

Social Work 536

Section #

Policy and Advocacy in Professional Social Work

3 Units

The purpose of the social work profession is to promote human and community well-being. Guided by a person-in-environment framework, a global perspective, respect for human diversity, and knowledge based on scientific inquiry, the purpose of social work is actualized through its quest for social and economic justice, the prevention of conditions that limit human rights, the elimination of poverty, and the enhancement of the quality of life for all persons, locally and globally.

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Office:

**Office Hours: Tuesday 5:15 pm -
5:45pm/7:00 -7:30 pm or by
appointment**

Course Day: Tuesday

Course Time: 4pm/5:45pm

Course Location: VAC

I. COURSE PREREQUISITES

Policy and Advocacy in Professional Social Work (SOWK 536) is built upon a liberal arts undergraduate foundation. Students are expected to have a basic understanding of how American government works at the local, state and national levels, and a rudimentary familiarity with the existence of social welfare policies.

II. CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION

Social workers practice within complex and interconnecting systems of policy, programs and communities that directly and indirectly impact their clients' lives. This course studies and assesses the impact of anti-poverty programs, security-building insurance systems, and opportunity-creating public policies on clients seeking to navigate within and across these systems, and on the social worker's role therein, at the programmatic, community and state-wide levels.

III. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides a substantive understanding of the American social welfare policies and programs developed and implemented by all levels of government that seek to limit poverty, provide security and create opportunity for people, families and communities. These programs, systems, and policies will be assessed for their adequacy, effectiveness and fairness. Advocacy efforts – past and present – will be explored and even joined in some of these subject areas.

The course will also help develop students’ analytic, writing and presentation skills, which are crucial for successful social work practice across the systems, funding streams and communities that make up America. The course seeks to inspire students to develop a case-level, program-level and macro-level policy advocacy orientation, so that – regardless of their professional specialization – USC graduates will be motivated to redress social and economic injustice and empower less advantaged groups.

This course is divided into three modules: (1) the first module examines and assesses programs seeking to alleviate poverty, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid; (2) the second module studies how America uses various social insurances to create and reinforce family and community-level security, and includes focuses on Social Security, Unemployment and Disability insurances, and Medicare (including the impacts thereon of the Affordable Care Act); and (3) the third module examines how our society seeks to create opportunity through its education, progressive taxation, and other systems. Each of these modules focuses on understanding the policy decisions, financing, program implementation and advocacy interventions creating and impacting these various programs, and the role social workers have within and across them.

SOWK 536 provides a foundation for concentration-specific courses across the clinical and policy arenas, in which students can apply their knowledge, analysis and skill to develop specific improvements across sectors.

IV. COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students in the Policy and Advocacy in Professional Social Work course (SOWK 536) will:

Objective #	Objectives
1	Demonstrate understanding of the general provisions and current pivotal issues central to major social welfare policies in several key institutional sectors, and the impact these have on the local community; critically assess various substantive and advocacy-based options for improving / reforming these social welfare policies.
2	Analyze the political, social, and economic histories that have shaped the delivery and financing of major social welfare policies, and assess the differing impacts (positive, neutral or negative) that these histories and delivery- and financing-regimes have on vulnerable populations in American society.
3	Effectively advocate for services, rights, social justice, and equal protection for and with individuals, groups, and/or communities. In preparation for their advocacy work, students will also proactively identify common, repetitive and predictable problems across multiple practice settings and substantive issue areas that could trigger potential advocacy interventions.

Objective #	Objectives
4	Distinguish, appraise, and attend to differences within and between communities, agency settings and budgets, scientific research, technological developments, and emerging societal trends in order to reform the financing and delivery of targeted services at the mezzo level.
5	Demonstrate knowledge of the values, purpose and roles the social work profession practices within the contexts of policy systems and program administration at multiple levels of governmental (national, state, local); and understand how social workers intervene and engage in micro, mezzo and macro advocacy in each of these milieus.

V. COURSE FORMAT / INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS

This class will include a variety of teaching/learning modalities. The instructor will provide lectures, with particular focus on faculty area of expertise; and classes will also be interactive, with students encouraged to discuss their ideas and experiences. Selected sessions will feature videos, in-class exercises, and/or speakers to illustrate the topics under examination. Material from the field and individual faculty-practitioner expertise will be used to integrate theory and intention with practice and impacts. As class discussion is an integral part of the learning process, students are expected to come to class ready to discuss the required readings, and its application to theory and practice.

VI. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

The following table lists the nine Social Work core competencies as defined by the Council on Social Work Education's 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards:

Social Work Core Competencies	
1	Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior *
2	Engage in Diversity and Difference in Practice
3	Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice *
4	Engage in Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice
5	Engage in Policy Practice *
6	Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
7	Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities *
8	Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities *
9	Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations and Communities *

* Highlighted in this course

The following table shows the competencies highlighted in this course, the related course objectives, student learning outcomes, and dimensions of each competency measured. The final column provides the location of course content related to the competency.