Course Description

This course will introduce you to the politics of social policy in the United States. We will begin by surveying the state of poverty and inequality, then review the origins of modern social insurance and redistribution. Next, we will unpack what social science can tell us about why these policies look the way they do and what their future may hold. Finally, we will dive into specific policy areas, addressing current debates using the social science lens we’ve developed. The course builds to an op-ed assignment on a policy of your choice, which you will submit to a media outlet of your choosing.

Learning Goals

By the end of this course, a successful student will be able to:
1. Navigate the array of public policies designed to address poverty, inequality, and opportunity in the United States.
2. Apply concepts of institutional and behavioral political science to current policy debates discussed in mass media.
3. Convey ideas through persuasive, written argument in the form of an op-ed.

Readings

All readings will be posted on Blackboard. Readings are subject to change up to one week before their assigned class. Please check the syllabus posted on Blackboard for updates.

Course Assignments and Grading

Grades will be composed of the following:
• 10% Attendance and participation
• 20% Midterm exam
• 10% Op-ed draft
• 10% Peer review of op-ed draft
• 25% Final op-ed
• 25% Final exam
Assignments

Assignments have strict deadlines of 11:59:59 pm on the due date. Missing this deadline by less than one day will result in a 10 percentage point deduction from the assignment’s grade. Each additional day late will result in an additional 10 percentage point deduction. For example, for an assignment is due Sunday evening, submission on Tuesday morning will result in a maximum grade of 80/100. This is non-negotiable. Any potential conflicts need to be brought to my attention more than 72 hours in advance of the assignment deadline.

Op-Ed

You will write an op-ed on a social welfare policy of your choosing. You will graded on the rough draft as well as the comments you provide on a peer’s rough draft. For full credit, you must submit your op-ed to an external media outlet, turning in an email of the submission to the medial outlet along with your final draft.

Attendance and Participation Policy

A focus of this class will be learning from your peers through discussion. As a result, attendance is mandatory and will be taken at the beginning of each class. You may miss up to 3 classes. Beyond those 3 classes, every unexcused absence deducts 2 points from your final grade.

You are also required to come to class on time. If you cannot arrive on time owing to extenuating circumstances, you must let me know in advance. If you are not present at the beginning of class, you will be marked late. 3 latenesses count as one unexcused absence.

You are expected to actively contribute to the discussion, both in small groups and as a whole. A component of participation is respect for your peers. Laptops are permitted for note taking. However, checking email, text messages, social media, or unrelated websites in class is unprofessional, will count against your participation grade, and may result in you being asked to leave lecture.

Exams

There will be a midterm and a final exam. The midterm will be held on October 16th and the final will be held on December 16th or 18th, depending on your section. Exams are closed book and closed notes. Makeup exams during the semester are possible for excused absences. However, there are no makeups for the final exam.

Disabilities Accommodation

It is college policy to provide accommodations and academic adjustments for students with disabilities. Any student with a disability who may need accommodations in this class is requested to speak directly to Student Disability Services located in Newman Vertical Campus, Room 2-271 as early in the semester as possible. All discussions will remain confidential.

Academic Integrity

Students are encouraged to work together to understand and synthesize the readings and materials. However, Baruch College’s policy on academic honesty will be enforced. Any plagiarizing or cheating will result in a failing grade for the course and will be reported to the Dean of Students Office.

Important Dates

- Monday, September 16th - Last day to drop without a grade of W
- Wednesday, October 16th - Midterm exam
Course Calendar

Module 1. What is Social Policy?

- Wednesday, August 28th - Class canceled due to American Political Science Association conference.
- Monday, September 2nd - Labor Day, no class collegewide.
- Wednesday, September 4th - Introduction
  - No assigned reading.
- Thursday, September 5th - The State of Inequality and Poverty
- Monday, September 9th - The American Welfare State in a Comparative Context
- Wednesday, September 11th - Causal Inference
- Monday, September 16th - How Taxes Fund Policy
- Wednesday, September 18th - Social Welfare History in the United States: 1933 -1992
- Monday, September 23th - Social Welfare History in the United States: 1992 to Present
Module 2. The Politics of Social Policy

- Wednesday, September 25th - Ideology
- Monday, September 30th - No class collegewide.
- Wednesday, October 2nd - Perceptions of Poverty and Inequality
- Monday, October 7th - Voice and Participation
- Wednesday, October 9th - No class collegewide.
- Monday, October 14th - No class collegewide.
- Wednesday, October 16th - Midterm
- Monday, October 21th - How to Write and Op-Ed
  - Packet of Op-eds.
- Wednesday, October 23rd - Social Movements and Mobilization
  - Madison, James, 1787. *Federalist No. 10.*
- Monday, October 28th - Identity and Race - Op-ed draft due
- Wednesday, October 30th - Institutions
- Monday, November 4th - Geography

• Wednesday, November 6th - Federalism

• Monday, November 11th - Policy Feedback and Path Dependence - Op-ed comments due

Module 3. Becoming a Policy Expert

• Wednesday, November 13th - Social Security

• Monday, November 18th - ‘Welfare’ and SNAP
  – Matthews, Dylan. 2016. “If the goal was to get rid of poverty, we failed’: The Legacy of the 1996 Welfare Reform” Vox.

• Wednesday, November 20th - Healthcare

• Monday, November 25th - Employment Policy - Op-ed due

• Wednesday, November 27th - Education

• Monday, December 2nd - Housing
  – Mathews, Dylan. 2019. “America has a housing segregation problem. Seattle may just have the solution.” Vox.

• Wednesday, December 4th - Homelessness and Substance Use Disorders

• Monday, December 9th - To be determined.

• Wednesday, December 11th - Conclusions of Social Policy

- Monday, December 16th - F Section, Final Exam, 3:30 to 5:30 pm
- Wednesday, December 18th - E Section, Final Exam, 3:30 to 5:30 pm