. We will discuss how to write a policy brief in class and study examples of policy briefs. Below are broad topics and points you should cover in your brief to the extent they are important to the bill(s) you selected:
 - (a) A brief introduction to the bill(s) stating its/their importance (positive or negative) for social welfare policy in Texas or the nation. Also include in the introduction a brief statement of the brief's purpose (what you intend to accomplish in it or what you want the reader to learn from it).
 - (b) A description of the problem/issue that necessitated or preceded the bill(s). What is the nature of the problem? How widespread is it? How many people are affected? Who is affected (everyone, particular groups such as those who are low income or living in poverty or in a particular age group?). How are they affected? What are the problem's known or suspected causes? How is the bill(s) intended to address the problem?
 - (c) The bill or bills' historical background, including historical antecedents. How much attention has this problem/issue received historically? How has the problem/issue been handled previously? How has the policy response changed over time? What is the bill(s) or related existing policy's legislative history? What recent events or situations led to the bill(s) being introduced? What are other state, federal, nations', or international policies regarding the problem/issue?
 - (d) A further description of the bill(s), including how it/they work if enacted. What resources or opportunities are expected to be provided (e.g., economic opportunity, cash, in-kind services, redistribution of goods and services, empowerment, status, preventive services, education, other)? Who will be covered and how (e.g., selective entitlement, universal entitlement, means testing, other)? How will the policy be implemented and by what entity? What are the policy's intended short- and long-term goals and intended outcomes? What funding is needed? What provisions are made, if any, for overseeing, evaluating, and coordinating policy implementation to ensure and/or determine its effectiveness? What criteria will be used to determine the policy's

outcomes and effectiveness? How long is the policy expected to exist (i.e., is there a specific requirement for review and continuation)?

- (e) Identification of individuals and groups concerned about the policy issue and their positions on the bill(s) and attendance at legislative hearings and other meetings where the bill or related issues will be addressed. **Be sure to interview concerned individuals and groups** (e.g., elected officials, legislative assistants, members of citizens' or advocacy groups, human service providers, consumer group members), and **attend legislative hearings and other meetings** of organizations, agencies, and committees where the issue is being discussed. Incorporate information gleaned from these activities in the analysis section of your brief (see point f below) and cite them correctly in the reference section. You may wish to do more than simply list the individuals and groups concerned and their positions and instead weave them into your analysis.
- (f) An analysis of the bill. The points covered in items f, g, and h are the **heart of the policy brief** and should comprise at least half the paper. Your analysis should reflect information addressed in the model(s) of policy analysis studied in this class or found in other sources. Address issues such as the value premises or ideological assumptions that underlie the bill. On what knowledge base or scientific grounding, if any, does the bill(s) rest? Is there empirical evidence that the bill(s) may achieve its intended result(s)? Are the goals just, democratic, and attainable? Is the bill(s) expected to contribute to a better quality of life for the target population by promoting social and economic justice, self-determination, self-realization, civil liberties or rights, empowerment, or other benefits, or might the bill(s) adversely affect the quality of life of the target or other groups?
- (g) Your conclusions. Based on your objective analysis, what conclusions have you reached about the bill(s) (i.e., proposed policy)? Are the goals politically feasible--i.e., is there sufficient legislative support for the bill(s)? Is public sentiment favorable toward the goals? Are the goals of the proposed policy economically feasible--i.e., is sufficient funding available to implement the policy and is it likely that funding will be continued as needed in the future? Are the goals administratively feasible--i.e., are there responsible administrative agencies capable of effectively implementing the policy to achieve its stated goals? Might alternative policies better achieve the goals? Is the policy important enough to justify the expenditure of scarce resources?
- (h) Your recommendations. What are your recommendations regarding the proposed policy? Do you recommend it as it is currently stated? Would you suggest modifications? How would you improve it?
- (i) **At least 12 scholarly references and three interviews correctly cited in APA format and noted in the text of the brief.** You may include both theoretical and empirical scholarly references. You may ALSO include references from the popular literature (newspapers, magazines) but these do not substitute for the minimum of 12 scholarly references (be careful about dubious sources of information, e.g., unsubstantiated references from unknown sources on the Internet).

THE POLICY BRIEF SHOULD PROVIDE A BALANCED, UNBIASED, CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE BILL(S), PRESENTING ACCURATELY AND FAIRLY EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE AS WELL AS PROPONENTS AND OPPONENTS' POSITIONS. NO MATTER HOW STRONGLY YOU FEEL ABOUT THE POLICY ISSUE(S) and BILL(S), YOU ARE PRESENTING AN OBJECTIVE ANALYSIS TO HELP OTHERS MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS.

2. Your letter to the editor or an elected official should be based on your research, analysis, and the position you have taken on the proposal as a result. Instructions for writing letters to the editor and legislators will be provided and discussed in class.

3. Make a 10-minute presentation to the class in the form of mock legislative testimony. Instructions for developing and presenting legislative testimony will be provided. Take a couple minutes to set the stage by explaining the bill and its status (e.g., was it tabled, left in committee, passed, vetoed by the governor); then use the remaining time to present your views and rationale for them. If you are working with a partner, you will still have 10 minutes to present total. Both of you should coordinate your testimony so as to limit repetition of the same points.

Criteria for Evaluating Short Papers and Legislative Analysis and Action Project (as appropriate for each assignment):

1. **Completeness and thoroughness:** How fully has the topic or issue been addressed? Has the topic or issue been sufficiently researched using scholarly and other resources, interviews, and other means in order to gain differing perspectives and full knowledge of the issue? Has the theoretical and empirical literature on the subject been incorporated in the project? Does the work leave the reader with the impression that major questions have been considered, or are important issues left unaddressed? Has the work been carefully proofread? (25 points maximum)
2. **Organization and clarity:** Is the policy brief or other product well written and organized in a logical manner? Are there appropriate transitions between sentences, paragraphs, and sections? Are the sentence structure and grammar of appropriate quality? Have descriptive headings and subheadings been used to improve organization of the policy brief? Are issues addressed in a way that someone unfamiliar with them can understand as well as someone knowledgeable about them? Are the editorial and letter to the editor or legislator presented appropriately for that medium? (25 points maximum)
3. **Referencing:** Are there a sufficient number of appropriate references as indicated for each assignment? Has referencing been done according to American Psychological Association (APA) or other appropriate referencing style? Are the references well integrated in the text? Are short direct quotations noted in quotation marks; are longer direct quotations indented; are page numbers or paragraph numbers for non-paginated electronic sources indicated for all direct quotations? Are indirect quotes paraphrased sufficiently? (25 points maximum)
4. **Originality and Creativity:** Does the work demonstrate a thorough understanding of the issues, varying viewpoints that have been compared and contrasted, and political considerations that will likely influence the legislation? Does the work demonstrate that the writer's or writers' analytical and critical thinking skills have been used in ways that suggest more than a restatement of what others have said about this issue, and have points been suggested that others have not addressed? Is the work written and formatted in a way that will gain the intended audiences' interest and attention? (25 points maximum)

Grading Scale: The grade for the legislative analysis assignment and the final course grade will be based on the following scale:

94 and above=A Work is exceptional on all criteria	74.0-76.999=C Work is adequate on most criteria
90.0-93.999=A- Work is exceptional on most criteria	70.0-73.999=C- Work is adequate on some criteria
87.0-89.999=B+ Work is good/very good on all criteria	67.0-69.999=D+ Work is inadequate on some criteria
84.0-86.999=B Work is good/very good on most criteria	64.0-66.999=D Work is inadequate on many criteria
80.0-83.999=B- Work is good/very good on some criteria	60.0-63.999=D- Work is inadequate on most criteria
77.0-79.999=C+ Work is adequate on all criteria	Below 60.0=F Work is inadequate on all criteria

Go Back

VIII. Course Calendar

Date	Topics	Readings (text)	Assignments Due
Week 1 Jan. 18	<p>Introductions of students and instructor</p> <p>Course overview</p> <p>What is social welfare policy and why isn't it more rational?</p> <p>What is policy practice and what do policy practitioners do? (Hint: "Policy affects practice, and practice affects policy.")</p> <p>Introducing the Social Work Grand Challenges</p> <p>Class exercise: If you could change a policy</p> <p>Volunteer Opportunity: ECHO 2016 Point in Time Count (if you participate, the experience can be used in the short policy assignment due on Feb. 8; training is Jan. 19, 6-8 PM and the count takes place on Jan. 28). Information on volunteering can be found at (http://austinecho.org).</p>	DiNitto & Johnson, Introduction: Politics, Rationalism, and Social Welfare Policy	Use these first weeks to get a start on your legislative analysis project
Week 2 Jan. 25	<p>Theories and language of welfare states</p> <p>Selecting a bill for your policy project and introduction to Texas Legislature Online (TLO)</p> <p>An overview of the 85th Texas legislative session and how social workers get involved in policy practice: Guest speaker, Will Francis, LMSW, Government Relations Director, NASW Texas (2:30)</p>	DiNitto & Johnson, Chapter 1, "Politics and the Policymaking Process"; Chapter 3, "Politics and the History of Social Welfare Policy"	Use these first weeks to get a start on your legislative analysis project
Week 3 Feb. 1	<p>Poverty and inequality in America</p> <p>Who pays, who benefits? Them, us, or all of us? (or why tax and budgeting policy are important)</p> <p>Why we can't agree on what poverty is, how to measure it, and if it exists in the USA</p> <p>Applying for TANF, SNAP, & Medicaid</p>	DiNitto & Johnson, Chapter 4, "Ending Poverty: Is It An Issue Anymore?"; Chapter 11, "The Challenges of a Diverse Society: Gender and Sexual Orientation," pp. 427-432	Use these first weeks to get a start on your legislative analysis project

<p>Week 4 Feb. 8</p>	<p>Poverty and inequality cont.</p> <p>A tale of two strategies for helping families with young children in the USA: Child support enforcement and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)</p> <p>How other countries do it, why they do it this way, and what difference it makes</p> <p>Class exercises: Living on public assistance and calculating a living wage</p>	<p>Radey, DiNitto, & Johnson, Chapter 7: "Helping Needy Families: An End to Welfare As We Knew It"; Kindle, DiNitto, & Johnson, Chapter 9, "Preventing Poverty: Education and Employment Policy"</p> <p>Article of your choice related to assignment #1 on public assistance or child support</p>	<p>Submit plan for Legislative Analysis and Action Project (see Appendix B)</p> <p>Short assignment #1 due</p>
<p>Week 5 Feb. 15</p>	<p>How the Texas legislature really works (what making sausage and making policy have in common or how an idea might become a bill and how a bill might become a law)</p> <p>Guest speaker: Tentative</p> <p>How to write policy briefs, editorials, testimony, and letters to the editor and elected officials</p>	<p>DiNitto & Johnson, Chapter 2, "Analyzing, Implementing, and Evaluating Social Welfare Policy"</p> <p>Materials on writing policy briefs, editorials, testimony, and letters to elected officials</p>	
<p>Week 6 Feb. 22</p>	<p>Social Security: Will it be there for you?</p> <p>Patty Duke and George Takei (Hikaru Sulu) enroll in Social Security retirement program</p> <p>Class exercise: Saving Social Security</p>	<p>DiNitto & Johnson, Chapter 5, "Preventing Poverty: Social Insurance and Personal Responsibility"</p> <p>Article of your choice on Social Security</p>	<p>Short assignment #2 due</p>
<p>Week 7 Mar. 1</p>	<p>Social construction and the history of disability policy</p> <p>New visions for disability policy</p> <p>Guest speaker: Tentative</p>	<p>DiNitto, Eisenbaum, & Johnson, Chapter 6, "Disability Policy: Embracing a Civil Rights Perspective"</p> <p>Article of your choice on disability policy</p>	<p>Short assignment #3 due</p>
	<p><i>Note: On Monday, March 6, NASW Texas will hold Social Work Advocacy Day at the Texas State Capitol. Details TBA. We will discuss participation in class. If you cannot participate in at least 3 hours of this event, do your best to participate in another organization's legislative advocacy day. If this is also not possible, discuss an alternative with the instructor.</i></p>		

Week 8 Mar. 8	<i>Note: We will not meet as a group on this day. This time has been allotted for outside class activities (attendance at a legislative advocacy day, the Dean Jack Otis Social Problem and Social Policy lecture described later in the course schedule, and committee hearings and related meetings you will attend for your policy analysis project).</i>		
Week 9 Mar. 15	Spring break: No class		
Week 10 Mar. 22	<p>Path dependence and the road to health care reform</p> <p>Will “Obamacare” become history?</p> <p>A global tour of health care policy: Frontline film “Sick Around the World” and related class exercise</p> <p>Guest speaker: Tentative</p>	<p>DiNitto & Johnson, Chapter 8, “Providing Healthcare: Can All Americans Be Insured?”</p> <p>Article of your choice on the current state of healthcare reform under the Trump administration</p>	Short assignment #4 due
	<p><i>Note: On Tues., March 28, former Texas State Senator Wendy Davis will present this year’s School of Social Work’s Dean Jack Otis Social Problem and Social Policy Lecture entitled “Embracing Feminism: The Case for Civic Engagement” from 7-8:30PM in the LBJ Auditorium. This is an important school event. Please do your best to make arrangements to attend this lecture. There is a class assignment associated with this lecture. If you cannot attend the lecture, see the course instructor to make arrangements for an alternative assignment.</i></p>		
Week 11 Mar. 29	<p>Child welfare policy: Protection from abuse and neglect, foster care, adoption, disproportionality and other issues plaguing the system</p> <p>Guest speakers: Child welfare panel</p> <p>Social services for older adults: Protection from abuse, neglect, and exploitation, guardianship, conservatorship, long-term care, and other issues as Americans live longer</p>	<p>Ritter, DiNitto, & Johnson, Chapter 10, “Providing Social Services: Help for Children, Older Americans, and Individuals with Mental and Substance Use Disorders,” pp. 369-399</p> <p>Austin American Statesman series “Missed Signs, Fatal Consequences”</p> <p>News article of your choice on child welfare reform in Texas or abuse and neglect of older adults or people with disabilities</p>	<p>Short assignment #5 due</p> <p>Draft of policy brief and letter to editor or elected official due</p>

Week 12 Apr. 5	Issues of diversity in social welfare policy (race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation) Immigration: Guest speaker (tentative)	DiNitto & Johnson, Chapter 11, "The Challenges of a Diverse Society: Gender and Sexual Orientation"; Chapter 12, "Challenges of a Diverse Society: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation" Article of your choice on political participation of underrepresented groups	Short assignment #6 due
Week 13 Apr. 12	How social policy can end the war on drugs Closing mental health and substance abuse service gaps Guest speaker: Tentative Brief project reports	DiNitto & Johnson, Chapter 10, "Providing Social Services: Help for Children, Older Americans, and Individuals with Mental and Substance Use Disorders"	Short Assignment #7 (editorial) due
Week 14 Apr. 19	Brief project reports		
Week 15 Apr. 26	Brief project reports Course instructor survey		Final written components of legislative analysis and action project (policy brief, letter to the editor or elected official, and Appendix D) due
Week 16 May 3	What's ahead in social welfare policy? Wrapping up the semester: Your future and careers in social welfare policy	DiNitto & Johnson, "Conclusion: Politics, Rationalism, and the Future of Social Welfare Policy"	

VIII. Course Evaluation

In addition to the official Course Instructor Survey that all students will be asked to complete at the end of the term, the instructor will request feedback from students at various points during the term. Students' input is welcome throughout the term to improve the course.

Go Back

IX. Additional References

- Alinsky, S. (1989). *Rules for radicals: A practical primer for realistic radicals*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Amidei, N. (2010). *So you want to make a difference* (16th ed.). Washington, DC: OMB Watch.
- Anderson, J. E. (2010). *Public Policymaking: An introduction* (7th ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Birkland, T. A. (2011). *Introduction to the Policy Process: Theories, concepts, and models of public policy making* (3rd ed.). Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.
- Blau, J., & Abramovitz, M. (2014). *The dynamics of social welfare policy* (4rd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bobo, K., & Kendall, J., & Max, S. (2010). *Organizing for social change: Midwest Academy manual for activists* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: The Forum Press.
- Brown, L. C., Langenegger, J. A., García, S. R., Lewis, T. A., & Biles, R. E. (2012). *Practicing Texas politics* (2011-2012 edition). Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Cummins, L. K., Byers, K. V., & Pedrick, L. (2011). *Policy practice for social workers: New strategies for a new era*. Boston: Pearson.
- Day, P. J., & Schiele, J. (2013). *A new history of social welfare* (7th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Dye, T. R. (2013). *Understanding public policy* (14th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Hick, S., & McNutt, J. G. (2002). *Advocacy, activism, and the Internet: Community organization and social policy*. Chicago: Lyceum.
- Hoefer, R. (2012). *Advocacy practice for social justice* (2nd ed.). Chicago: Lyceum.
- Jansson, B. S. (2014). *Becoming an effective policy advocate: From policy practice to social justice* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole.
- Karger, H. J., & Stoesz, D. (2014). *American social welfare policy: A pluralist approach* (7th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Popple, P. R., & Leighninger, L. (2015). *The policy-based profession: An introduction to social welfare policy analysis for social workers* (6th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Ritter, J. A. (2013). *Social work policy practice: Changing our community, nation, and the world*. Boston: Pearson.
- Rocha, C. J. (2007). *Essentials of social work policy practice*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Schneider, R. L., & Lester, L. (2001). *Social work advocacy: A new framework for action*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole/Wadsworth.
- Segal, E. A. (2014). *Social welfare policy and social programs: A values perspective* (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Cengage.
- Smith, C. F. (2016). *Writing public policy: A practical guide to communicating in the policy-making process* (4th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

Smucker, B. (1999). *The nonprofit lobbying guide* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Independent Sector.
Available at: http://www.clpi.org/CLPI_Publications.aspx

Wilson, J. Q., & Dilulio, J. J. (2015). *American government: Institutions & policies*. (14th ed.). Cengage Learning.

Go Back

X. Appendices

Appendix A: Attendance Report

Name: _____

The definition of attended a class session is that you were present for the entire session (neither arrived late nor left early). Unless you are ill, have an (unforeseen) emergency, or are excused to observe a religious holiday, the first absence results in 10 points subtracted from your final grade. Generally, missing two or more classes will result in an F for the course or the need to withdraw from the course depending on circumstances.

Week	Date	Attended (circle yes or no)	If no, indicate reason if you wish
1	Jan. 18	Yes No	
2	Jan. 25	Yes No	
3	Feb. 1	Yes No	
4	Feb. 8	Yes No	
5	Feb. 15	Yes No	
6	Feb. 22	Yes No	
7	Mar. 1	Yes No	
8	Mar. 8	Yes No	
9	Mar. 15	SPRING BREAK	NO CLASS
10	Mar. 22	Yes No	
11	Mar. 29	Yes No	
12	Apr. 5	Yes No	
13	Apr. 12	Yes No	
14	Apr. 19	Yes No	
15	Apr. 26	Yes No	
16	May 3	Yes No	

The above is a true reporting of my class attendance.

Signature

Appendix B: Plan for Legislative Analysis and Action Project

Your name(s):

1.

2.

Topic of interest:

Number, brief title, and two to three sentence description of bill(s) you will analyze:

Hearings, meetings you plan to attend:

1.

2.

Individuals you plan to interview and their titles and positions/organizational affiliations:

1.

2.

3.

Appendix C: Rubric for Opinion Editorial Assignment

Competency 5: Engage in policy practice	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Identify social policy at the local, state, and federal level that impacts well-being, service delivery, and access to social services.	Op-ed clearly and thoroughly identifies how current policy/state of affairs impacts well-being, service delivery, and/or access using sufficient data, research, other reputable source(s), and own analysis	Op-ed sufficiently identifies how current policy/state of affairs impacts well-being and service delivery and/or access, though some aspect and related support from data, research, other reputable source(s), and own analysis may be lacking	Op-ed identifies some aspects of how current policy/state of affairs impacts well-being and service delivery and/or access, though other important aspects and sufficient support from data, research, other reputable source(s), and own analysis are lacking	Identification of how current policy/state of affairs impacts well-being and service delivery and/or access are not addressed or are inadequately addressed, and data, research, other reputable sources, and own analysis are clearly lacking in the op-ed
Assess how social welfare and economic policies impact the delivery of and access to social services.	Op-ed clearly and thoroughly assesses how social welfare and economic policies impact service delivery and access using sufficient data, research, other reputable source(s), and own analysis	Op-ed sufficiently assesses how social welfare and economic policies impact service delivery and access, though some aspect of assessment, and support from data, research, other reputable source(s), and own analysis may be lacking	Op-ed assesses some aspects of how social welfare and economic policies impact service delivery and access, though other important aspects of assessment, and sufficient support from data, research, other reputable source(s), and own analysis are lacking	Assessment of how social welfare and economic policies impact service delivery and access are not assessed or are inadequately assessed and data, research, other reputable sources, and own analysis are clearly lacking in the op-ed
Apply critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.	Op-ed demonstrates the use of critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, economic, and/or environmental justice in ways that are clearly logical and likely to convince readers that the author has presented a valid case	The op-ed demonstrates the use of critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, economic, and/or environmental justice in ways that are sufficiently logical and may persuade readers that the author has presented a valid case	Op-ed demonstrates some aspect(s) of critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, economic, and/or environmental justice, but the extent of this application and its logic may be insufficient to convince readers that the author has presented a valid case	Op-ed fails to demonstrate that critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, economic, and/or environmental justice has been applied in ways that are logical, and the op-ed is unlikely to convince readers that the author has presented a valid case

Appendix D: Report of Legislative Analysis and Action Project

Your name:

Your partner's name (if any):

Number and brief title of bill(s) you analyzed:

Names, titles, and affiliations of those you personally interviewed:

1.

2.

3.

List hearings, meetings, and other events you attended (include a brief description of each):

1.

2.

Your contributions to the project, including written products:

Other information you wish to provide about your work (continue on reverse side of additional page if necessary):

Go Back

XI. Contact Information

- **Instructor:** Diana DiNitto
- **Office Number:** SSW 3.130B
- **Office Phone:** 512-471-9227
- **E mail:** ddinitto@mail.utexas.edu
- **Office Hours:** T 2:30-3:30; W 1:30-2:30 & 5:15-5:45; & by appt.

[Go Back](#)