SW 647.002  Policies & Services that Enhance Community Participation & Well Being

Winter 2001
Monday 11:00-2:00 Room 3816 SSWB
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1. Course Description

This course will survey the policies and services that promote a civil society and enhance human rights in the framework of American democracy. Emphasis will be placed on those policies and services which serve to enhance social participation, economic security, respect for diversity, voluntary action, and community and corporate responsibility. 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 considered.

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. These interactions will be examined, with special attention given to those leading to policies and programs that enhance opportunities for social participation, economic security, respect for diversity, voluntary action, and corporate responsibility.

Selected public laws, programs, and structures that enhance citizen participation within diverse populations will be described and compared. Emphasis will be placed on those that address participation of diverse and discriminated against 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, (1) 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 (2) diminish poverty and economic insecurity; (3) 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); (4) resettle and integrate refugees and other immigrant populations; and (5) respond to the needs of groups seeking social justice (e.g., feminist, faith-based, ethnic, gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender, the disabled, and other discriminated against groups). In addition, the participatory opportunities provided via self-help, grassroots associations and informal networks, and congregational-based service providers will be considered.

3. Course Objectives

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

1. Analyze relevant public laws and programs that encourage social participation, community well-being, human rights, and economic security.
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 well-being.
3. Locate and apply commonly used indicators of social, economic, and other measures of community well-being.
4. Compare the levels and types of participation possible and desirable for members or representatives of discriminated against groups in mediating structures that are intended to promote well-being.
5. Identify the factors that lead to or detract from such participation from the perspectives of discriminated against groups and the social work practitioners who bear some responsibility for promoting participation.

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. The issues to be examined will include the motivations for, content, and impact of laws and regulations affecting human rights and nondiscrimination on the basis of race, gender, disability, age, religion, and sexual orientation.

- **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. Participation can also be used to enhance treatment and rehabilitation. However, programmatic emphasis on one or more of these approaches may draw resources from another, as when a focus on treatment competes with prevention efforts. 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 will be used to inform practice in this area. Special emphasis will be placed on the social worker’s responsibility to promote the general welfare of society by preventing and eliminating discrimination, 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 confidentiality, privacy, rights and prerogatives of clients, the client’s interest, proper and improper relationships with clients, interruption of services, and termination.
6. Required Reading

- The *New York Times* (daily and Sunday)
- A coursepack of articles, available from Excel at 1117 South University Avenue.
- Class handouts (to be distributed).
- Materials from Relevant Websites.

7. Assignments and Grading

**Assignment 1: Journal.** Each week, students will be required to analyze the assigned readings and post on “course tools” their reflections on how the readings relate to the course objectives and their community experiences (e.g., in field placement, employment, voluntary activities, group assignments). Each posting should be approximately two (2) pages and will be due on the Friday prior to the scheduled class discussion of the topic(s). Late assignments will not earn credit. The journal is worth 20% of each student’s grade.

**Assignment 2: Small Group Project.** This assignment is a small group effort that will require community-based research and participation. The class will be divided into small groups of students. Each group will take responsibility for identifying, analyzing, writing a report about, and presenting its findings to the class regarding the policies and processes that support and enable (or prevent) citizen participation in one component of the local community’s sub-systems.

Possible Examples:

1. Washtenaw County has spent over two years discussing homelessness as a community problem. Which components of the community have been involved in this discussion? Which have not (and why)? What policies and services did the county use to promote citizen participation in the problem definition and the development of recommended solutions/actions? What plans are being developed for citizen participation as the county moves into the implementation phase?

2. Another example is the identification of the policies and processes utilized by the Public Health Department to obtain and use citizen input/involvement in the development of the Health Improvement Plan for Washtenaw County.

3. A third example is the consideration of the policies and procedures, either currently in place or under consideration by the Ann Arbor Public Schools, to solicit and use citizen participation in its efforts to narrow the achievement gap between minority and majority students in the district.

4. A fourth example might involve the analysis of the policies and procedures used by numerous churches, temples, and other faith-based communities to promote the involvement of their congregations in efforts to improve community well-being through participation in such activities as the free breakfast program at St. Andrews or the Mitzvah Day at Temple Beth Emeth. What are the values, policies, and processes that these faith-based communities utilize to encourage and support citizen participation by their members?
Other examples and further details of the assignments will be discussed in class. Each group will be required to submit a 6-8 analytic summary of its finding on March 12. **Class presentations will take place March 12-April 9.** This assignment is worth 30% of each student’s grade.

**Assignment 3: Analytic Paper.** Students have two options to complete this assignment. **Option 1** would be an analysis of the community effort covered in Assignment 2, that assesses how effective it has been in *enhancing community well-being within its specific area of concern.* The final product would be a written paper (8-10 pages, double-spaced) documenting the effects of policies, programs, and services in the area selected. **Option 2** would be to write a similar analysis of another community effort, distinct from the project or program evaluated in Assignment 2. While it is preferred that students focus on efforts in Washtenaw County, they may select a similar effort in another community (e.g., where they live, work, or have a field placement) after discussion with the course instructor.

Possible topics include the situation of homeless persons, the health of county residents, school performance of racial minority students, the well-being of TANF recipients, or access to services among the disabled. Other examples and further details of this assignment will be discussed in class. This assignment will be due April 9th. It is worth 30% of each student’s grade.

**Assignment 4: Class Participation.** Students are expected to come to class having done the assigned readings and prepared to engage actively with the material presented in the reading and class lectures, discussions, and exercises. The quality, rather than the quantity of class participation will be assessed. Class participation will count 20% of students’ grades.

**Grading**

Grades are earned by successfully completing the work on the assignments and by attending and participating in class. Points earned will be translated to letter grades according to the following schedule:

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**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.
1. January 8      Introductions, Course Overview and CourseTools Review

2. January 15     No Class: Martin Luther King Jr. Day

3. January 22     Concepts of Community Participation and Well Being

Readings:


** TOPIC FOR ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE & TASK GROUPS FORMED**

4. January 29     Promoting Economic Well Being at the Community Level

Readings:


**5. February 5 Promoting Social Well Being at the Community Level**

**Readings:**


• Speaker from Washtenaw County Public Health Department

6. February 12  Promoting Healthy Communities

Readings:


• Speaker on Healthy Families

7. February 19  Promoting Environmental Justice

Readings:


8. February 26 No Class: Mid Semester Break.

9. March 5 Welfare Reform, Policy Devolution and Community Well Being

Readings:


10. March 12 
**Improving The Well Being of Children and Youth**
(Written Reports for Assignment # 2. Due)
(Task Group Presentation # 1)

Readings:


11 March 19 
**Improving the Well Being of Children and Youth II**
(Task Group Presentation # 2)

Readings:


12 March 26  Creating Responsive Social Services  
(Task Group Presentation # 3)

Readings:


• Northern California Community Services Council (1994), Building Healthy and Safe Communities: Principles for Designing and Delivering Successful Community Programs, San Francisco: NCCSC, 5-15.


13. April 2  Creating Affordable and Safe Housing  
Task Group Presentation # 4)

Readings:


- Speaker from Avalon Housing

14. April 9  Public Infrastructure, Cultural Activities, & Community Well Being  
(Task Group Presentation # 5)  
(Assignment # 3. Is Due)

Readings:
A. Public Infrastructure


B. Cultural Activities

- M. McDonald, G. Antunez, and M. Gottemoeller, “Using the Arts and Literature in Health Education,” *International Quarterly of Community Health Education*.
- Southeastern Michigan Community Partnership for Cultural Participation (December 1999), *Southeastern Michigan Geodemographic and Database Analysis* (Executive Summary), Southfield, MI: Art Serve.

15. April 16 Prospects for the Future. Course Review and Evaluation
Readings:


