
SOC POL 330: ECONOMICS OF SOCIAL POLICY

Fall 2019
Class meets Tuesdays & Thursdays, 9:30-10:50 AM, Annenberg G15

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Welcome to Economics of Social Policy! The purpose of the course is to think about social policy issues through an economic lens. We will explore the basic economic foundations of individual decision-making and discuss the ways in which economists hypothesize that individuals respond to the incentives embedded within social policies. We will pay particular attention to the nature and detail of existing social policy, and use economic analysis to predict how these policies might influence behavior. We will also explore some of the relevant empirical literature on a set of policy topics. I hope that by the end of the course you will understand the theoretical frameworks and some of the empirical tools that economists bring to their analyses of public policy issues. You need not be convinced that these frameworks are the best approach to analyzing policies, but you should understand them sufficiently to be able to analyze a policy issue in the way that an economist would.

Policy analysis involves both positive and normative aspects. Even when presented with the same sets of facts, people can have different opinions about the best policy responses to particular issues—indeed, that’s one of the factors that makes policy so much fun to study! The purpose of this class is to teach you how to think, not what to
think. When you are asked to analyze a policy issue, you will be evaluated on your reasoning, not on the position you take.

The course is broadly divided into two topics: income support programs and social insurance.

Course requirements will include 2 problem sets, 2 policy memos, a midterm exam, and a final exam. Your course grade will be determined as follows:
- Final exam (30%)
- Policy memos (40%)
- Midterm (20%)
- Problem sets (10%)

Required texts:
Gruber, Jonathan Public Finance and Public Policy (Worth Publishers)
ISBN-10: 1429219491
Note: any edition is fine.

I will also post some articles on the course Canvas website.

Academic Integrity
Students in this course are required to comply with the policies found in the booklet, "Academic Integrity at Northwestern University: A Basic guide". All papers submitted for credit in this course must be submitted electronically unless otherwise instructed by the professor. Your written work may be tested for plagiarized content. For details regarding academic integrity at Northwestern or to download the guide, visit: http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/index.html

Accommodations for students with disabilities
Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU (accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; 847-467-5530) and provide professors with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential.