Main objectives

To improve students’ factual understanding of U.S. social policy. This means learning how major U.S. social programs work, such as their eligibility, benefits, financing, and cost. And it means recognizing historical milestones and important trends. While much of the course will focus on traditional social programs (e.g., Social Security, Medicaid), we will also investigate tax expenditures and social regulations.

To improve students’ theoretical understanding of U.S. social policy. We’ll pay particular attention to the role of institutions, values, interest groups, and political parties in shaping social programs. Students will learn how each theory works, as well as the analytic strengths and weaknesses of each. Students will test at least one of these theories in their research paper.

To become familiar with current debates over social policy. Examples include health reform and the future of retirement pensions.

Why take this course?

Because social policy provides valuable insights into the workings of American government. Spending for social welfare routinely accounts for over half of the national budget. Health care, unemployment, and inequality are some of the central domestic issues of our time. You cannot understand public policy in the United States without knowing something about social policy.

Because the emergence of the welfare state was one of the most important transformations of government in the 20th century.

Because the course has been taught several times, always to good reviews, and the teacher specializes in U.S. social policy.

Because the course meets in Morton Hall (“The Morton”), an architectural marvel that is convenient to all points on campus.
Assigned readings

The one book you need to buy is Boomerang by Theda Skocpol; it’s a very good case study of the Clinton health plan. Most of the readings, however, will be available via Blackboard or the Internet. As you will see, I have assigned readings from a wide variety of academics, think tanks, foundations, and government agencies. I want you to become familiar with many of the people and organizations that work on social policy, and I want to expose you to some arguments that you may not like. Note: some readings are listed as TBA because I expect interesting articles will be published during the semester (e.g., about legal challenges to the recent health reform).

The list of readings is not set in stone. I may substitute readings if I find something better; the length of any new reading will be close to the original. I also reserve the right to add to the reading list, though never more than about 5 pages per class session. Mostly, I want to be able to pass along some interesting article about current events to you. I will not do this very often.

I expect you to keep up with recent developments in social policy at the national level. You would be smart to read a major newspaper or Internet news site regularly. Current events are fair game for class discussions and any tests.

Course web site (Blackboard)

This is a great tool and you should use it often. The most important sections include:
+ Announcements (highlighting key facts, concepts, debates, or puzzles from the readings; notifying you of upcoming speakers; answering questions raised in class);
+ Course Documents (containing the syllabus, lecture notes, and assigned readings);
+ Assignments (featuring important information about the two tests, research proposal, and research paper); and
+ External Links (helping you learn more on your own about U.S. social policy; helping you find evidence for your research paper)

Course assignments (more details later in the semester)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Due</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Grade Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M, February 14</td>
<td>First test</td>
<td>15 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>F, March 4</td>
<td>2-page research proposal</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>M, April 4</td>
<td>Second test</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>M, April 18</td>
<td>8-page research paper</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>M, May 9 or W, May 11</td>
<td>Take-home final exam</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Each week</td>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>10</td>
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Grading policies

I do not grade on a fixed curve. If all students submit excellent work, all receive excellent grades. In practice, some students always perform better than others, and no two years are exactly alike. One year recently, half the students earned an A or A- in this course. Another year, only about 10% of students earned A or A-, and one-third earned Cs.

The single most important assignment is the research paper. The topic is mostly up to you; the main idea is to use one or two theories discussed in class to better understand the politics of a specific policy or program. While the assigned readings are designed to give breadth to your understanding of social policy, this assignment is supposed to give analytic depth. For example, in the paper you might analyze how interest groups helped enact the Medicare drug benefit in 2003. Or you might assess the influence of public opinion on the minimum wage during the 1980s and 1990s. Examples from earlier eras and cross-national comparisons are also possible. Remember, this will be an 8-page paper, not a book, so you need to pick a topic with clear boundaries. However much you might want to write about federalism and programs for the poor, you can’t possibly do a good job in just eight pages.

Some topics are off-limits. You cannot write an opinion piece, such as what you think should be done to reform Social Security. Nor can you write a program evaluation, such as how much the 1996 welfare reform reduced poverty. Still, you have lots of options.

Regardless of your topic, you must conduct substantial outside research. I will offer more guidance later in the semester. In the meantime, start thinking about what topic you might like to investigate in more depth.

Tests and papers are normally graded on a 10-point scale. Any late assignment will be penalized five percentage points per day (e.g., a 91 becomes an 86 after one day and an 81 after two days), and that includes weekends. The only legitimate excuses for completing an assignment late are documented medical or family emergencies, or religious observances. In short, I need to see a note from a dean or a doctor. Computer problems and heavy demands from other courses can be anticipated and worked around. The same is true of athletic contests, model UN conferences, LSAT tests, volunteer work, job interviews, and the like.

NOTE: Anyone who fails to complete an assignment will fail the course.

NOTE: You must keep a copy of your research paper until I have returned a graded copy to you.

Class participation is not a big (10%) part of your grade, but it’s still important. Social policy lends itself to lots of good discussions; I definitely do not plan to lecture non-stop this semester. What do I expect from students? At a bare minimum, class participation requires regular attendance. Of course, some students come to class all the time, look alert, but barely say a word. That’s not enough. To do well you need to ask me questions, answer my questions, or respond to your classmates’ comments every week. At the other end of the spectrum are students who talk all the time but don’t say much that’s new or interesting. You need to
demonstrate a serious engagement with the readings, lectures, and fellow students. In short, your class participation should be active and informed.

If you have a documented learning disability and need special consideration in taking notes, completing exams, or writing papers, please notify me during the first week of classes so we can make suitable arrangements. I typically have students each semester in this situation, so don’t hesitate to contact me.

Finally, please read and follow the Honor Code. I direct your attention to two of the most important passages:

“All academic work undertaken by a student must be completed independently unless the faculty member or other responsible authority expressly authorizes collaboration with another.”

“Plagiarism occurs when a student, with intent to deceive or with reckless disregard for properly scholarly procedures, presents any information, ideas or phrasing of another as if they were his or her own and does not give appropriate credit to the original source.”
W, 1/19 Course objectives, assignments, topics, readings
No assigned readings

I. JUSTIFYING THE WELFARE STATE
F, 1/21 Minimal government; safety net for the poor
Charles Murray, Losing Ground, ch. 17 (Blackboard);
Rebecca Blank, It Takes a Nation, pp. 191-207 (Blackboard)

M, 1/24 Earned benefits for many; social rights for all
www.ssa.gov/history/whybook.html;
Lawrence Mead, “The Rise of Paternalism” in Mead (ed.), The New Paternalism,
pp. 1-11, available as an e-book via Swem Library;
T. R. Reid, The Healing of America, pp. 205-17 (Blackboard)

II. DESCRIBING THE WELFARE STATE
W, 1/26 The U.S. in cross-national perspective
John Kingdon, America the Unusual, pp. 15-21 (Blackboard);
Christopher Howard, The Welfare State Nobody Knows, ch. 1 (Blackboard)

F, 1/28- Helping the sick
M, 1/31 Christopher Howard and Edward Berkowitz, “Extensive But Not Inclusive:
Helping the sick
Health Care and Pensions in the United States,” pp. 70-79 (Blackboard);
Kaiser Family Foundation, Medicare at a Glance (Sept. 2010), available at
www.kff.org/medicare/upload/1066-13.pdf and The Medicaid Program at a

W, 2/2 Helping the aged
Howard and Berkowitz, “Extensive But Not Inclusive,” pp. 79-91 (Blackboard);
Social Security Administration, Understanding the Benefits, available at
www.ssa.gov/pubs/10024.pdf

F, 2/4 Helping those who can’t work or are out of work
Social Security Administration, Disability Benefits, available at
www.ssa.gov/pubs/10029.pdf;
Virginia Employment Commission, Unemployment Insurance Claimant
Handbook (July 2009), available at
M, 2/7- Helping the poor and near-poor

F, 2/11 Review for first test; discuss research proposal; catch up on current events
No assigned readings

M, 2/14 First in-class test

III. EXPLAINING THE WELFARE STATE
a. Influence of institutions
W, 2/16- Which institutions matter, and how
Robert Lieberman, Shifting the Color Line, pp. 13-22 (Blackboard);
Theda Skocpol, “The Limits of the New Deal System and the Roots of Contemporary Welfare Dilemmas” (Blackboard)

M, 2/21- Policy feedback
W, 2/23 Eric Patashnik, Reforms at Risk, ch. 5 (Blackboard)

Andrea Campbell, How Policies Make Citizens: Senior Political Activism and the American Welfare State, chs. 2, 4 (Blackboard);

F, 2/25 How to write a good research paper for this class
Jonathan Kirshner, “Alfred Hitchcock and the Art of Research” (Blackboard);
Read 3 examples of student papers (Blackboard)

b. Influence of values/ideology
M, 2/28 Which values matter, and how
Kingdon, America the Unusual, pp. 23-37 (Blackboard);
Seymour Martin Lipset, American Exceptionalism, pp. 71-76 (Blackboard);
David Ellwood, Poor Support, pp. 14-26 (Blackboard)
W, 3/2 Whose values matter? 

F, 3/4 Case study: values and “welfare” 
Martin Gilens, “How the Poor Became Black” (Blackboard)

Note: your 2-page research proposals are due in class on March 4

M, 3/7 - Spring Break
F, 3/11

M, 3/14- Case study: values and health care
W, 3/16 No assigned reading for Monday

Lawrence Jacobs and Robert Shapiro, Politicians Don’t Pander, ch. 3 (Blackboard)

c. Influence of organized groups
F, 3/18 Political parties and interest groups
Larry Bartels, Unequal Democracy, ch. 2 (Blackboard); 
Daniel Gitterman, Boosting Paychecks, ch. 3 (Blackboard); 
Jill Quadagno, One Nation Uninsured, ch. 2 (Blackboard)

M, 3/21- Case study: Clinton health plan
F, 3/25 Theda Skocpol, Boomerang, preface, introduction, chs. 1-2

Skocpol, Boomerang, chs. 3-4

Skocpol, Boomerang, chs. 5-6, afterword

M, 3/28 Catch up on current events
Readings TBA

d. Combining explanations
W, 3/30 Institutions, culture, organized groups
Read either Lawrence Jacobs, “Institutions and Culture: Health Policy and Public Opinion in the U.S. and Britain,” World Politics (January 1992): 179-209 (JSTOR); or Kenneth Finegold, “Agriculture and the Politics of U.S. Social Provision” (Blackboard)
F, 4/1  Review for test; answer questions re- research paper
No new readings

M, 4/4  **Second in-class test**

**IV. CURRENT POLICY DEBATES**

*a. Health reform, 2010*

W, 4/6  Key provisions

F, 4/8  Against the odds, how it became law

M, 4/11-  Major challenges (legal, administrative, fiscal)
Social Security and Medicare Boards of Trustees, *Summary of 2010 Annual Reports*, available at [http://www.ssa.gov/oact/trsum/index.html](http://www.ssa.gov/oact/trsum/index.html) (note: focus on Medicare); Reading(s) TBA

*b. Retirement pensions*

F, 4/15  Can we afford to retire?

M, 4/18  Possible policy changes

Note: your 8-page research papers are due in class on Monday, April 18

W, 4/20

What the people say


c. *Down and out in America*

F, 4/22

Quick snapshots of poverty, inequality, and unemployment


Reading TBA re- unemployment

M, 4/25

Diagnoses from the left


Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, “Winner-Take-All Politics” (Sept. 20, 2010), available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=547d2Ge_j2o (watch first 32 minutes)

W, 4/27

Diagnoses from the right


F, 4/29

Final thoughts; teacher-course evaluations

M, 5/9 (noon)

Take-home final exam due for 11 am section

W, 5/11 (5 pm)

Take-home final exam due for 10 am section