SW 512 - Social, Economic, and Political Environments  
Section 005  
2 credit hours  
Fall 2015

Instructor: Lisa Reyes Mason, PhD  
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Email: mason@utk.edu  
Phone: 865-974-6544

Class Time: Monday, 5:45 to 7:35 p.m.  
Room: 318 Henson  
Office Hours: Monday, 11:05 a.m. to Noon or by appointment

Code of Conduct

It is the student's responsibility to have read the College of Social Work Ethical Academic and Professional Conduct Code that is in the College of Social Work MSSW Handbook (www.csw.utk.edu). Students are also expected to sign and adhere to the Social Work Field Placement Code of Conduct.

The Honor Statement

An essential feature of The University of Tennessee is a commitment to maintaining an atmosphere of intellectual integrity and academic honesty. As a student of the University, I pledge that I will neither knowingly give nor receive any inappropriate assistance in academic work, thus affirming my own personal commitment to honor and integrity. (Hilltopics and the Campus Syllabus)

University Civility Statement

Civility is genuine respect and regard for others: politeness, consideration, tact, good manners, graciousness, cordiality, affability, amiability and courteousness. Civility enhances academic freedom and integrity, and is a prerequisite to the free exchange of ideas and knowledge in the learning community. Our community consists of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and campus visitors. Community members affect each other's well-being and have a shared interest in creating and sustaining an environment where all community members and their points of view are valued and respected. Affirming the value of each member of the university community, the campus asks that all its members adhere to the principles of civility and community adopted by the campus: http://civility.utk.edu/
Disability

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a documented disability or if you have emergency information to share, please contact The University of Tennessee Office of Disability Services at 100 Dunford Hall (865-974-6087). This will ensure that you are properly registered for services.

Dimensions of Diversity

The College of Social Work and the University of Tennessee welcome and honor all people. In accordance with the U.S. Council on Social Work Education and the U.S. National Association of Social Workers, the College of Social Work defines “the dimensions of diversity as the intersectionality of multiple factors, including” age, class, color, culture, mental or physical disability, ethnicity, gender, gender expression, gender identity, immigration status, marital status, national origin, political ideology, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation. The College values intellectual curiosity, pursuit of knowledge, and academic freedom and integrity. A person’s diverse life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim. The College of Social Work promotes social justice and social change, and strives to end discrimination, oppression, poverty, and other forms of social injustice.

Course Description

This course is a required foundation course. It examines the profound influences on and critical interfaces of client systems with the world in which we live. It also incorporates local to international information about social, economic, and political trends and innovations, and about effects of social problems, injustice, and power on client systems and on social change and service delivery systems. The course pays special attention to the process of devolution and globalization and the influence of these economic and political forces on the distribution of resources. International comparative social patterns are analyzed to understand economic justice from a national and international perspective. The history of the social and political environment, both nationally and abroad, are considered to enhance students’ understanding of how political decisions shape the social welfare arena in which we practice.

Course Rationale

The Social, Economic, and Political environment course provides a foundation for understanding the interconnectedness of various economic, social, and political theories and systems that influence oppression and social injustice, and the challenge of social workers to change oppressive social systems. Social work students, therefore, must understand and critically analyze local, national, and international interconnectedness of macro level social arrangements and how these arrangements may result in structural oppression, discrimination, and social injustice. Students require evidence-based knowledge in preparation for culturally
competent practice in work with multicultural client systems, organizations, agencies, and communities.

Course Competencies

By the completion of this course, the students are expected to be able to:

1. Trace the history and trends of the economic and political system in the United States that affect how the U.S. welfare system is constructed. 2.3, 4.4 (content: define the political economy and the relationship with social welfare; identify the historic trends in economic theory and the changes in political ideology over time (e.g. supply side economics and neoliberal/conservative movements); utilize information technology to analyze economic and political trends).

2. Describe the political process in the United States, and how power and influence prevent or promote social and economic justice within and across multicultural populations. 2.4, 2.5, 3.1 (content: how interest group politics influence the political process; understanding the political system; global hegemony, first and third world economic issues and immigration; structural inequality; distributive justice).

3. Use social and economic justice as a basis for analyzing the effects of social, economic, and political trends and the resultant interactions between individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities. 3.3, 2.4 (content: the influence of values of the dominant culture on societal choices in economic and political systems, and the profession; privilege; the differential effect on client systems, communities, and organizations of tax systems and benefits).

4. Connect economic and political decisions to peoples’ access to resources, locally, nationally, and internationally, and recognize the ethical dilemmas inherent in lacking resources. 2.5, 1.4, 3.2 4). (content: tax system; economic, distributive justice; disparities in health and welfare; devolution of resources and services; corporate welfare; poverty gap and income/wealth inequality; use information technology to analyze access to resources).

5. Analyze and compare national and international social, economic and political conditions using existing available statistics to identify differences in societies’ access to resources. 2.5, 2.1, 2.3, 3.3 (content: use existing national statistics to compare social welfare and access across states; use international comparative literature to assess differences across countries in social welfare policies and practices; use information technology to identify disparities in access to resources).

6. Analyze client systems and the relationships of power among individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities and societies, using theories of empowerment, participatory change, conscientization, and social construction to understand the
relationships of power and advantage in society, recognizing the role of social worker as learner and engaging client systems as experts of their own experience. 3.5, 3.3, 2.2 (content: theories of empowerment, social construction, popular education, and participatory change in the context of group/population membership; how groups attain powers).

Attendance and Participation

Students are expected to attend every class session and participate actively. Students are expected to contact me by e-mail (mason@utk.edu) if circumstances interfere with class attendance.

Policy on Cell Phones, Laptops, and Other Electronics

All cell phones should be silenced and put away during class. Laptops or iPads should only be used for class activities or notetaking, as needed. Using phones, laptops, iPads or other electronic devices to send text messages, check email, check Facebook or other social media sites, or surf the Internet is not appropriate during class time. If you have a special circumstance, consult with the instructor in advance.

Course Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>% of Grade</th>
<th>Due Date and Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam 1</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Opens October 12, due October 14 by 10:00 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop Facilitation</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>To be assigned by group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam 2</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Opens November 29, due December 1 by 10:00 p.m.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. **Class Participation (25%)**. Through thoughtful, engaged participation, students show preparation for class and growth of analytic and professional development skills. The 25% for participation is determined as follows:

   - **10%** is based on the instructor’s assessment of in-class participation through discussion, individual, and small group activities
   - **10%** is based on successful student completion of “For Next Week” items which can be found at the end of select Powerpoint presentations during Weeks 1-6
   - **5%** is based on peer assessment of the student’s participation and contributions to the workshop facilitation project

2. **Exam 1 (25%)** (CC 1,2,3,4,5,6). This exam will cover material from Weeks 1 through 7. Questions will assess student mastery of course material and ability to apply concepts learned. The exam will be posted on Blackboard, and students will submit their exam
response as a Word document uploaded to Blackboard no later that the specified date and time. Exams are open book (i.e., course materials) and open note. However, under no circumstance should students discuss the exam with other students in their own or other sections of this course.

3. **Workshop Facilitation (25%)** (CC 2,3,4,5,6). Working in small groups (up to 4 students/group) students will facilitate a 75-minute workshop on a specific topic during Weeks 9 to 14: Hunger/Food Security, Housing/Homelessness, Health Care, Child Welfare, Immigration, or Environmental Justice. Students will be expected to facilitate the workshop in a way that demonstrates their mastery of the topic, while also engaging students in participatory techniques and deepening class understanding and analysis of the topic. Detailed instructions and criteria for the workshop can be found after the Course Outline in this syllabus.

4. **Exam 2 (25%)** (CC 2,3,4,5). This exam will cover material from Weeks 9 through 14. Questions will assess student mastery of course material and ability to apply information learned from fellow students’ workshops. The exam will be posted on Blackboard, and students should submit their exam response as a Word document uploaded to Blackboard no later that the specified date and time. Exams are open book (i.e., course materials) and open note. However, under no circumstance, should students discuss the exam with other students in their own or other sections of this course.

**Grading Scale**

Grades in this course will be assigned as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90 – 100</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87 – 89</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 – 86</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77 – 79</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 – 76</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66 – 69</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤ 65</td>
<td>F</td>
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**Readings**

All readings will be either posted on Blackboard or hyperlinked through the syllabus. If a hyperlink is not working, students should notify the instructor at least 48 hours prior to class, so alternate arrangements can be made (e.g., reading emailed to students, alternate reading).

**Syllabus Note**

This syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor, for the purpose of enhancing student learning as needed during the course of the semester.
**Course Outline**

**Week 1. August 24 – Introduction**

This session provides introductions, a course overview, and engagement with the core concept of social justice.

**Readings Due:** None

**Week 2. August 31 – Economic and Political Forces I**

This session covers core economic and political concepts, and begins to examine trends in the political economy of the U.S. social welfare system.

**Readings Due:**

**Week 3. September 7 – Labor Day Holiday**

**Note:** Class does not meet in person.

**Week 4. September 14 – Economic and Political Forces II**

Class discussion of political economy continues, including topics of structural inequalities, interest group politics, devolution, taxation, and corporate welfare.

**Readings Due:**
Week 5. September 21 – Social Forces

This session engages students in critical thinking about dominant culture and privilege in the U.S., and how these affect social and economic justice for client systems.


Week 6. September 28 – Poverty and Inequality

This session examines trends, explanations, and comparisons of poverty and inequality in the U.S. and internationally. Notions of development across societies will also be discussed.


**Week 7. October 5 – Conscientization and Participatory Change**

What is power? This session covers conscientization and participatory change as strategies for attaining power and effecting social change.

**Readings Due:**


**Week 8. October 12 – Exam 1**

This exam will cover material from Weeks 1 through 7. See Course Assignments (page 4) for the date that the exam opens and the date and time that the exam is due.

**Note:** Class does not meet in person.

**Week 9. October 19 – Hunger/Food Security**

Student-led workshop, followed by instructor-led lecture/discussion.

**Readings Due:**


Week 10. October 26 – Housing/Homelessness

Student-led workshop, followed by instructor-led lecture/discussion.


Week 11. November 2 – Health Care

Student-led workshop, followed by instructor-led lecture/discussion.


Week 12. November 9 – Child Welfare (continued on next page)

Student-led workshop, followed by instructor-led lecture/discussion.


**Week 13. November 16 – Immigration**

Student-led workshop, followed by instructor-led lecture/discussion.

**Readings Due:**


**Week 14. November 23 – Environmental Justice**

Student-led workshop, followed by instructor-led lecture/discussion.

**Readings Due:**


**Optional:** Sustainable Tennessee Organization (2012). *Sustaining Tennessee in the face of climate change: Grand challenges and great opportunities.* Read: Chapter 5 (pp. 37-55)
Week 15. November 30 – Exam 2

This exam will cover material from Weeks 9 through 14. See Course Assignments (page 4) for the date that the exam opens and the date and time that the exam is due.

Note: Class does not meet in person.
Workshop Facilitation – Instructions and Grading Criteria

Working in small groups, students will facilitate a 75-minute workshop on Hunger/Food Security, Housing/Homelessness, Health Care, Child Welfare, Immigration, or Environmental Justice. Workshops should be professional, engaging, and well prepared in advance. Students are expected to facilitate the workshop in a way that:

- Demonstrates mastery of the topic, beyond the assigned readings
- Develops class understanding of relevant social, economic, and political factors that affect the causes of or solutions for the topic
- Clearly and explicitly applies at least two course concepts to the topic (e.g., political economy, interest group politics, privilege, participatory change, etc.)
- Illuminates at least one specific example or case related to the topic at either the local, state, national, or international level
- Engages peers in participatory learning activities

When preparing your workshop, you should assume that your fellow students have prepared the assigned readings for the day. Thus, your task is to design, research, and implement a workshop that takes the class understanding of this topic—and the social, economic, and political factors at play—even deeper. This workshop is an opportunity to lead, facilitate, create, and produce successfully as a team.

Note: An initial workshop lesson plan or outline (1-2 pages) is due via email to the Instructor at least two weeks prior to your workshop. A sample lesson plan will be available on Blackboard. At least one week prior to your workshop, all members of your group should meet in person with the instructor, preferably before or after class, although other times during the week can also be arranged.

The workshop is worth 25% of your course grade, and will be graded out of 100 possible points:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates mastery of the topic</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develops understanding of relevant social, economic, and political factors</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriately applies at least two key course concepts to the topic</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses or analyzes at least one specific example or case related to the topic in an appropriate and meaningful way</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Effectively engages the class in participatory learning activities</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates professional presentation skills (e.g., effective time management, voice projection, responsiveness, flexibility)</td>
<td>10</td>
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