

# Social Policy Issues

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Last Updated: Wed, 07/09/2025

**Course prefix:** PUBP

**Course number:** 4200

**Section:** 01

**CRN (you may add up to five):**  
93832

**Instructor First Name:** Ezra G

**Instructor Last Name:** Goldstein

**Semester:** Fall

**Academic year:** 2025

**Course description:**

This course will explore topics surrounding issues facing society and when and how policy can effect change. Social policy focuses on addressing inefficiencies, inequalities, and opportunities that exist across society. Discussions will be motivated by the issue of social mobility and economic opportunity. The course will examine how social issues contribute to social mobility through topics such as labor policy, housing, health care, and family policy. In doing so, the course will examine theoretical, practical, empirical, and political explanations of social issues, as well as the implications of policy choices. Importantly, the course places considerable weight on critically evaluating social policy arguments, relying on empirical evidence when available, to suggest how policy scholarship can drive change. When appropriate, the material will explore frontier methods of policy analysis to help guide our thinking about what "works" in social policy.

**Course learning outcomes:**

The goal of this course is to engage students with a range of social policy topics and debates, push students to build their toolkit for evaluating social policy arguments, and discuss the merits of social policy levers. In doing so, students can expect to read, digest, and discuss materials from politicians, media coverage, policy advocates, and scholars. A core component of the course will require students to choose their own social issue and consider how policy can affect the topic. To do so, students will write a series of short papers exploring their chosen issue, culminating in an executive summary memo and a final paper.

By the end of the course, it is expected that you will be able to:

- Explain common social issues and policies built to address them.
- Identify the costs and benefits of social policies.
- Describe approaches for evaluating the impact of social policies.
- Discuss current issues in designing, evaluating, and implementing social policy.
- Write your own social policy memo.

**Required course materials:**

All course materials will be provided via the course page.

**Grading policy:**

The course consists of several assessments (described in more detail below) totaling 100 points.

**Participation and Discussion**

**20**

In-Class Discussion

10

Short Quizzes

5

Short Seminars

5

**Mini Papers**

**50**

Mini Paper 1: Description

10

Mini Paper 2: Policy Identification

10

Mini Paper 3: Policy Analysis 1

10

Mini Paper 4: Policy Analysis 2

10

Mini Paper 5: Policy Memo

10

## **Final Evaluation**

**30**

Policy Presentation

10

Peer Comments

5

Final Paper

15

## **Participation:**

In-class participation will count towards twenty percent of the overall grade and will be evaluated along three distinct metrics.

- The first is your participation during discussions and lectures in class. Throughout the course, we will pause to reflect on readings, answer prompts about social issues, and digest potential policy solutions and pitfalls. It is expected that you will arrive to class prepared to actively engage with these discussions.
- Second, each topic will have a student-led short seminar. The short seminar will cover an assigned material (e.g. a reading, podcast, or video) and the student will be tasked with preparing a short (between five to ten minutes) seminar on the material. The student will be asked to provide three discussion questions or points for the class and will guide the class through the discussion. Assignment to seminars will be randomized, and the number of student-led seminars will be determined by the courses' final enrollment.
- Finally, short, Monte Carlo writing quizzes will be assessed at random. The quizzes will cover recently assigned material and consist of no more than two short-answer questions. The quizzes will be open note; students can use any of their own printed or written material. There will be no more than five such quizzes in the class.

## **Mini Papers**

For the following five related assignments, students are required to select a social issue/topic and at least two existing federal, state, or local policies aimed at tackling the

issue. Note that students must confirm the choice with the instructor by the end of the second week of class. Each of the five assignments are "mini papers" expected to be between two to three pages in length, not counting relevant references.

1. For the chosen topic, discuss the socioeconomic, demographic, and context of your choice. Discuss why your topic matters to society, how the topic impacts those affected, and begin to conceptualize policy responses.
2. Identify and describe at least two policies designed to address the social issue you have chosen. For each chosen policy, you must be able to identify the costs and benefits, and the similarities and contrasts between the other chosen policies.
3. Policy Analysis 1; Choose one of the social policies identified in mini paper 2. For that policy, write a two-page policy memo that describes the debate surrounding the policy, summarizes scholarly evidence about the effectiveness of the policy, and provides questions for policymakers to address.
4. Policy Analysis 2; For another social policy identified in mini paper 2, write a two-page policy memo as in the previous assignment. Your new policy memo should address any feedback from the previous assignment.
5. Social Policy Memo. Write a complete social policy memo that can be entirely contained within a two-page document. In doing so, you should focus on just one of your chosen policies. Your complete memo should begin with a discussion of the policy problem, discuss the context of the issue, and briefly highlight (and advocate) for your chosen policy.

## **Final Seminar, Critique, and Paper**

Students are asked to present a compilation of their mini papers as a seminar for the class in a professional and scholarly manner to demonstrate their understanding of the topic and social policy landscape. They will engage their classmates and lead a discussion on their chosen topic.

1. Seminar: Students will prepare a seminar that will be presented between 15 and 20 minutes in length. Their seminar materials must be prepared in some slide-equivalent format (PPT, Latex, or other) and be posted for the class before their seminar date.
2. Critique: Students will be expected to provide a brief set of comments to another student. Students will base their comments on another student's complete policy memo. Their comments will be shared with the class following the seminar, and the set of comments will be used as a jumping-off point for a discussion.
3. Final Paper: The ultimate goal of the final paper is to synthesize what we have learned and discussed about the student's chosen policy topic. The final paper will be between eight and ten pages in length and comprise of a complete revision of each mini paper. Finally, the student will address comments and questions discussed during the seminar, and suggest their interpretation of the social policy direction in a discussion section to their final paper.

## **Attendance policy:**

draft

**Academic honesty/integrity statement:**

Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. All work submitted must be original and properly cited. Plagiarism, cheating, or any form of academic dishonesty will result in immediate consequences as outlined in the university's academic integrity policy.

**Core IMPACTS statement(s) (if applicable):**

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, economics, 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*