

PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS

PLSC 208/876—EP&E 247

Spring 2011

The American Welfare State in Comparative Perspective

Professor Jacob S. Hacker

Monday 1:30-3:20; 77 Prospect Street, A001

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The American welfare state has long been considered a “laggard” in comparative perspective—less expensive and extensive, later to develop and slower to grow than systems of social welfare provision abroad. This course will examine the “exceptionalism” of the American welfare state through a wide-ranging investigation of the origins, development, and future of the most critical features of U.S. social policy. The questions that we will take up are varied: Why and in what respects is the American welfare state comparatively distinctive? Why has policy unfolded as it has in such core areas of the welfare state as health insurance, retirement pensions, and poverty relief? What role have race, gender, privately provided social benefits, and other important factors played in the welfare state’s formation? Has there been substantial reform and retrenchment over the past few decades? What explains current policy disputes?

Because U.S. social policy is very much in the news today, we will delve into both scholarly analyses and current debates, ending with a consideration of two burning issues of the past few years: health care reform and Social Security reform. By the end of the semester, students will have a stronger appreciation not only of the historical roots and political dynamics of U.S. social policy, but also of current battles in the enduring struggle over the proper role of government in the social welfare field.

Format

This is a small-group seminar. Although I will begin each session with a brief presentation, the remainder of each meeting will be given over to in-class discussion. As such, broad participation is essential. You should come to class having done the week’s readings and prepared to discuss them. You should also consult the course website for discussion questions and additional topical readings.

To encourage informed participation, I require that students prepare 4 short discussion papers (3-4 pp., double-spaced). Their purpose is to take up a key topic, issue, or argument in the week’s readings and evaluate it. These are not, therefore, to be summaries of the week’s readings, but independent analyses of themes and claims therein (for example, a critique of an argument made in the readings). Students can choose the weeks on which they write papers. At least one of these papers, however, must be a policy brief written on one of the current policy topics covered in the last three weeks of the course. This memorandum should be outline why and how America’s leaders should

take a particular approach to one of the key policy areas covered in the class. *The papers are due in my email inbox by 5PM on Sunday, the day before the seminar.*

In addition, students will write a longer (10-15 pp.) final paper to be turned in at the end of the semester. Although the topics for these papers must be approved in advance, there is substantial flexibility regarding subject and form, so long as the papers are analytic, make a refutable claim, and show strong grounding in the readings. Possibilities include:

- a cross-national or historical analysis of a particular policy area or issue using course readings and additional independent research;
- an empirically informed elaboration or dissection of a particular set of arguments concerning the factors that account for important aspects of U.S. social policy;
- a critique of an important area of U.S. social policy based on historical and/or comparative reflection, with suggestions for reform.

Grading is based in equal parts on the short papers, final paper, and seminar participation.

Readings

The readings are of three basic types: (1) works of *history* that principally seek to describe crucial events and actors in the development of U.S. social policy; (2) works of *analysis* that seek to explain processes or outcomes within particular policy areas or with regard to particular issues; and (3) works of *advocacy* that argue for reforming (or preserving) policies on the grounds that certain approaches are “best.” We will proceed roughly from (1) to (3), starting with a consideration of the historical foundations of U.S. social policy; then examining scholarly debates over specific policy areas, enduring historiographic controversies, and competing theoretical perspectives; and finally discussing some contested policy issues and the competing proposals that center around them. (To ensure timeliness, many of the readings in the third category will be distributed as the semester unfolds.) The readings will mix seminal and recent scholarly work with journalistic and popular accounts as well as a mix of recent policy proposals.

The books listed below are required. They are available at the Yale bookstore and on reserve at the Bass Library. Additional readings are available online (see the links in the syllabus). In addition, students should read at least one general source on American politics on a regular basis., such as the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*.

Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (Basic Books, 1982).

R. Kent Weaver, *Ending Welfare As We Know It* (Brookings, 2001).

Jacob Hacker, *The Divided Welfare State* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Weekly Schedule

Week 1 (1/10) Course Introduction and Administration

Theodore R. Marmor, Jerry L. Mashaw, and Philip L. Harvey, *America's Misunderstood Welfare State* (Basic Books, 1990), Chap. 2.

Week 2 (1/14) Historical Foundations

(This class meets of Friday instead of on Martin Luther King Day)

Noble, *Welfare As We Knew It*, Chaps. 1, 3-6

Report of the Committee on Economic Security, available online at:
<http://www.ssa.gov/history/reports/ces/ces5.html>.

Week 3 (1/24) Policy Areas I: Social Security

Martha Derthick, *Policymaking for Social Security* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1979), Introduction and Chaps. 1, 2, 6, 9, 11, and 14.

Oral history interview with Arthur J. Altmeyer, available online at:
<http://www.ssa.gov/history/ajoral4.html>.

Week 4 (1/31) Policy Areas II: Health Care

Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, Book II

Week 5 (2/7) Policy Areas III: The Working Years

Michael Graetz and Jerry Mashaw, *True Security* (Yale University Press, 1999), Chaps. 1 and 4.

Week 6 (2/14) Policy Areas IV: Antipoverty Policy

Weaver, *Ending Welfare As We Know It*, Chaps. 1-2 and pp. 43-53, and Chaps. 4-5, 10-11, and 13.

Lane Kenworthy, "Do Social Welfare Policies Reduce Poverty? A Cross-National Assessment," *Social Forces*, 1999.

Week 7 (2/21) Themes I: Race (*Proposal for final paper due in class.*)

Gareth Davies and Martha Derthick, "Race and Social Welfare Policy: The Social Security Act of 1935," *Political Science Quarterly* (Summer 1997).

Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare* (University of Chicago Press, 1999), Chaps. 3, 5.

Week 8 (2/28) Themes II: Gender

[Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity* \(Oxford University Press, 2001\), pp. 117-69.](#)

[Suzanne Mettler, *Dividing Citizens: Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy*, Chaps. 1, 4, and 9.](#)

“The Revised Benefit Schedule under Federal Old-Age Insurance,” available online at: <http://www.ssa.gov/history/reports/1939no2.html>.

SPRING BREAK

Week 9 (3/21) Themes III: Public-Private Relations

Jacob S. Hacker, *The Divided Welfare State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), all but conclusion

Week 10 (3/28) Contemporary Issues I: Retrenchment

[Paul Pierson, “Welfare State Retrenchment Over the Very Long Run,” to be supplied.](#)

[Jacob S. Hacker, “Privatizing Risk without Privatizing the Welfare State: The Hidden Politics of Social Policy Reform in the United States,” *American Political Science Review*, 2004.](#)

Week 11 (4/4) Contemporary Issues II: Health Care Reform

Jacob S. Hacker, “The Road to Somewhere: Why Health Reform Happened,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 2010.

[“Health Care Reform,” Special Issue of *The Economists’ Voice*, 2010 \(read White and Cutler\)](#)

[Michael F. Cannon, “All the President’s Mandates,” *Cato Institute Briefing Paper*, September 2009.](#)

Week 12 (4/11) Contemporary Issues III: The Future of Social Security

[Steven M. Teles and Martha Derthick, “Social Security from 1980 to the Present: From Third Rail to Presidential Commitment—and Back?,” in *Conservatism and American Political Development*, ed. Brian J. Glenn and Steven M. Teles \(New York: Oxford University Press, 2009\), 261-90.](#)

[“Social Security,” Special Issue of the *Economists’ Voice* \(read Krugman, Lazear, Diamond and Orszag, and Boskin\)](#)

Week 13 (4/18) Whither the Welfare State?

[Bruce Ackerman and Anne Alstott, Why Stakeholding? *Politics & Society*, 2004.](#)

Hacker, *Divided Welfare State*, Conclusion.

Reading period begins Monday, April 25. Papers are due in my inbox or mailbox (77 Prospect) at the end of reading period (May 2) by 4:30 PM.