

PUBP 3201: Introduction to Social Policy Issues

Georgia Tech – Fall 2026

Instructor:

Jovan Julien

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Office Hours:

Wednesday, 2:00PM – 3:00PM

George Tower, 1742

Class Meets: Tuesday & Thursday, 3:30pm-4:45pm, Howey Physics S204

Course Description

No society is without its problems. We study them to help us understand conditions we consider problems, define collectively-shared values, and develop solutions. This course examines contemporary social problems and their historical antecedents, which includes analyzing their causes, effects, and possible remedies or policies that could address these issues.

We will explore how government policies that respond to the aforementioned social problems are created, implemented and evaluated to address the diverse social needs of citizens. Social policy focuses on addressing inequalities that exist in healthcare (disparities, inequalities, and policy implications), human services, education, public understanding of science, housing, criminal justice, poverty and employment.

We will focus on social policy in the U.S. context, though we will often compare these efforts to those in other countries. We will examine the theoretical, practical and ideological explanations of policy choices, as well as consider how public opinion shapes these choices and alternative policy proposals. Importantly, we will focus on how to overcome challenges in social policy development to identify potential policy innovations for solving our most intractable social inequities.

We will explore the following questions:

- What is the role of government in addressing social inequality?
- How is the governments role and response moderated by public opinion (which public(s) and whose opinions?)?
- How do we know, measure, and/or quantify when social policies work or fail?
- What innovations might be possible?
- How do we develop social policies that are responsive to the diverse needs of communities in the U.S.?

Additional questions that may arise during the course include

- How different values and ideologies guide different policy approaches to a social problem?
- How values and ideologies influence policy analysis?
- How policy analyses are used in public discourse and policy development?

Course Objectives

By completing this course, you should be able to:

- Explain major social policies/programs in the U.S. context.
- Compare different theories on how to address social issues.
- Identify approaches for evaluating the impact of social policies on diverse communities.
- Describe current issues in designing social policy.
- Recognize the conditions for social policy innovation.

This is a Core IMPACTS course that is part of the Social Sciences area.

Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help master course content, and support students' broad academic and career goals.

This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question:

- How do I understand human experiences and connections?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcomes:

- Students will effectively analyze the complexity of human behavior, and how historical, economic, political, social or geographic relationships develop, persist or change.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Intercultural Competence
- Perspective-Taking
- Persuasion

Course Texts

- Assigned readings will be made available to you via Canvas

Grade Scale

A= 100-90 B=89-80 C=79-70 D=69-65 F=64 and below

Deadlines and Grading

Deadlines for each assignment are provided in the *Assignment Schedule* in this Canvas. Please add them to your calendar as late assignments will not be accepted without formal accommodation facilitated through the Disability Resource Center or the Office of Student Life.

You have ONE opportunity to request a re-grade on either a Weekly Reflection or Writing Assignment. You must have made an attempt on the assignment in order to update your submission (i.e., you cannot miss the deadline and then submit an assignment). This is an opportunity for you to update your work based on feedback provided and further engage with

the course material. Re-grade requests must be made to me via email by 11:59PM Friday of each week. The very last day to request a re-grade is 11/27.

Course format and requirements

The course is structured to maximize student participation; therefore, each student must be prepared—i.e., have carefully read the assignment—for each class. The more effort you put into the course, the more you benefit from the course. Lectures will help to establish a common universe of discourse during the first part of the course and provide supplemental material to inform class discussion.

To pass the course, students must meet **every one of the following requirements on schedule:**

- 1) **Class participation (10%)**. Each student should be prepared for each class meeting by not only reading the assigned material, but also giving careful thought to it. It is recommended that you take notes while reading to formulate discussion points and questions; you may bring both readings and notes to class. Class participation is evaluated on the basis of the quality—not the quantity—of your contributions to class discussion. I ask that everyone attend, be prepared for, and actively and respectfully participate in each class.

All materials, unless noted otherwise, are available in Canvas or through the GT Library.

- a. **Policy Labs** are interactive activities and discussions that take place during class, typically on Thursdays. These are designed to help you better understand the material we are covering that week as well as further define your questions and perspectives on key areas of social policy design and implementation.
 - b. Monte Carlo quizzes if needed
- 2) **Weekly Reading Reflections (25%)** –Every week, you will complete your reading reflection by Friday at 11:59PM. These will cover material from that week and are meant to prepare you for discussion.
- 3) **Critical Thinking Assignment (25%)** – There will be four critical thinking assignments to choose from throughout the semester. You are only responsible for submitting TWO of these. This assignment provides you with an opportunity to more deeply engage with a policy area you may be interested in. All assignment options will be made available for you to see by Week 2. You are welcome to turn in any of these early, but late assignments will not be accepted.
- 4) **Final Paper (40%)**– Acknowledging that you will each have a different interest area that brings you to this course, I would like for you to create a final project that reflects (a) your learning from the course and (b) how you might apply that to something you are passionate about. The final project guidelines will be posted, but there will be two deadlines:
 - a. **Paper Proposal**– Instead of a midterm exam, you will submit a project outline that includes an abstract describing your project topic and purpose and where you might begin your research (10/9 @11:59PM).
 - b. **Final Paper** – Instead of a final exam, you will submit a final paper for the course (12/11 @11:59PM).

COURSE POLICIES

The Syllabus and Outline

The syllabus represents a contract between the instructor and the student. Students should read it carefully and ask the instructors any questions she/he/they may have. The student is ultimately responsible for obtaining any clarification and/or answers to any questions she/he/they may have about the course before the end of the add/drop period. The student's decision to remain in the course beyond the add/drop period represents her/his/their understanding and acceptance of the expectations and requirements laid out in the course syllabus.

Class Culture

Social policy issues are often contentious and affect-laden—that is, they tend to evoke an emotional response. Therefore, discussion will be driven and informed by **data that are valid, credible, and reliable**. The major guiding principle of this course is: **critique an argument, do not criticize the person making the argument**.

Time Allocation

Over the length of this course, students will spend an average of 3 hours per week devoted to classwork (including lecture and discussion). Although specific out-of-class time investments may vary for individual students, a reasonable estimate of time to support the learning goals of this course is 90 out-of-class hours, averaging 6 hours weekly.

Office Hours

I will tentatively hold office hours on Wednesday from 2:00PM – 3:00PM on Wednesday in location TBD.

I really enjoy meeting with students! However, please note that office hours are for clarification of material, not for recreating a lecture if you missed class. For that, please get with other students to share notes and get a recap.

Syllabus Policy

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus if necessary. I will give you fair notice (at least a week) if something, such as a reading assignment, is going to change.

*The course calendar lists the topics for discussion for each class meeting. In addition to scheduled discussion, developing policy issues will be discussed in real time, because American public policy is dynamic. **The instructor reserves the right to revise the syllabus and course calendar.***

Preferred Name and Pronouns

Class rosters are provided to me with the student's legal name – sometimes that does not include your preferred name and/or gender identity. I would genuinely like to address you by your preferred name and/or pronouns. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

Disability Resource Center

If you anticipate needing classroom or exam accommodations due to the impact of a disability or medical condition, you must register for services with the Office of Disability Services:

<https://disabilityservices.gatech.edu/>

Withdrawal Policy

Please find all current policies on withdrawal from the Institute here:

<https://registrar.gatech.edu/registration/withdrawal-and-dropping-courses>

Culture of Honesty Policy

You are responsible for knowing and complying with the policy and procedures relating to academic honesty. To understand what constitutes dishonest work, as defined by the University, please carefully review the policy here: <https://policylibrary.gatech.edu/student-life/academic-honor-code>

Violations of the academic dishonesty rules are grounds for receiving an “F” in the course as well as possible expulsion from the university. If you have any questions about what constitutes cheating, academic misconduct, or plagiarism, examine the University policy and /or ask me.

Emails

Please give me at least 24 hours to respond to emails on weekdays and 48 hours on weekends. If I do not respond by then, please do follow-up! As instructors, our inboxes can become overwhelmed very quickly and I genuinely want to be available when you have questions or need assistance.

ChatGPT and AI

You are welcome to use the abundant resources created by the machine learning world. However, you must use these responsibly and appropriately. It may be used for generating topics or reviewing content for grammatical issues, but not for writing the content of your assignments. If you use it in any way, you should note that in the assignment. You should also be prepared to comment on what you used it for, what it got right and what it got wrong. And trust me, it got something wrong. ***If you use it without proper citation, this will be considered academic dishonesty (see Culture of Honesty Policy).***

Mental Health and Wellness Resources

Mental health is paramount to our overall health and success. If you or someone you know needs assistance, you are encouraged to contact the Center for Mental Health Care & Resources (<https://mentalhealth.gatech.edu/>). The Center has resources for students dealing with anxiety, depression, loss/bereavement, family issues, and other social needs.

A full list of resources for students at Georgia Tech may be found here:

<https://students.gatech.edu/student-resource-guide>

If you are having a hard time getting the help you need, please let me know and we can work on getting you routed to the right GA Tech team member.

Prohibition on Recording Classes

In the absence of written authorization from the Office of Disability Services, students may not make a visual or audio recording of any aspect of this course.

Attendance is the prerequisite for—not the same as—class participation (you must attend in order to participate). At the start of each class session, an attendance sheet will be circulated. Students are responsible for signing the attendance sheet for themselves only; failure to sign constitutes an unexcused absence. More than two unexcused absences will impact negatively on the final grade. Typically, absences are approved in cases of illness, personal and family emergencies, and representing Georgia Tech at professional events. If you anticipate being absent for a class, please send me an e-mail with the date of and reason for the absence.

Tentative Course & Assignment Schedule

Unless otherwise noted, Tuesday will be lecture and Thursday will be Policy Labs.

Date	Topic	Readings/Materials	Assignments
Week 1	Part I: Getting Started / Succeeding Part II: Thinking About Social Issues	- Syllabus - Suggested: Dugan (2024, Ch 2)	- About You Quiz - Syllabus Quiz Due 8/28 at 11:59PM
Week 2	Part III: Theory and Ideology	- Gough (1978) - Dugan (2024, Ch10)	Weekly Reflection– Due 9/4 at 11:59PM
Week 3	Part IV: Development of US Social Policy	- Skocpol (1996) “Storming Ceasar’s Palace” (PBS)	1st CT Option –Due 9/11 at 11:59PM - Weekly Reflection – Due 9/11 at 11:59PM
Week 4	Part IV: Development of US Social Policy	“The Diversity Dilemma” (CBS News) - Optional: Norton, Conway & Foster (2002)	Weekly Reflection – Due 9/18 at 11:59PM
Week 5	Part V: Key US Programs	“What I Hear When I Hear Welfare Queen” (PBS) CBPP (2024) Coy (2024)	2nd CT Option –Due 9/25 at 11:59PM - Weekly Reflection – Due 9/25 at 11:59PM
Week 6	Part V: Key US Programs	Pradhan & Liss (2024) “What to know about Georgia’s controversial approach to expanding Medicaid” (PBS NewsHour)	Weekly Reflection– Due 10/2 at 11:59PM
Week 7 NO CLASS 10/6 (FALL BREAK)	Part VI: Actors, Interests & Jurisdiction	Ludden (2024) - Engeman (2021)	3rd CT Option –Due 10/9 at 11:59PM • - Weekly Reflection– Due 10/4 at 11:59PM
Week 8	Project Mapping TBD Guest Speaker	<i>No new readings or content</i>	Final Project Proposal due

			10/16 at 11:59PM
Week 9	Part VI: Actors, Interests & Jurisdiction	• Miller (2024) • Fry, Yee & Jetha (2023)	• 4th CT Option –Due 10/23 at 11:59PM • <i>[Optional reflection due 10/23 at 11:59PM]</i>
Week 10	Part VII: Innovations in Social Policy	• McKnight (1995, 80-88) • Moulton, Sanford & Merrick (2018)	• Weekly Reflection– Due 10/30 at 11:59PM
Week 11	Part VII: Innovations in Social Policy	• Johnstone & O'Hare (2024)	• <i>No reflection due</i> •
Week 12	Part VIII: Today's Social Challenges	• Head (2022) • Reardon (2023)	• Weekly Reflection– Due 11/13 at 11:59PM
Week 13	Part VIII: Today's Social Challenges	• Economist (2024)	• Weekly Reflection– Due 11/20 at 11:59PM
Week 14 NO CLASS 11/26 (THANKSGIVING)	Project Presentations	• Olson et al (2023) • Breslow (2024)	•
Week 15	Social Policy Jeopardy	• <i>No new reading or material</i>	• <i>No reflection</i>
Week 16	Final Reflections	• <i>No new reading or material</i>	• <i>No reflection</i>
<i>Reading Day is 12/10</i>			
No final exam. You will need to submit the final version of your paper by December 10 th at 11:59PM EST.			

Reading List

Breslow, Jason. 2024, June 28. "New York City is moving to ban phones from school. Will it work?" *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/2024/06/28/nx-s1-5021605/school-cellphone-bans-new-york-city>

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP). 2024, May 31. "Policy Basics: Top Ten Facts about Social Security". *CBPP*. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/social-security/top-ten-facts-about-social-security>

Coy, Peter. 2024, May 13. "Want to Fix Social Security? The Well-Off Must Accept Smaller Checks. *NY Times OPINION*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/13/opinion/social-security-retirement-benefits.html>

Danielson, J. Taylor, and Robin Stryker. 2014. "Cultural Influences on Social Policy Development", in *The Oxford Handbook of U.S. Social Policy*, edited by Daniel Beland, Christopher Howard, Kimberly J. Morgan.

Dugan, John P. 2024. *Leadership Theory: Cultivating Critical Perspectives, 2nd Edition*. John Wiley & Sons: New Jersey.

Economist Intelligence Unit. 2024, May 1. "Fighting disinformation gets harder, just when it matters most." *The Economist*. <https://www.economist.com/science-and-technology/2024/05/01/fighting-disinformation-gets-harder-just-when-it-matters-most>

Engeman, Cassandra. 2021. "When Do Unions Matter to Social Policy? Organized Labor and Leave Legislation in US States." *Social Forces*, 99(4): 1745–1771. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soaa074>

Fry, Wendy, Erica Yee and Rya Jetha. (2023, June 23). "California is the first state to tackle reparations for Black residents. What that really means." *CalMatters*. <https://calmatters.org/explainers/reparations-california/>

Gough, Ian. 1978. "Theories of the welfare state: a critique". *International Journal of Health Services*, 8 (1). pp. 27-40.

Head, Brian. 2022. "Wicked Problems in Public Policy Understanding and Responding to Complex Challenges." Palgrave Macmillan: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-94580-0>

Johnstone, Jean, and Michael O'Hare. 2024. "Art for policy and policy for art." *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 30(2): 256–273.

McKnight, John. 1996. *The Careless Society: Community and Its Counterfeits*.

Miller, Ken. 2024, August 2. "Tulsa commission will study reparations for 1921 race massacre victims and descendants." *AP News*. <https://apnews.com/article/tulsa-race-massacre-commission-d4b3b3bbff288bd92e3a8b3b0df720f#>

Ludden, Jennifer (2024, July 22). "As new tech threatens jobs, Silicon Valley promotes no-strings cash aid. NPR: All Things Considered." <https://www.npr.org/2024/07/19/nx-s1-5035263/basic-income-cash-aid-ai-sam-altman-silicon-valley-jobs>

Norton, Andy, Tim Conway, and Mick Foster. 2002. "Social Protection: Defining the Field of Action and Policy." *Development Policy Review*, 20 (5): 541-567.

Olson, Jay A., Dasha A. Sandra, Samuel P. L. Veissière, and Ellen J. Langer. 2023. "Sex, Age, and Smartphone Addiction Across 41 Countries." *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*.

Pradhan, Rachana and Samantha Liss. 2024, June 24. "Medicaid for Millions in America Hinges on Deloitte-Run Systems Plagued by Errors." *KFF Health News*.

<https://kffhealthnews.org/news/article/medicaid-deloitte-run-eligibility-systems-plagued-by-errors/>

Reardon, Sara. 2023, June 14. "AI Chatbots Could Help Provide Therapy, but Caution Is Needed." *Scientific American*. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/ai-chatbots-could-help-provide-therapy-but-caution-is-needed/>

Skocpol, Theda. 1996. "The Politics of American Social Policy, Past and Future", 309-340., published in *Individual and Social Responsibility: Child Care, Education, Medical Care, and Long-Term Care in America*, edited by Victor R. Fuchs. Chicago University Press.

Watts, Julie, Jui Sarwate, and Grace Manthey. (2024, June 13). "Are California's Mental Health Courts successful? That depends on who you ask because there's no reliable data." *CBS News*. <https://www.cbsnews.com/sacramento/news/how-successful-are-mental-health-courts/>

Wright-Mendoza, Jessie. 2019, May 3. "The 1910 Report That Disadvantaged Minority Doctors." *JSTOR Daily*. <https://daily.jstor.org/the-1910-report-that-unintentionally-disadvantaged-minority-doctors/>

Addendum

Weekly Reading Reflections

Each student will individually complete the reflection papers. The purpose of these informal essays is for you to ruminate on our readings and discussions. You can also choose to focus comparatively on at least two readings with one based on the week of the assignment.

Here are questions to help guide you on you as you write your papers:

- How is the theory in the readings connected to the practice of public policy?
- What readings & class discussions connect with your live experience or questions that you are engaging as student and scholar?
- What 2 (or more) readings spark your imagination and thinking? How are they related to each other? Do they take different theoretical positions? Do you agree? Disagree?
- These are not formal research papers, but you should use APA guidelines for citing your sources and completing a reference page.
- Each paper is 1-2 pages long, double-spaced, 12-point font.

Final Paper:

Each student will do a final project/paper. Your project, which may be done collaboratively, will evolve out of class discussions, readings, your own field(s) of inquiry, and other experiences or work (where applicable). You should use APA guidelines for citing your sources and completing a reference page. The final project will be a minimum of 10-15 pages. Rough draft due: Nov 12, 2026.

Stage One of Proposal for final project due in class 10/15/2026

In no more than 1 page (single-spaced), briefly address the following questions: After receiving my feedback, you can begin stage 2.

1. What topic are you interested in exploring?
2. Why is it important to study?
3. What questions do you want to answer in this project? Of these questions, what is the central research question?
4. How might you go about finding answers to your question(s)?
5. What are the implications of your study?
6. If applicable, what time frame do you want to cover? Consider ways to narrow your topic/scope, since this is only a 10-15 page paper.

Submit your assignment on the course Canvas site and come to class ready to discuss your topic with your peers.

Stage Two of Proposal for final project due in class 11/12/2026

Write a minimum of 2-3 pages. After receiving my feedback, you can go to your rough draft.

1. Write your thesis/opening paragraph.
2. List what you are going to cover in your paragraph. Write an outline, do an idea tree, or write in any form you are comfortable with, as long as you are clear about what you are going to address in your project.

List at least 3 or 4 references you are going to use. List correctly using APA guidelines.

Grade Evaluation

- **An “A” paper...** You’ve demonstrated a thoughtful understanding of the readings & themes. You’ve cited readings carefully & drawn upon your own experience &/or classroom discussions. Your paper is clear and well organized. It is probably the maximum length for the assignment. Paragraphs connect and there are solid transitions. Your ideas are original. There are very few sentence level errors.
- **A “B” paper ...** is solidly written, covers the readings & key issues, & is well organized. It meets the page requirements. It uses less details and examples drawn from readings, discussions & personal experiences. Your paragraphs connect. There are some sentence level errors, but not many.
- **A “C” paper...** fulfills the requirements but doesn’t have much depth & looks like it hasn’t been revised much. It rambles, isn’t well organized & doesn’t draw carefully on readings &/or discussions. The paper barely meets page requirements. There are many sentence level errors.
- **A “D” paper...** is too short & lacks any depth. It has lots of errors & is a response to course materials that does not draw directly on readings & discussions. It is disorganized and hasn’t been revised at all.

Course Contracts:

You can contract for an “A” or a “B”. I view the classroom as a workplace where high-quality engagement is expected and rewarded. Throughout the semester, you will have an opportunity to earn points for the work you do both inside and outside the classroom. All work will be evaluated based on the competency and grading criteria as discussed in this syllabus. I am available via e-mail or by appointment to discuss any questions you have about assignments.

- “A” contracts can earn a total of 100 points during the course of the quarter.
- “B” contracts can earn 83 points:

Weekly Reflections: Contracting for the “A” requires eight of the nine reflection papers; contracting for the “B” requires five of the nine reflection papers.

Final Paper: “A” contracts require one to write no more than 15 pages; “B” contracts require at least 8 pages (double spaced for everyone):

Classroom Ground rules:

I ask you to follow these basic ground rules to create an atmosphere that encourages a high level of participation by each of us, and a respectful space in which we can dialogue.

1. We all have knowledge. We are all experts in some areas. Everyone also has ignorance in some areas. We all have something to teach and something to learn. We cannot be blamed for repeating misinformation we have learned, but we can hold each other responsible for repeating misinformation after we have learned otherwise.
2. Try to participate, even if you are quiet. We will all try to draw out those who are more quiet than others, and insure that those of us who talk a lot, don’t dominate conversation.

3. There are some things we will not debate: classism, racism, sexism, imperialism/colonialism and homophobia (and discrimination against disabled people, elders, children, Jews, Arabs, etc.) exist as part of the culture and structure of this society, and we will not tolerate their expression.
4. We encourage everyone to re-think the assumptions and knowledge they bring with them. The process of learning requires us to open our hearts and minds.
5. We will act with mutual respect for everyone's knowledge and experience by making space and time for everyone's participation. We will never demean, devalue or in any way put down people for their experiences.
6. We will welcome critical feedback and suggestions for this course.

Rotating Chair: Rotating chair is a mechanism to facilitate class discussion. The person who has the floor and is speaking will recognize the following speaker. If you wish to respond to a speaker, you should raise your hand and the speaker will call on you. The speaker should look around the room and give consideration to the person who has spoken the least. Try not to interrupt a speaker by waving your hand before he/she/they have finished speaking. The purposes of rotation chair are 1) to break down the hierarchy between students and instructor; 2) to communicate to all individuals present (not just student answering teacher); 3) to regulate who speaks (not just teacher and exceptionally vocal students).