1. Course Description:

Several selected social problems are presented in this course to illuminate how today's professional social workers address social issues confronting American society. Each topical area will present how contemporary social work practice addresses the particular social problem within the values of the social work profession. The various methods of professional social work such as interpersonal practice, community organizing, human service management, social policy and evaluation and the various levels of social intervention that focus on individuals, families, groups, communities, and organizations will be presented in regard to the particular social problem focus. The selected problem focus allows students to learn about social work's struggles and accomplishments in developing strategies to prevent and cope with these problems, and thus illuminates what the profession is doing -- or could be doing -- in each of these specific problem areas. The course also demonstrates the contribution of social science knowledge and research in conceptualizing social problems, and the importance of multicultural sensitivity in the interventions conducted by social work practitioners.

2. Course Content:

The particular social problems selected for discussion will change from year to year depending on faculty and student interest and the contemporary context. Selected topics may include poverty, homelessness, family violence, divorce, mental illness, juvenile delinquency, inequality, racism, child abuse and neglect, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, community development, and managed care. The opening sessions of the course will briefly overview the social context for the kinds of roles, interventions, and fields of service that the profession generally operates from, before exploring in depth the professions response to each selected social problem. Important professional themes such as multicultural sensitivity, empowerment, prevention, and value based intervention will also be reviewed in this course. Note: this course is distinguished from a more traditional course on social problems...
since it focuses specifically on a limited number of selected social problems and probes social work's professional involvement in preventing and assuaging each problem.

3. **Course Objectives:**

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

1. Articulate the various roles, levels of intervention, and fields of service from which social worker's practice.
2. Describe the various value dilemmas, political controversies, and societal challenges that the profession of social work faces when it approaches selected social problems.
3. Explain why diversity, empowerment, and strengths-based perspectives are critical to the way social workers approach social problems.
4. Critique the social work profession's response to selected social problems.

4. **Course Design:**

Class sessions are scheduled for an hour and a half, twice weekly. Varied pedagogical strategies are utilized in this course including, but not limited to: traditional lecture/discussion format, use of case studies and role play exercises, in vivo activities within area professional human service organizations, guest lectures from experts in the field, panels of consumers and practitioners, films and other audiovisuals.

5. **Relationship of this Course to Four Curricular Themes:**

*Multiculturalism & Diversity Issues* are addressed throughout the course. In the introductory sessions these concepts will be defined and later in each selected social problem area, the impact of diversity and multicultural sensitivity will be related to how the social work profession assesses and intervenes in the particular social problem.

*Social Justice and Social Change Issues* are an integral part of many of the professional roles that social workers perform in trying to prevent and ameliorate social problems: they included such approaches as individual and group advocacy, social action, community development, and advocacy research. Students are encouraged throughout the course to critically analyze both the ways and the degree to which contemporary social work practice has met this traditional mission.

*Promotion/Prevention/Treatment/Rehabilitation* are the range of strategies that the profession of social work brings to bear on contemporary social problems. Students will be encouraged to look critically at each social problem and whether this range of strategies is being employed by the social work profession.

*Social Science and Behavioral Research* is used throughout the course to conceptualize each of the selected social problem areas as well as the effectiveness of methods to address these social problems.
6. Relationship of this Course to Social Work Ethics and Values:

This course introduces the concept that professions act within a value and ethical framework. This framework shapes the kinds of interventions that the social work professions can employ in addressing social problems. Elements of the National Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics and other ethical framework are discussed to help students understand the opportunities and parameters of the profession.

Course Texts:


Possible additional readings. I reserve the right to assign no more than one additional reading per week. Additional readings will be made available to you at least one week before the class in which they are due to be discussed. Any additional readings will be handed out in class, or will be made available through coursetools.

Topical Outline:

A. Preliminaries

Introduction to the Course

How do we talk to each other about social work issues? (Materials provided by the instructor)

B. Social Work as a Practice Profession Rooted in Research and Theory

The relationship of practice, theory, and research: correlation, causation, counterfactuals and falsification (Materials provided by the instructor)

C. Overview of Contemporary Social Work Practice:


D. Context for Understanding Social Problems:

Eitzen & Zinn Social Problems, Chapters 1&2

Eitzen & Leedham Solutions to Social Problems, Section 1 Chapters 1-3

E. Social Justice:

“The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” by Ursula K. LeGuin (provided by instructor)

Links to various social work codes of ethics on coursetools site.

F. Aging Issues:

Eitzen & Zinn Social Problems, Part of Chapter 5


G. Poverty:

Eitzen & Leedham Solutions to Social Problems, Section 2, “Poverty,” Chapters 4-6

Eitzen & Zinn Social Problems, Chapter 7


H. Racial and Ethnic Inequality:

Eitzen & Zinn Social Problems, Chapter 8


I. Gender Inequality:

Eitzen & Zinn Social Problems, Chapter 9

Eitzen & Leedham Solutions to Social Problems, Section 4, “Gender,” Chapters 10-11


J. **Sexual Orientation:**

Eitzen & Zinn Social Problems, Chapter 10


K. **Families:**

Eitzen & Zinn Social Problems, Chapter 15

Eitzen & Leedham Solutions to Social Problems, Section 6, “Families,” Chapters 14-16


L. **Education:**

Eitzen & Zinn Social Problems, Chapter 16

Eitzen & Leedham Solutions to Social Problems, Section 7, “Schools,” Chapters 17-18


M. **Health & Mental Health:**

Eitzen & Zinn Social Problems, Chapter 17

Eitzen & Leedham Solutions to Social Problems, Section 9, “Health Care and Delivery,” Chapters 21-23


N. **Crime and Justice:**

Eitzen & Zinn Social Problems, Chapter 12
Eitzen & Leedham Solutions to Social Problems, Sections 12, Chapters 30-32


O. Workplace:

Eitzen & Zinn Social Problems, Chapter 14

Eitzen & Leedham Solutions to Social Problems, Section 8, “Work,” Chapters 19-20


P. Substance Abuse:

Eitzen & Zinn Social Problems, Chapter 13


Q. Urban Problems:

Eitzen & Zinn Social Problems, Chapter 6

Eitzen & Leedham Solutions to Social Problems, Section 10, “Cities,” Chapters 24-26


R. Global Inequality & Immigration Issues:

Eitzen & Zinn Social Problems, Chapter 3


S. National Security:


Other Source Materials:
Grading Mechanisms

This course will employ three grading mechanisms:

1. An in-class test 50%
2. Log assignments 40%
3. Student participation in Coursetools 10%

The log assignments are graded by the number completed and submitted into Coursetools – the course conferencing system. Students will receive an A for submitting 4 logs, a B for submitting 3 logs, a C for submitting 2 logs, a D for submitting 1 logs, an E for submitting no logs. The average log is between 2-3 pages in length and describes the student’s efforts to explore and discuss course concepts. The deadlines for logs are that at least one log will be completed in each month of the semester. Therefore the first log will be due before the end of January, the second will be due before the end of February, the third by the end of March and the fourth by the end of April. The descriptions of potential log assignments are presented below:

SW 400 Log Assignments:

1. Clienthood: In this exercise you are to go to your local Department of Public Welfare (or Family Independence Agency) and apply for food stamps. When you arrive, carefully observe the demeanor of the Security Guard (if there is one) and receptionist when you enter the building. Look around the waiting area and observe the kinds of furniture, decor, magazines, etc. Are there long lines poorly marked? Are folks milling around or just sitting in chairs waiting to be served? How did you figure out where to start? How long was the application form you finally received, were the questions clearly stated, and did anyone offer to help you fill it out? How did you feel about answering these questions? Did you have to make a special appointment with a worker to see if you could receive benefits? How much time did you spend in the agency waiting, filling out forms, talking with personnel, and trying to come up with documentation? Overall, how did the application process make you feel?

2. Roots of Social Work: In this assignment you are to visit a settlement house or "Y" in a "rust belt" city (the older the agency the better!). On winter break, those of you who live in NYC might visit Henry Street Settlement, or those of you who live near Chicago might visit Hull House or Erie Neighborhood House, or those of you who live in or near Detroit might visit Franklin Wright Center. There are many settlements scattered all over the East and Mid-West, even a small city like Toledo has its Friendly Center. If you can't locate a settlement then look up a "Y" or "community center" for this assignment. Try to get an appointment with the program director in the settlement or "Y" and
interview this person to discover the kinds of programs and services that have been provided throughout the last century and are still in operation in the New Millennium.

3. Assessing the Privileges of Corporate America: Select a Fortune 100 corporation and go to their web page. (If you need help to figure out what are the Fortune 100 companies, go to: http://www.pathfinder.com/fortune/fortune500/index.html). Locate their stockholder investment information page or information on their most recent annual reports. Look at the compensation packages for their executive officers often found in their most recent Proxy Statement to SEC. Look at the gender and ethnic composition of their board of directors. (This may be discovered by going to Fortune magazine’s “America’s Best Companies for Minorities:” http://www.pathfinder.com/fortune/diversity/index.html) Look at the compensation of top executives as well as the compensation of members of the board for attending board of director meetings. Look at any “stockholder proposals” that were published in the annual report and the position and rationale of the board either for or against the proposal. Report your findings in this log.

4. Survival on a Welfare Diet: Michigan’s food subsidy for a single adult on welfare for one day is about $3/day. In this log you are to stay within this budgeted amount for one week ($21/week!) Keep track of everything you eat and how much you spend on food for the entire week. You may try creative ways to expand your diet – like eating food that is left on a table in a restaurant, eating breakfast at St Andrews Church or other food kitchens in town. You cannot rely on the goodness of friends to feed you during this “experience.” Comment on the quality of this weekly diet and any struggles that you had trying to stay within the budget. Was this task made easier because you knew that you could go back to eating what you normally spend for food when the week was completed?

5. Public Hearings: Attend a public hearing on a bill or proposal the impacts the quality of life for an oppressed client group. This public hearing could be at a committee of the state legislature in Lansing or a more local political body such as city council here in Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, or Detroit. Observe the various groups that either support or oppose the proposal. Describe the rationale of various sides testifying, the reactions of the political figures in the public body, and infer the ideologies that are embedded in the various positions of proponents and opponents of the proposal.

6. Interview a Social Work Practitioner: Arrange an appointment with a practicing, MSW social worker (not an academic or faculty member). Choose a field of practice of social work or a particular social problem that interests you, and locate a practitioner who works in such a setting or with a particular client group. You may select a social work practitioner who performs any number of social work roles – e.g. clinician, organizer, administrator, researcher etc. (In class we will develop an interview schedule so that each of these logs collects the same information from a range of contemporary social workers.) Ask the practitioner to show you around her/his agency and describe the various services offered. Put all of the information that you have gleaned from this interview into this log.

7. Self Help Groups: Locate a self help group in your local community and call the contact person and get permission to attend one of the meetings. Self help groups are not run by professionals but by their own indigenous leaders who are struggling with the same problems as everyone else in the group. There are many groups which focus on many kinds of problems – e.g. Recovery Incorporated and Dawntreaders for the mentally ill; twelve step programs like Alcoholics Anonymous, Alano,
Narcotics Anonymous for people struggling with substance abuse problems, etc. The monthly schedule of meetings for these groups can be found in the “Community” section of the Ann Arbor News on the first Saturday of each month. Self help groups in SE lower Michigan can also be located by surfing onto http://comnet.org/local/orgs/casa/resource/SupportHelp.htm. Most of these groups meet in the evening, and you should call the contact person to see if they will let you attend as an observer (though you may also go as a potential member if you are genuinely struggling with the group’s target problem). Describe how the group operates, who attended the meeting, and how members interacted within the meeting. Share your reactions to this meeting. Would you ever consider using such a group or recommending such a group to a friend or family member?

8. Volunteer Opportunities: There are many human service organizations that provide volunteer opportunities to members of the community. See for example: http://comnet.org/local/orgs/volunteer/opp_long.html. Volunteers are trained and used in domestic violence shelters, homeless shelters, crisis hot lines, etc. Some of you may already have participated in volunteer activities, and this log will give you a chance to write about these experiences. For those of you who have not performed any kind of volunteer service, this will be an opportunity to locate a volunteer program, complete the training, and participate as a volunteer in that program. (This kind of activity is a prerequisite to most MSW programs). In this log you should describe your agency, its clientele, and your experiences as a volunteer.

9. Performance of Mentality: Attend a performance of “Mentality” during this semester. Briefly describe the skits, what you learned from the skits, and what you and the audience learned from the dialogue after the skits. Do you think this is an effective means of community education about mental disabilities?

10. Action: In this log assignment you are to engage in some kind of political or social action during the semester. In class we will be discussing the various kinds of social actions (e.g. demonstrations, boycotts, sit-ins, protest marches etc.) that social workers engage in with others in order to change institutional and social arrangements that impact negatively on our clients and ourselves. The context of this action can be UMSSW, LS&A, the University of Michigan, or larger systems such as legislative bodies or governmental units. In this log you should describe the “action” and your participation. Explain the goal of the action and who the action was designed to influence. How many folks participated in the action, and how did you assess the impact (success or failure) of this action to achieve its goal? How would you classify this action – collaborative, persuasive, bargaining, adversarial?

11. Theater of the Oppressed: The Center for Research on Learning and Teaching has a theater troupe that conducts interactive theater presentations around issues of diversity, multiculturalism and social justice. If there is enough interest in pursuing this log item, we will schedule a class period to a presentation by CRLT staff during the semester.

12. Etc.: If you are not particularly thrilled by the selection of log assignments that I have presented above, then I want you to feel free to develop your own learning experiences that relate course concepts to real life experiences. I only ask that you check out your Etc. log with me before you do it. This not only gives me some warning but also allows me to react and be helpful to your ideas before
you expend energy doing it. Additionally, I hope to develop some new ideas for logs as the semester progresses. Ideas for Etc. logs will be posted on the coursetools site.

**Final Test**

The final test will be conducted during the scheduled test day at the end of the semester in April. This in-class test will be composed of short answer questions and multiple choice questions. Before the final test, a study guide will be handed out in the class that lists the various concepts and readings that may be covered by the final test.

**Feedback in Coursetools:**

Coursetools is the University of Michigan’s class conferencing system: https://coursetools.ummu.umich.edu/courses/mine.nsf/getcourses. Not only will you be posting your completed logs in Coursetools, but you are also expected to comment and give feedback to your classmates’ logs. Feedback is an important part of group process and past experience with Coursetools has demonstrated that it significantly increases the educational experience of the course. 10% of your grade will be reflected in your feedback to your classmates. In order to receive all 10% you will be expected to make at least 35 responses to your classmates’ logs during the semester.