

American Social Policy – Political Science #281

Illinois Wesleyan University

Dr. Greg Shaw

{sample syllabus only – this may not reflect the details of the current course}

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Course description and requirements:

This course examines several cases of social policy in the United States – historically and in the contemporary period – to highlight patterns of policy making and points of consensus and profound disagreement that result from both ideological and procedural concerns. We will address many of the normative concerns raised by various federal and state programs, in addition to the related areas of gender and race, from the 19th century to the present. Class discussions, readings, assignments, and in-class debates will cover cash assistance to low-income families, housing assistance and homelessness, Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, and affirmative action, among others. Of particular interest is how the ideological and cultural melting pot/salad bowl of America historically – and still – poses moral conflicts over the appropriateness of the welfare state and of individual rights more generally. Students are encouraged to examine the changing structures of the American welfare state, including the values these programs have reflected, and how they fit with or challenge students' personal ideologies.

Students' grades will be based on two essay-type exams, three short reflection papers, and class participation. Each of the exams is worth 20% of the overall course grade. The short papers are each worth 15% of the grade. Regular and thoughtful participation in class discussions comprises the remaining 15% of the grade. A few days before each of the exams I will distribute a list of questions resembling the questions that will appear on the up-coming exam. This should give you a framework for study and should be taken as a rough indicator of the level of difficulty and style of the actual exam questions. Taking an exam at a time other than the regularly scheduled time requires advance approval from me.

This class will involve a few in-class debates on topics we jointly will select. Each student will need to take an active role as part of his/her team in researching the team's positions and in representing those positions in class. Opinions will, of course, matter, but marshalling relevant facts and cogent arguments will matter more. Your individual and our collective success in these projects depend on your significant dedication to them.

Each of the reflection papers needs to consider how the cases put forth by the authors fit together or clash on a question or topic that you identify. Each paper should include ideas from three authors that you believe speak to a common theme. These papers should only minimally summarize the authors' arguments and should be comprised mainly by your reflections, critiques and syntheses of them. There are several ways to approach these papers. One is to create a partial or even reasonably complete reconciliation among claims that the authors implicitly or explicitly offer as contradictions of other authors. Another is to draw out previously unexplored ideas or lessons by synthesizing material across authors. A third is to use material from one author to critique another and to evaluate how well those criticisms stand up to your scrutiny. I suspect many of you will find these papers challenging. An early start, well ahead of the due dates listed below, will be very helpful. Late papers will suffer a 5 percentage point reduction in grade for each day they are late, weekends included. Papers should be typed, double-spaced, and between 5 and 6 pages long (feel free to print double-sided to conserve paper).

Grading policy and statement on academic integrity:

Final course grades will be assigned on the following basis: 90-100% = A/A-; 80-89% = B+/B/B-; 70-79% = C+/C/C-; 60-69% = D; below 60% = F. Taking a grade of incomplete in this course is very strongly discouraged. Under no circumstances will a student be granted a grade of incomplete without discussing the matter with me well in advance of the end of the semester. Regular attendance is required.

I am aware that academic dishonesty has become common at some institutions. While I am sure that very few, if any, Illinois Wesleyan students would cheat on class assignments, the university's policy and my policy on academic dishonesty bear repeating. Academic dishonesty fundamentally undermines the mission of the university and cheapens our collective enterprise. Students caught cheating on an exam or engaging in plagiarism on written assignments will receive a failing grade for the course. In these cases I will also file a formal complaint with the administration. The university's academic dishonesty policy states that the administration will move to expel from the university any student who is the object of two such substantiated complaints. See the university catalog for further explanation.

Course readings:

The following texts are required reading and are highly recommended for purchase:

From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America, 6th ed., Walter Trattner (Free Press, 1999)

There Are No Children Here: The Story of Two Boys Growing up in the Other America, Alex Kotlowitz (Anchor Books, 1991)

The Diminishing Divide; Religion's Changing Role in American Politics, Kohut, Green, Keeter, and Toth (Brookings Institution Press, 2000)

Selected chapters from the following books are on electronic reserve (the password is 'welfare'):

The Homeless, Christopher Jencks (Harvard University Press, 1994)

Where Are Poor People to Live: Transforming Public Housing Communities, edited by Bennett, Smith, and Wright (M.E. Sharpe, 2006)

Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980, Charles Murray (Basic Books, 1984)

Medicaid and Devolution: A View from the States, edited by Frank Thompson and John DiIulio, Jr. (Brookings Institution Press, 1998)

Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby, Stephen Carter (Basic Books, 1991)

The Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions, William Bowen and Derek Bok (Princeton University Press, 1998)

Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries, Orlando Paterson (Basic Civitas Books, 1998)

La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty, Oscar Lewis (Random House, 1965)

Justice, Gender and the Family, Susan Okin (Basic Books, 1989)

Mooney and Lee, chapter 11 in *The Public Clash of Private Values*

Same-Sex Marriage Pro & Con: A Reader, Andrew Sullivan, Vintage, 2004

Topics	
Week of:	Readings
Introduction and course overview	Lewis, excerpt from introduction
Examining our values regarding individual worth, social insurance, and economic opportunity	Trattner, chapter 1
Poor relief from the colonial period to 1935	Trattner, chapters 2, 4, 6, 10
Poor relief from the New Deal to the Great Society	Murray, chaps. 11, 12, 15-17 Trattner, chapters 12-14
Welfare policymaking since the 1960s	Trattner, chapter 15-17 Okin, chapters 6, 7
Medicaid & Medicare	Thompson & DiIulio, chaps. 2, 7, 8
<i>1st reflection paper due</i>	
Social Security: Its past and future	Aaron and Reischauer, chapters 1, 3, 5, 6, 8 [optional but very helpful]
Low-income housing assistance	Kotlowitz, entire text Chapters from <i>Where Are Poor People to Live?</i>
Homelessness	Jencks, chapters 1-6, 10, 11
<i>First exam: covering all material to date</i>	
Race in America	Patterson, chapter 2 (“Feast of Blood: ...”) selection from Paul Sniderman
Affirmative Action	Carter, chaps. 1-3 Bowen & Bok, chaps. 1, 9 & 10
Capital punishment	Mooney, chapter 11
<i>2nd reflection paper due</i>	
Abortion policy	TBA

Religion in public life

Chapters from *The Diminishing Divide*

The politics of gay rights
(debate same-sex marriage)

Chapters from *Same-Sex Marriage Reader*

Conclusions

TBA

3rd reflection paper due

Final exam: cumulative w/ emphasis on 2nd half of the course

Some of you may want to read more about some of these topics. In the interest of helping you in your quest for knowledge, I've jotted down some suggestions for further reading. These are organized by topic. By no means is this list exhaustive.

Abortion: For a general overview, see McFarlane and Meir's *The Politics of Fertility Control* (2001). See also Lawrence Tribe's *Abortion: The Clash of Absolutes*.

Affirmative action: Bowen and Bok's *The Shape of the River* is the single best account of the effects of affirmative action in college admissions currently available.

Capital punishment: For an overview of capital punishment see Harry Henderson's *Capital Punishment*. For a discussion of the morality of capital punishment, see *Executing Justice: The Moral Meaning of the Death Penalty* by Lloyd Steffen.

Housing and homelessness: The literature on homelessness tends to be not especially systematic, perhaps due to the extreme difficulty of studying that population. You might consult *Sidewalk*, by Mitchell Duneier. See also *Helping America's Homeless*, by Burt, Aron, Lee and Valenta. For an account of how people often become homeless, *Paths to Homelessness: Extreme Poverty and the Urban Housing Crisis*. Joel Blau's *The Visible Poor: Homelessness in the United States* is also a good read. For a powerful journalistic account, see *Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America* by Jonathan Kozal.

Medical assistance: For an early history of public health provision in America, see Paul Starr's *The Social Transformation of American Medicine: The rise of a sovereign profession and the making of a vast industry*. The best account of Medicaid in the 1980s is *Medicaid Since 1980*, by Coughlin, Ku and Holahan.

Race, politics and public opinion: One important beginning point here is W.E.B. Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk*. See also Gunnar Myrdal's *The American Dilemma*. Regarding lingering racism in America, see Sniderman and Piazza's *The Scar of Race*. For a thoughtful treatment of cross-race differences in opinions on broad questions of economic achievement, see Jennifer Hochschild's *Facing up to the American Dream*. For an excellent account of African-American public opinion, see Michael Dawson's *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African-American Politics*. For accounts of the intersection of race and the welfare state, see Jill Quadagno's *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty*, or Robert Lieberman's *Crossing the Color Line*. See also William Wilson's *The Truly Disadvantaged* and *When Work Disappears* for discussions of race and poverty.

Religion in public life: A good and recent treatment of this topic is *With God on Our Side* by William Martin. See also Stephen Carter's *The Culture of Disbelief*.

Welfare: One of the best and reasonably comprehensive histories of welfare in America is Michael Katz's *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*. Histories of welfare in the US prior to the Social Security Act of 1935 include Theda Skocpol's *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, and Linda Gordon's *Pitied but Not Entitled*. Michael Harrington's *The Other America* prompted some soul searching in the 1960s about the need to address poverty during the Great Society era. Piven and Cloward's *Regulating the Poor* offers a well developed argument about the coercive functions of the welfare state. R. Kent Weaver's *Ending Welfare As We Know It* is probably the best account of the 1996 ending of AFDC and launch of TANF. Rebecca Blank and Ron Haskins' *The New World of Welfare* offers some good accounts (some very narrowly focused) of post-1996 welfare.