

American Social Policy – Political Science #281

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Course description and requirements:

This course examines a variety of social policies in the United States – historically and in the contemporary period – to highlight patterns of policy making and points of popular consensus and profound disagreement. We will address many of the normative concerns raised by various federal and state programs. Class discussions, readings, assignments, and in-class debates will cover assistance to low-income families, food security, Social Security, the Earned Income Tax Credit, reproductive rights, affirmative action, church and state separation, and capital punishment. 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' own perspectives. This course carries general education credit in analysis of values and the U.S. diversity flag.

It will be very important, for our collective success and for your individual benefit, that the class actively cultivate an ethos of respectful honesty regarding our normative reactions to these issues. I strongly discourage self-censoring, unchecked anger, or refusal to hear the other. Openness and honesty about our differences will take us a long way toward better mutual understanding, and will make our class discussions much more informative and interesting.

Students' grades will be based on a series of quizzes, two exams, one short reflection paper, a simulation, a pair of debates, and class participation. The weighting of grades is as follows:

5 quizzes (5% each)	25%
reflection paper	15%
midterm exam	15%
final exam	20%
desert island simulation	3%
two debates (5% each)	10%
participation generally	12%

In Canvas you will find study guides listing terms and concepts that will be helpful in preparing for the quizzes and final exam. Taking a quiz or exam at a time other than the regularly scheduled time requires advance approval from me.

This course will involve 2 in-class debates. Each student will need to take an active role as part of her/his/their team in researching the team's positions and/or representing those positions in class. Logical arguments will, of course, matter, but marshalling relevant facts will matter more. Your individual and our collective success in these projects depend on your significant dedication to them. Your participation in these debates will be graded by a confidential peer-evaluation of your contributions. You will find the peer evaluation form in Canvas.

For the short reflection paper, see the guidance document and grading rubric near the top of our Canvas page. Briefly, this assignment asks you to imagine a conversation among three of the authors on our syllabus. You will write this paper in line with instructions that you will find in the guidance document. Depending on your background, some of you may find this paper challenging. An early start will be helpful. Visit the IWU Writing

Center at Ames. Papers will suffer a 5 percentage point reduction in grade for each day they are late, weekends included. Email late papers to me to stop the penalty clock.

You will take 5 quizzes via Canvas but outside of class time. These will almost always occur on a Monday afternoon / evening. See dates below. Each quiz will cover approximately 2 weeks of material. You will be allowed one attempt at about a dozen multiple-choice questions, and you will work within a time limit (approx. 20 minutes). Each quiz will be available from 4:00pm to 11:59pm on each quiz day. You are expected to complete these quizzes without accessing any other materials. If you attempt to rely on materials other than your memory, you will likely run out of time. Each quiz will cover the material presented since the previous quiz. Without advance approval, there are no opportunities for make-up quizzes. Put these in your calendar at the beginning of the semester.

The midterm and final exams will take the form of longer sets of multiple-choice / matching questions. The two exams only minimally overlap. The final exam is not designed to be cumulative. You should create an excellent set of notes that cover both readings and class discussions. You will take the exams in class, via Canvas in class, and you will not be permitted to access any other materials.

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. Pluses and minuses typically range approximately 3 percentage points from the deciles. Taking a grade of incomplete in this course is 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 expected and necessary if you are to do well in this class. Each unexcused absence beyond the first will result in a 1 percentage point reduction in your overall grade. Excused absences – such as for illness, varsity athletics, and music performances – require timely documentation.

If you have a learning accommodation in place with the university, I encourage you to speak with me about your needs. I look forward to working with you to help ensure a highly successful experience in this class. If you believe you need such an accommodation but do not yet have one in place, you should visit the Advising Office at your earliest convenience.

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. This includes working on quizzes or exams with others, which is not something you are permitted to do. You may not use artificial intelligence to generate written work. In cases of academic dishonesty I will also file a formal complaint with the administration. Per the university's academic dishonesty policy, 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 text is required reading:

Greg Shaw, *The Welfare Debate*, Greenwood Press, 2007

All the other readings and videos are linked in Canvas. Do your best to review each week's materials prior to coming to class.

Topics	
Week of:	Readings
Th: Introduction and course overview	Desert island simulation (in Canvas)
T: Developing an ideological map	Lakoff, <i>Don't Think of an Elephant!</i> , ch. 1
Tuesday 4pm to 11pm, on your own: take the practice quiz in Canvas (ungraded but useful)	
Th: Finishing the desert island simulation	Sandel, <i>Justice</i> , ch. 6
	Holbrook, "Why I Am a Libertarian"
• You MUST turn in your simulation worksheet at the beginning of class on Thursday the 16 th	Clayton, "Why I Am Not a Libertarian"
	Lewis, from introduction of <i>La Vida</i>
<i>First quiz: Tuesday the 21st, 4:00pm – 11:59pm, via Canvas</i>	
T: Equality, equity & ice cream	Murray, excerpt from <i>Losing Ground</i>
Th: The making of the modern welfare state	Kaus essay in the <i>New Republic</i> , 7/86
	Shaw, <i>The Welfare Debate</i> , chap. 3
T: The war on poverty	Shaw, <i>The Welfare Debate</i> , chaps. 4 & 6
PBS documentary	
Th: Welfare history, how should we evaluate the war on poverty?	
T: Welfare policy in the 2000s	Hays, <i>Flat Broke with Children</i> , chap. 8
Th: discuss welfare readings	Shaw, <i>The Welfare Debate</i> , chap. 7
T: Debate: welfare overhaul, 1996 – present: success or failure?	
Th: The Earned-Income Tax Credit	Holmes and Berube essay
	Larry Mead essay
	Listen / view the mini-lecture on the EITC
	https://www.cdcfoundation.org/sites/default/files/files/EITC_PublicHealthActionGuide.pdf
<i>Second quiz: Monday the 17th, 4:00pm – 11:59pm, via Canvas</i>	
T: Tax breaks & subsidies as social policy	Mettler, <i>The Government-Citizen Disconnect</i> , ch. 3
Th: Midterm exam (covers all material to date)	
Social Security	Cohen, American Progress report on Social Security
	Warshawsky, AEI report on Social Security
	View the mini-lecture on Social Security in Canvas

Report from American Progress:
<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-house-republican-study-committee-budget-proposes-harsh-changes-to-social-security/>

T: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

CATO Institute report, 2023

Nestle essay (2019)

Th: National School Lunch Program

John Oliver video on school lunches (link in Canvas)

Humphreys, lunch shaming essay

Friday, March 8th: Your reflection paper is due by 4pm. Provide a paper copy delivered to my office.

Spring break

T: Discuss your trip to Kroger

See document in Canvas: “Let’s go shopping”

Food deserts

Alkon et al., “Foodways of the Urban Poor”

Th: Tobacco control

Brownell & Warner, Big Tobacco & Big Food

Malone, essay on tobacco control

van der Eijk and Chen, Tobacco 25 essay

Third quiz: Monday the 24th, 4:00pm – 11:59pm, via Canvas

Affirmative Action in higher education

Carter, *Reflections of an Affirmative Action*

Baby, chaps. 1-3

Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard

(2023) read the Court’s syllabus

Reproductive rights

Excerpts from *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health*

Organization (2022)

Fourth quiz: Monday the 7th, 4:00pm – 11:59pm, via Canvas

T: Religion in public life

Excerpt, *Masterpiece Cake Shop v. Colorado* (2018)

303 Creative vs. Elenis (2022), the Court’s syllabus

Th: Debate – public accommodations / services, the 1st amendment, and religious beliefs

Capital punishment

George Ryan, “I Must Act”

Cassell, “In Defense of the Death Penalty”

Stephen Breyer, dissent in *Glossip v. Gross*

Fifth quiz: Monday the 21st, 4:00pm – 11:59pm, via Canvas

Tuesday: summation and course evaluations

Final exam: In-class, via Canvas: multiple choice & matching, covers 2nd half of the course, ~23 questions, 75 minutes