

Syllabus
Introduction to Federal Social Programs in the United States
Professor Sarah Reber, UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs
(updated 9/22/2021)

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course provides an introduction to key federal social programs—in the areas of health care, education, housing, labor markets, racial equity and income support—in the United States. The course begins by discussing the goals of social programs, principles of program design from public economics, and approaches to evaluating policy alternatives. The course then covers one substantive policy area each week, discussing the history and purpose of programs in that area, what research shows about their effects, and/or current debates or proposals for reform.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS

See the course website for more detail on the topics to be covered and readings and other preparation you need to do for class. Here is the schedule of topics we will cover (subject to minor changes):

Week 1: Introduction and Goals of Federal Social Policy

Week 2: The Public Economics Framework: Key Concepts and Trade-Offs

Week 3: Racial Equity

Week 4: Taxation

Week 5: Poverty and Income Support

Week 6: Labor Markets

Week 7: Education

Week 8: Health Care

Week 9: Housing

Week 10: Wrap up and work on Congressional Testimony

COURSE POLICIES AND INFORMATION

Communication

You can reach me by email at sreber@ucla.edu. Please write “Social Policy Class:” followed by an actual subject in the subject line. I will do my best to respond quickly, usually within 24 hours.

Office Hours

I love meeting students, and I want you to learn as much as you can in this class. Please come to my office hours, which will be on Zoom. You can schedule an appointment at the appointment link provided on the course website (in the “Links and Resources” section).

Respectful Participation and Difficult Topics

We will cover topics in this course—including issues related to racism, poverty, and inequality—that some may find difficult or emotional to discuss. Sometimes, approaching these topics analytically can feel removed from the on-the-ground experiences of the people who are affected by policy, and different students may experience this differently depending on their backgrounds. Nevertheless, I

believe taking an analytic, data-informed approach to understanding social problems—and their potential solutions—is a critical complement to other approaches.

People learn best when they are actively engaged with the material, so you will spend a lot of time in this course in conversation with each other. It is my expectation that we all treat each other with respect in these discussions. Listen respectfully, don't interrupt, be inclusive. Avoid asking individuals to speak on behalf of an entire group. I encourage you to share your own experiences and beliefs if you feel comfortable doing so, but this is up to you. Give each other the benefit of the doubt.

I want to highlight a couple of items from the Public Policy Department's "Behavioral Expectations and Community Values" statement. The full statement is in the "Links and Resources" section of the course website.

- Strive to relate to and work effectively with others who differ from yourself, regardless of the person's age, class, color, culture, race or ethnicity, family structure, beliefs, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, ability, political orientation, and/or value system.
- Maintain freedom of expression and dialogue, in a respectful and civil manner, on the spectrum of views held by the diverse members of our community.

I also want to give you a "heads up" that in week three, I have assigned "The Case for Reparations," by Ta-Nahasi Coates; this essay contains descriptions of racial violence and racist language, including several instances of the "n-word," which I understand can be upsetting to read. Those descriptions and language are central to the author's argument and contribute to the power of the essay. Students will have the option of reading a summary of the essay, which does not contain these descriptions or language, if they prefer.

Email me or come to office hours if you ever have questions or concerns. And please let me know if there is anything I can do to make the discussions—or other aspects of the course—work better for you and other students.

Assignments and Grading

Research shows that students learn best when they are active learners and that completing small assignments promotes learning more than one big assignment. The assignments are designed with this in mind. Many are designed to help you keep up with the readings and coursework so that we can have lively discussions in class and in the breakout rooms.

Participation (10%)

- Posting questions in the Questions section of the course website or voting on questions posted there
- Participation in class sessions
- Completing the mid-course and end-of-course evaluations (The mid-course evaluation is a chance for me to learn how things are going and will be administered anonymously through CCLE. The end-of-course evaluation is administered by the university; I am able to see whether you completed the evaluation, not what you said.)

Weekly Quizzes & Reading Reactions (25%)

- Reading reactions (graded for completion, these will be part of the weekly quiz)
- Weekly quizzes (graded)
- Your two lowest scores will be dropped from the average

Key Questions Assignments (30%)

- Each week we discuss a specific policy domain (weeks 3 through 9), students will answer “Key Questions” about a policy proposal. Some weeks, students will have a choice of policy proposals to comment on.
- We will also use these questions as a guide for breakout room discussions, so students will get a start on completing the assignment during class time. This assignment will be due before class the following week.
- There are seven substantive topic areas covered in the course, and students must complete five Key Questions assignments (the two lowest grades will be dropped).
- These assignments will be peer graded for completion and effort. Students will grade and briefly comment on two other students’ assignments; completing the peer reviews and completing the assignment itself will account for 5% and 25% of the course grade, respectively.

Congressional Testimony (35%)

- For the final project, students will prepare Congressional testimony. You will receive more detailed instructions and information about grading in a separate document.
- You can work in groups of up to 3.
- Prep work for this assignment will start in week 8.
- Students will work on this assignment in breakout rooms and with the professor during class time in week 10.
- The final draft will be due during finals week (December 9 at 6pm).

Late assignments

Please turn your assignments in on time. In general, I take off 1/3 of a letter grade (so 3 points out of 100) for each day an assignment is late. If you need an extension, please email me as soon as you know you need more time.

For the Weekly Quizzes and Reading Reactions, I do not accept late work except in extraordinary circumstances. The point of these assignments is to guide you in the reading (and give you a little incentive to keep up), so it defeats the purpose if you do them late; plus, it is not really fair to answer the quiz after class. Your two lowest scores will be dropped from the average, so if you have to miss an assignment, you can just take a 0 and let that be one that is dropped.

Completing the assignments on time is important to get the most out of the course. I also understand that things come up, especially in COVID times. If you are struggling or become overwhelmed by your schoolwork, please reach out to me, Kevin Franco (if you are an MPP student; kfranco@luskin.ucla.edu), or Erika Villanueva (if you are an undergraduate Public Affairs major; contact her using my message center).

Religious Observance

If you have a religious observance that will conflict with your participation in this course, please email me before the end of the second week of class so that we can discuss accommodations.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Academic Accommodations

Students needing academic accommodations based on a disability should contact the Center for Accessible Education (CAE) at (310)825-1501 or in person at Murphy Hall A255. Students should contact the CAE within the first two weeks of the term as reasonable notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. For more information visit <http://www.cae.ucla.edu>.

Academic Integrity

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. I encourage you to review the University's policies regarding academic honesty. Senate Regulation A-306 requires that all suspected cases of academic dishonesty be reported to the Office of Student Conduct.

Mental Health

There are resources on campus for students to help with study habits, anxiety, stress, and depression. Please check out the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) center at UCLA (<https://counseling.ucla.edu>). **Crisis counseling is also available 24 hours/day at (310) 825-0768.** In addition to counseling and other psychological and mental health services, they provide additional resources such as readings on dealing with stress and anxiety, group counseling sessions, mindfulness trainings, and other behavioral services. CAPS services are often covered by UC SHIP.

Gender Discrimination

UCLA prohibits gender discrimination, including sexual harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. If you have experienced sexual harassment or sexual violence, there are a variety of resources to assist you. Be aware that UCLA faculty and TAs are required under the UC Policy on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment to inform the Title IX Coordinator—A NON-CONFIDENTIAL RESOURCE—if they become aware that you or any other student has experienced sexual violence or sexual harassment.

CONFIDENTIAL RESOURCES: You can receive confidential support and advocacy at the CARE Advocacy Office for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, 1st Floor Wooden Center West, CAREadvocate@careprogram.ucla.edu, (310) 206-2465. Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) also provides confidential counseling to all students and can be reached 24/7 at (310) 825-0768.

NON-CONFIDENTIAL RESOURCES: You can also report sexual violence or sexual harassment directly to the University's Title IX Coordinator, 2241 Murphy Hall, titleix@conet.ucla.edu, (310) 206-3417. Reports to law enforcement can be made to UCPD at (310) 825-1491. These offices may be required to pursue an official investigation.