Social Work 670
Analytic Methods for social Policy Practice

Spring/Summer 2002
Prerequisites: 522 or permission of instructor
Tuesday, 8-12 AM
Room SSWB 2618
Office Hours: Tuesday 12-4 PM or by appointment

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Course Description:

Understanding the major analytic and quantitative tools used by practitioners engaged in assessing or evaluating human service systems is an essential component of social policy practice. This course will emphasize multiple program analysis, and students will be asked to analyze an area which consists mainly of programs serving special populations. Students will acquire beginning level skill in the use of a wide variety of analytic and quantitative tools, while gaining in-depth skill in a more limited number of tools and techniques. Competence in these skill areas will be gained by completing a major analysis of a human service system.

The underlying theme of this course will be how to increase the rationality of the choice process when applied to complex and rapidly changing human service systems. In short, scientific analysis opposed to political analysis or advocacy is emphasized.

Course Content:

Students will learn the major analytic and quantitative tools used by practitioners in assessing or evaluating human service programs or systems, which include a range of specific programs. The theme of this course is how to increase the rationality of the planning, analysis, and evaluation process, particularly of programs intended to serve the underprivileged or over-deprived populations. Students will learn that human service organizations include a wide variety of programs of diverse size and complexity, with respect to their activities and goals. This course will impart skills which can be applied at various levels of analysis in different contexts.

Course session topics may include: problem specification across systems of service, using social experiments, social indicators, forecasting, simulation models, etc., to identify problems; using secondary sources (e.g., census, annual reports, surveys, evaluations and audits) to quantify problems; using primary sources (e.g., interviews, surveys, quasi experimental designs) to quantify problems; using qualitative indicators of problems; developing options and solutions to systems of service problems; costing out options; utilizing other criteria (e.g., administrative
ease, feasibility, stigma, etc.) to evaluate options; preparing analysis documents; diagnosing decision making situations; and enhancing utilization of results.

Several areas will be emphasized, including:

1. Careful diagnosis of a problem, whether of a client group, an organization, activity, or community.
2. Eliciting, formalizing, and explicating goals and objectives of various decision makers and interested parties in different problem, program, or organizational contexts.
3. Determining the data gathering and analysis techniques appropriate to various contexts.
4. Gathering, culling, analysis, and presentation of information, both quantitative and qualitative, as an aide to informed decisions.
5. Writing evaluation and analysis proposals.
6. Preparing and presenting evaluation reports and policy analyses, both periodic and final, tailored for different groups and different purposes.

Course Objectives:

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

1. Demonstrate beginning level competence in the use of the major analytical tools that are most commonly used to assess and evaluate complex systems of services.
2. Demonstrate in-depth knowledge of two analytical tools and their application in the human services field.
3. Design a procedure for reviewing and assessing a major service system that encompasses a wide variety of separately mandated programs.
4. Identify the limitations of rational analysis and be able to determine when rational choice processes are desirable and feasible to use.
5. Discuss typical ethical concerns related to the use of analytic methods in social policy practice.

Course Design:

I will use a combination of lecture, discussion and in-class exercises completed in groups to examine a variety of contemporary issues. In addition to in-class exercises, students will complete three written assignments outside of class that will reflect techniques learned over the course of the semester.

Relationship of the Course to Four Curricular Themes:

- *Multiculturalism and Diversity*: Students will develop the capacity to identify ways in which gender, race, ethnicity, social class, age, and other forms of social stratification and disenfranchisement influence and are impacted by the social policy practice process.
• **Social Justice and Social Change**: This course will provide students with the capacity to participate in the social policy process and the ability to approach policy analytically by virtue of social work practice and ethics. Students will learn that social work practice and ethics play an important role in shaping the outcome of ongoing policy debates to reflect issues in social justice and change.

• **Promotion, Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation**: Students will learn that policies in human services are too often implemented in reaction to an issue, not proactively, due to changing social, economic, and political circumstances and influences. Promotion, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation activities are difficult to evaluate and therefore raise special challenges in social policy implementation.

  Students will be exposed to innovative evaluation techniques (e.g., forecasting and simulation models) that can be used to analyze and evaluate promotion, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation activities prior to the development, implementation, and analysis of any relevant policy issue or initiative.

• **Behavioral and Social Science Research**: Policies in human services are in a constant state of flux owing to changing social, economic, and political circumstances. Thus, any review of existing policy may be quickly outdated and has limited use as part of the training social work students carry into their careers. Therefore, students will be provided with social science models and theories that can be used as tools to analyze and evaluate any policy issue encountered in the course of their professional activities. Examples of the use of social science in policy development will be presented (e.g. Coleman report on education).

**Relationship of the Course to Social Work Ethics and Values:**

Ethical standards of social work practice (NASW Code of Ethics) and evaluation practice (Program Evaluation Standards) will be used to review issues commonly confronted in social policy practice. The ethical themes of autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, fidelity, and justice will be particularly emphasized and discussed.

**Course Assignments and Expectations:**

There are no assigned texts for this course. Reading for the course will consist of journal articles available online or chapters/journal articles not available online but held in reserve in the Social Work library. The majority of the reading for this course will come from your own investigation of the literature dealing with your topic of interest.

The structure of the course will involve some lecture (especially at the beginning of the course), in-class work (done in-class and in small groups), and much independent work by class participants. Individual meetings with the instructor will also be required.

Assignments will consist of three short papers in memo format and a class presentation. It is expected that information collected in preparation for individual memos will be shared among
class-mates concerned about similar issues and classroom time will be allocated to provide opportunities for exchange of information and discussion of individual projects.

We will use assigned readings in class discussions and as the basis for in-class assignments and there is an expectation that students will read assigned materials as required. There are three papers weighted equally at 20 points each. Papers can receive full point value only if they are turned in on time and will lose 1 point each day they are late. Final grades will be determined by converting your points into the 9.0 grading scale described in the UM SSW Student Guide.

**Memo 1.** This memo will identify the problem/issue you will focus on for the duration of the course, describe the multiple human service organizations that might be part of impacting the problem, and identify the location (system) on which you will focus.

**Due: June 4. A maximum of 20 points possible if turned in on time.**

**Memo 2.** This memo will explore the various pieces of information used to define the problem, develop the policy, institutionalize and/or implement the policy. It will also identify the key players and their role in the decision making process regarding the formation of the policy you are studying.

**Due: June 25. A maximum of 20 points is possible if turned in on time.**

**Memo 3.** This memo will offer you a choice. You may choose to outline an additional round of research missing from the information utilized in the policy formation you have focussed on during this course (based on your assessment in memo 2). If you choose this option you will include an analysis of how your research could be used and by whom. You may also choose to prepare a memo utilizing the information you reviewed in memo 2 to put forward your own policy recommendation. If you choose this option, you will include an analysis of who the memo is meant to influence and why you chose them as your focus.

**Due: July 16. A maximum of 20 points is possible if turned in on time.**

**Final presentation.** You will present your main points to the class using a one page summary of your argument and any attachments you think are important.

**Due July 17. A maximum of 20 points is possible.**

Class participation. Because I will run the class in a participatory fashion, if you attend 9 of the possible 11 classes, you will automatically receive 10 class participation points. I do not require, but would appreciate it, if you could let me know when you will not be able to attend class. You are not required to provide me with a reason. An additional 10 points will be awarded for your participation in in-class exercises (see the Course Outline for when exercises will take place).

**Books and Articles**

The required readings for the course are listed below in the Course Outline. I have made sure that each of the articles I am requiring will be available in the Social Work Library or on-line using Mirlyn.
Course Outline

May 7, 2002
Overview of the course.
Roots of policy analysis, a review
Introduction to alternative models of policy analysis

May 14, 2002
Policy analysis as a “rational” process
In-class exercise.

Readings: (all three readings are available on-line)

May 21, 2002
Where and when and how do numbers get used and what are the choices?

Readings:

May 28, 2002
The power behind problem definitions and policy agendas
Social problems as dichotomies
In-class exercise

Readings: On reserve in the library
Skocpol, T. (2000). The missing middle. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. (selection from the book will be on reserve in the library)

June 4, 2002
Memo 1 due
Problem definitions – how do they influence the intervention
In-class exercise
Readings: (available on-line).
* additional readings will be added after week 1.

June 11, 2002
Institutionalization process in policy development – where the problem is supposed to be solved makes a difference.

Readings:

June 18, 2002
Policy implementation – it isn’t a linear process!

Readings
Lin (2001). In press – a copy will be on reserve in the library.
* additional readings will be added after the first class.

June 25, 2002 Memo 2 due
Policy evaluation – it isn’t as easy as you think
In class exercise

Readings:
* readings will be added after the first class.

July 2, 2002
Policy evaluation – some of the pitfalls

July 9, 2002
How do you put it all together? Revisiting the rational policy analysis argument. Is it possible?
In-class exercise

July 16, 2002
Final memo due
Class presentations

Course statement approved by faculty: 2/19/97.
Course statement prepared by: Larry M. Gant (rev. 2/5/97) (Edited by H. Raschke, 6/12/98).