1. Course Description

This course will analyze those policies and services that promote or inhibit the development of civil society, enhance or deny human rights, and contribute to the attainment of social justice or sustain the existence of social injustice. Emphasis will be placed on those policies and services which serve to enhance civic participation, economic security, respect for diversity, voluntary action, and community and corporate responsibility. The course will also integrate an intensive focus on how policies and services, particularly at the local level, maintain or diminish the existence of oppression and privilege in U.S. society. Programs provided by various units of government, nonprofit and social service organizations, and corporations will be reviewed, and various partnerships and collaborations among funders, service providers, and community groups will be examined. The course will also explore ways in which the involvement of community members can lead to the construction of socially just policies and services that can overcome the effects of privilege and oppression.

2. Course Content

Students will learn that community well-being is enhanced when social problems are managed, human needs are met, and social opportunities and human rights are optimized. Both problems and needs are the outcome of interactions between individuals, collectivities, and the larger society. The implications of these interactions will be examined in the context of a diverse society, with special attention given to the relationship between policy development and implementation, the attainment of social justice goals, and the eradication of oppression and privilege. Attributes of such policies and programs include, but are not limited to, enhanced opportunities for social participation, economic security, heightened respect for diversity, increased voluntary action, and greater corporate responsibility.

Selected laws, programs, and structures that enhance citizen participation within diverse populations will be described and compared. Emphasis will be placed on those that enable the sustained and meaningful participation of diverse and oppressed populations and on the social worker’s responsibility for facilitating such participation. Examples will include the use of mediating structures, such as citizen boards, advisory groups, commissions, and consumer involvement in promoting and guiding positive social change. In many of these, participation is intended to enhance citizen capacity to initiate and oversee action. However, participatory structures are also intended to assure the responsiveness of programs of a promotional, service, or preventive nature. These programs are designed to promote social justice by reducing poverty
and economic insecurity; address personal crises and community emergencies (such as those brought about by violence against persons and property, nature and environmental disasters, war and terrorism, or economic dislocation); resettle and integrate refugees and other immigrant populations; overcome the consequences of privilege; and respond to the needs of oppressed groups seeking social justice (e.g., women, racial, religious, ethnic and sexual minorities, the disabled, and other oppressed groups). In addition, the participatory opportunities provided via self-help, grassroots associations and informal networks, and congregation-based service providers will be explored.

3. Course Objectives

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Within the context of a diverse society, analyze relevant policies and services that promote social justice, encourage civic participation, community well-being, human rights, and economic security, and enable individuals and groups to overcome the consequences of privilege and oppression.
2. Demonstrate familiarity with selected aspects of the structures, legal standing, and roles of the nonprofit sector in providing human services, advocating for human rights, and promoting community participation and well-being.
3. Locate and apply commonly used indicators of social, economic, and other measures of community well-being to diverse populations that are experiencing the effects of social injustice and oppression.
4. Analyze how privilege, oppression, and injustice affect the levels and types of participation possible and desirable for members or representatives of diverse communities in mediating structures that are intended to promote well-being.
5. Identify the political, social, economic, and cultural factors that lead to or detract from such participation among oppressed populations.
6. Understand the roles social workers can play at the community level in promoting the well-being and sustained participation of its members.

4. Course Design

In-class activities, readings, and course assignments will be coordinated so as to enhance course objectives. For example, simulations of real-work processes, films, videos, and speakers presented in the classroom will provide the contextual background for student assignments in the community. Lectures by the instructor will be complemented by student presentations and by speakers representing consumers, providers, professionals, and volunteers involved in advocacy, community education, and service delivery.

5. Relationship of the Course to Curricular Themes

- Multiculturalism and Diversity will be addressed in this course through the emphasis on enhancing the well-being and community participation of populations and groups that have been historically subject to discrimination, injustice, and oppression. The issues to be examined will include the motivations for, content, and impact of laws and regulations.
• **Social Justice and Social Change** underlie the creation of mediating structures, programs, and policies expressly designed to enhance community well-being. Students will examine these issues as well as social work’s historical engagement in planned change and the meaning of its underlying commitment to social justice in the contemporary environment.

• **Promotion, Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation** will be examined in terms of whether programs and policies are effective or ineffective in their promotion, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation efforts. Sometimes, programs designed to express these themes complement each other – for example, when participation enhances promotion and prevention, and both are part of a comprehensive strategy of change. The course will also focus on how policies and services can promote the goal of social justice and, by addressing the structural causes of privilege and oppression, prevent the emergence or reemergence of their consequences. For these reasons, the extent to which programs and policies are infused with these themes and how they interact with each other will receive critical analysis.

• **Behavioral and Social Science Research.** This course will be based on the twin assumptions that the programs and policies to be studied can be understood through social scientific methods and that scientific concepts can also be used in the design of effective programs and policies. However, even this assumption needs analysis. Scientific perspectives can lead to very different interpretations of social issues and, consequently, different policy and programmatic responses. For example, much of sociology can be divided into (1) structural/functionalist perspectives which advocate the eliminating of cultural and behavioral skill differences between groups and the legal, economic, and other barriers to full participation; and (2) conflict perspectives, which assume that societies tend towards conflict because power and resources are inequitably distributed and that, in the long run, conflict is positive because it increases the likelihood of expanding access to social goods. These perspectives infuse many of the readings and analyses presented in this course. Applying one or the other can lead to different interpretations of events and social processes and to very different social agendas and programs for social change. For this reason, even the social science knowledge base of this course will itself be subject to examination.

• **Social Work Ethics and Values.** This course will address ethical and value issues related to policies and services directed at social participation and community well-being. The NASW *Code of Ethics* and other sources of the profession’s ideology and values will be used to inform practice in this area. Special emphasis will be placed on the social worker’s responsibility to promote social justice in a diverse society by preventing and eliminating discrimination, oppression, and privilege, ensuring equal access to resources, expanding choices and opportunities for all persons, encouraging respect for diversity, advocating for changes in social policies, and encouraging informed participation by the public. In addition, ethical issues related to working with various client systems will be reviewed, such as the meaning of self-determination in a multicultural society, the impact of information technology on client confidentiality and privacy rights, and the concept of the client’s
interest, proper and improper relationships with clients, interruption of services, and termination.

6. Required Reading
A coursepack of required readings is available at Excel Text Preparation, 1117 South University Avenue. Students are also encouraged to read either print or electronic versions of the New York Times, Wall Street Journal and Detroit Free Press daily. The Economist and The Nation are excellent weekly readings from different political perspectives. Additional documents and web-based readings will be assigned during the semester.

7. Assignments (Note: Each assignment will incorporate the special focus on Privilege, Oppression, Diversity and Social Justice as well as a special focus on Strength and Assets.)

Assignment 1: Reflection Papers/Journal (20%). Students will submit a reflection paper online (via CTools) each week. Reflection papers should comment upon and integrate material from the assigned readings with your personal experience and/or your field work experience. In addition, these papers should reflect your knowledge of current pertinent media coverage, as reported in the New York Times or other newspapers. They should also incorporate one or more aspects of our focus on privilege, oppression, diversity and social justice. Postings to CTools should be brief and concise, about two pages in length, and should be posted every week by the Sunday prior to class. Late postings will not earn credit. 1st reflection paper due: January 16.

Assignment 2: Analytic Paper (30%). This assignment requires each student to analyze the policies and processes in one component of the community’s subsystems covered in the course syllabus in terms of how they enhance community well-being within the specific area of concern. The final product will be a written paper of ~10 pages, double-spaced, documenting the effects of the policies, programs, and services in the area selected. You must incorporate one or more areas of our special focus: privilege, oppression, diversity and social justice. Due: February 22. Further details will be provided in class.

Assignment 3: Group Project (40%). In the second class session students will sign up for a working group (consisting of 3-4 students) presentation that will assess a specific dimension of local policy development and implementation. This assessment will utilize multiple methods for community assessment that will be covered in the first and second sessions of the class. Each group will turn in a progress report of its findings on March 15 and report to the class during the second half of the semester. Final written reports due: April 12. Further details will be provided in class.

Class Participation (10%): Students are expected to attend every class session, come prepared by doing the required reading, and participate in discussions and exercises. Class participation will be worth evaluated based on a combination of self and instructor assessment.
8. Grading

Grades are earned by successfully completing the work on the assignments and by attending and participating in class. A 100 point system is used. Numerical grades earned for each written assignment will be translated into letter grades according to the following formula:

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9. Class Schedule and Readings

**Note:** Readings for this course have been selected very carefully to reflect policies at the community and social systems level. Students should come to class having read the assigned readings and prepared to discuss and integrate them with classroom and field content. Some in-class exercises have been developed to synthesize and apply readings to practice situations. Readings from the coursepack are marked with an asterisk (*). Others are available online in the library. Some handouts will be distributed at least one week in advance; others in class.

**Week 1/January 11**
Introductions, Course Overview, Review of Group Roles & Ctools, Review of Course Assignments and Class Rules

**Week 2/January 18**
Concepts of Community Well-Being

**Reading:**

**Week 3/January 25**
Concepts of Community Participation

**Reading:**

**Topic for Assignment 2 Due and Project Groups Formed**

Week 4/February 1 Promoting Economic Well-Being at the Community Level Reading:


Week 5/February 8 Promoting Social Well-Being at the Community Level
Reading:


Week 6/February 15 Creating a Healthy Physical Environment
Reading:

Week 7/February 22  Developing Affordable and Safe Housing for All

Reading:

** Assignment 2 – Analytic Paper – Due **

Week 8/March 1  Spring Recess – No Classes

Week 9/March 8  Cultural Activities, Community Participation, & Well-Being

Reading:

Week 10/March 15 Promoting Economic Well Being Through Civic Participation Reading:

** Progress Report of Group Projects Due/Presentations Begin **

Week 11/March 22 Promoting Social Well-Being Through Civic Participation
Reading:

Week 12/March 29 Creating Healthy Environments Through Civic Participation
Reading:
Week 13/April 5  Creating Affordable and Safe Housing Through Civic Participation

Reading:

Week 14/April 12  Cultural Activities, Community Participation, and Well-Being

Reading:


**Week 15/April 19**  
The Future of Community Participation and Well-Being  
**Reading:** To Be Announced

**Final Group Project Papers Due**  
**Review and Evaluate the Course**