

## **Shirley Zimmerman, Approaches to Family Policy**

### **APPROACHES TO FAMILY POLICY- FSoS 5255**

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### **Course Description**

This course focuses on the connections between public policies and families and the values that enter into policy debates and choices related to families. It provides conceptual frameworks that can be used to identify and understand some of the influences underlying policy choices affecting families and also frameworks for evaluating the consequences of these choices for families of diverse structures, socio-economic statuses, and racial and ethnic backgrounds. Central to the course are the intersections between families and governments via policy outputs, and the roles that citizens and family professionals can play in improving them.

### **Course Goals**

After this course, students should be able to:

1. critically examine the conceptual and practical connections between families and policy;
2. critically examine the influences that shape policy choices affecting families, i.e., values, structures, special interests, personal motivations, etc., through the application of different policy frameworks;
3. critically examine the goals and objectives of different family policies for the values they reflect;
4. critically think about the consequences of government policies for families through the application of family frameworks to different policy choices;
5. critically examine and consider the consequences of the distributional effects of government policies on families with diverse structures, racial and ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic status;
6. better understand their role as citizens and future family professionals in helping to shape family policy in ways that help, not hurt, families.

### **Assigned Readings**

Zimmerman, S. (1995). Understanding Family Policy: Theories and Applications (2nd edition). Newbury Park, Ca.: Sage Publications. (required)

Family Policies and Family Well-being: The Role of Political Culture. Newbury Park, Ca.: Sage Publications, 1992. (optional)

Packet of Focus readings (required):

- Summer, 1995, Vol 17, No. 1

- Fall/Winter, 1995, Vol 17, No. 2
- Spring, 1996, Vol. 17, No. 3
- Fall/Winter, 1996-97, Vol 18, No.2

Daily newspapers - the New York Times is an especially good resource

## **APPROACHES TO FAMILY POLICY**

Course Outline and Reading Assignments

Jan. 6, Definitions, Trends, and Models

- *Readings:*
  - Zimmerman, Chapter 1. Defining family policy Definitions, domain and concepts

Jan. 8, Family Trends: The Empirical Basis for Changing Family Definitions

- *Readings:*
  - Zimmerman, Chapter 2

Jan. 13, Family Trends in Context

- *Readings:*
  - Zimmerman, Chapter 3

Jan. 15, Competing Definitions and Perceptions of Family and Policy Trends

- *Readings:*
  - Zimmerman, Chapter 4. A Social Change Model: Different definitions and perceptions of the problems of families and role of government in addressing them

Jan. 20, Policy Frameworks: Converting Perceptions of Family Problems into Policies and Programs for Families

- *Readings:*
  - Zimmerman, Chapter 5. The institutional framework Chapter 6. The rational choice framework
- *Assignment:*
  - For the next three class sessions, students will break into groups to analyze a news article that deals with some policy issue related to some problem that families experience in relation to society, using the policy framework(s) featured for each class session to frame their analysis, They should be prepared to discuss:
    1. the problem or issue or situation on which the article focuses
    2. the policy or proposed policy that addresses the issue
    3. the relevance of the featured policy framework for understanding the way the problem is being addressed, using
    4. the concepts associated with the framework and giving illustrations drawn from the article

(Students will have to adapt group assignments to the news articles that will be provided)

One student will chair the discussion, another will record it, and another will observe group processes re: participation and climate. Summaries of group discussions will be turned in at end of class, signed by each group member.

Jan. 22, Policy Frameworks (continued)

- *Readings:*
  - Zimmerman, Chapter 7. Variations on policy as rational choice: political culture theory, incremental theory, game theory
- *Assignment:* See above

Jan. 27, Policy Frameworks (continued)

- *Readings:*
  - Zimmerman, Chapter 8. Interest group theory, elite theory and systems theory
- *Assignment:*
  - In addition to the usual group assignment, groups also will discuss which policy framework might best apply to the situation presented in the assigned news article and why it might or might not be as good as the ones featured for today.

Jan. 29, Exam - definitions, frameworks, concepts and their application

Feb. 3, Family Frameworks: Tools for Conceptualizing Family Well-Being

- *Readings:*
  - Zimmerman, Chapter 9. Families as social systems
- *Assignment:*
  - For the next two sessions, students will analyze a news article that discusses some problem experienced by families in relation to society, or is the result of some policy, from the perspective of one of the family frameworks featured for each of the sessions and be prepared to:
    1. identify the problem as it relates to families and the policy or problem that it raises or creates
    2. apply the family framework under review for today to analyze the implications of the problem for families, using the concepts associated with framework and providing illustrations from the article

One student will chair the discussion, another will record and summarize it, and another will observe the process and climate of the group, sharing his or her observations with the group. The summary will be turned in at the end of class signed by all group members.

Feb. 5, Family Frameworks (continued)

- *Readings:*
  - Zimmerman, Chapter 9 & 10. Exchange & Choice Theories, Symbolic Interaction, Family Stress Theory

Feb. 10, Putting It All Back Together

- *Readings:*
  - Zimmerman, Chapter 10. Conflict theory, Feminist and Cultural Theories & Chapter 11 Reframing the Policy- Family Relationship so it Works Better for Families
- *Assignment:*
  - Selecting the appropriate conceptual framework for assessing family well-being

Feb. 12, Exam - definitions, frameworks, concepts and their application

## Topical Issues in Family Policy: Application of Frameworks to Family Problems and Policy Responses

Feb. 17, Poverty, Welfare, and Welfare Reform: What's the Problem?

- *Readings:*
  - Measuring poverty: A new approach, Focus, 17,1. pp. 2-13,
  - (Students interested in comparing U. S. approach to poverty with that of another country should read Poverty and Social Policy in Unified Germany in Focus, 17, 3, pp. 49-54.)
- *Assignment:*
  - Small Groups: Discuss the implications of poverty for family well-being based on the application of family framework(s)

Feb. 19

- *Readings:*
  - Welfare reform, Zimmerman, pp. 46-56, 76-80, 153-154 (Clinton's welfare reform plan and the Contract with America);
  - Welfare reform in the 104th Congress: Goals, Options, and Tradeoffs, Focus, 17, 1, pp. 29-31
- *Assignment:*
  - Small groups: What's the problem? How is it defined? Discuss and compare the implications of Clinton's welfare reform plan, the Contract with America for families and their well-being, using family one of the frameworks. Also apply the policy frameworks that best fit the struggle over welfare reform
- Legislative Summaries are due.

Feb. 24

- *Readings:*
  - Update: The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, (handout);
  - Immigration provisions in the new welfare law, Focus, 18, 2, pp. 14-18;
  - Block grants: Advantages and disadvantages, Focus, 17, 1, pp. 33-40.
  - (Students interested in a comparative approach to family policy should read pp. 21-22 in Focus 17, 2 which is about Time Limited Benefits in France.

Feb. 26

- *Readings:*
  - Patterns, causes and consequences of out-of-wedlock childbearing: What can government do? Focus, 17, 1, pp. 41-45;
  - The myths of dependence and self-sufficiency: Women, welfare and low wage work, Focus, 17, 2, pp. 1-9
- *Assignment:*
  - Small groups: Apply the family framework(s) that best illuminates the implications of these readings for families. Give examples from the readings.

Mar. 3, Health Care Reform: What's the Problem?

- *Readings:*
  - Zimmerman, Chapters 6, 7, and 8

Mar. 5

- *Readings:*
  - A medicaid primer, Focus, 17, 3, pp. 1-6; Medicaid politics & group differences, Focus, 17, 3, pp. 7-11.;
  - News articles- Health care legislation enacted during the 104th Congress and since
- *Assignment:*
  - Identify the factors that have influenced developments in health care reform from the perspective of the policy frameworks. Assess implications of different health care reform proposals for family well-being, applying one of the family frameworks
- Papers due.

Mar. 10, Other Family Policy Topics

- *Readings:*
  - Kinship foster care and children's welfare: The California experience, Focus 17, 3, pp. 42-47;
  - Child support and children's well-being, Focus 17, 3, pp.31-36

Mar. 12

- *Readings:*
  - Food insecurity and hunger: Poverty policy issues for 1990s and beyond, Focus, 18, 2, pp. 61-64.
- *Assignment:*
  - Review of applications of conceptual frameworks to the problems of families and the responses of family policy to their problems
- Discussion of how conceptual frameworks can be used to define the problem and guide professional practice and discussion of legislative experiences

Mar. 17 Exam An integration and application of conceptual frameworks (policy and family) to the major family policy issues discussed in class

### **Course Requirements**

**Class Participation:** This course will involve lectures, class and small group discussion. Students will meet in small groups as outlined in the syllabus. Students will form groups at beginning of course and unless otherwise arranged, will remain in same group throughout the quarter. Groups will be expected to submit brief written summaries of their discussion at the end of class for each group session, signed by each group member. Members will rotate the roles of chair, presenters, recorder, and observer of group process, Group and class participation will be included in determining student grades. It will be assumed that students will come to small group sessions having completed the reading assignments.

At the conclusion of the course, each group member will anonymously complete a brief form evaluating the participation and contribution of each other. Students will rate each other on four criteria: 1) attendance at group sessions; 2) preparation; 3) contribution to group discussion and tasks; 4) contribution to the maintenance of group process and morale.

Emphasis on small group and class participation in this course is related to the nature of the course material and course objectives. Course materials deal with subject matter about which there is considerable debate and controversy in the larger society. Such debate not only requires informed citizens but also their active participation in it. One of the objectives of the course is to prepare students for participating in these processes.

**Class Attendance:** Because student participation is an essential component of this course, attendance is expected at all class sessions. Also because students will be held responsible for material presented and discussed in class as well as from course readings, students' will find it to their advantage to attend class regularly.

**Exams:** Three integrative exams will be given, January 19, February 12, and March 17. The exams will include both structured and essay questions. Answers to essay questions will be graded on the basis of accuracy and clarity in the application of concepts and analytic logic. These same criteria will be applied throughout the course for other written assignments.

**Legislative Hearing and Summary:** All students are expected to attend a legislative hearing or city council meeting dealing with an existing or proposed policy that addresses some problem experienced by families and submit a summary of their experience and observations (typed and double spaced). The summary should draw on one of the policy frameworks discussed in class to guide their observations and the development of their paper, highlight the goals and objectives of the policy or proposed policy under discussion, the values reflected in the goals and objectives of the policy or proposed policy, the roles and positions of persons participating in the discussion (i.e., chair, interest group representatives, etc.), and then draw on one of the family frameworks for coming to some conclusion about the implications of the hearing for families and their well-being. The summary is due on or before February 19.

To find out if and when meetings or hearings are scheduled, call the House Information Office, 296-2146. Ask to be put on the mailing list to receive meeting or hearing announcements. A schedule of meetings of other public bodies appears in the newspapers on Mondays. These meetings can substitute for a legislative meeting or hearing. Consider school board meetings, city council meetings, or any meeting at which some controversial policy issue related to families is being discussed. Although in-person attendance at hearings or meetings is encouraged and preferred, some meetings and hearings are televised on cable 'IV and viewing them on TV may substitute for actually attending them. CSPAN televises congressional sessions for both the House and Senate and these can be very interesting and informative.

**Grading.** Basic course requirements include the three exams; attendance at a legislative hearing followed by the submission of a summary of observations at hearing (typed and double spaced); small group and class participation; and class attendance.

- Exams 60%
- Legislative hearing and summary 20%
- Group/class participation/attendance 20%

Grades will be assigned according to the grading policies and practices of the University in the Class Schedule, including pluses and minuses.

- A = Outstanding
- B = More than satisfactory
- C = Satisfactory
- D = Less than satisfactory, but worthy of course credit
- F = Fail, not worthy of course credit

All students must complete all basic course requirements at the level deemed satisfactory for this course and write a 3 to 5 page summary of their observations of the legislative hearing they attended, following the instructions on page 7.

Points will be awarded for each assignment. Grades will be based on points accumulated over the quarter. All assignments will be awarded points on the basis of accuracy and clarity in the application of concepts, analytic logic, and knowledge of course material. Students working for an A are required

to write an 8 -10 page library researched paper in addition to accumulating the requisite points for an A.

Grades will not be posted. Students wishing to know their grade before it appears on their transcript should provide me with a stamped addressed postcard. Graded final exams will be in my office where students can review them.

Satisfactory work or a C in this course means being able to apply family and policy frameworks and the concepts with which they are associated to the analysis of different family policies and demonstrating a basic knowledge of the domain of family policy and the value debates that cut across family policy issues. A C for the course represents 70% of possible total of accumulated points.

More than satisfactory work or a B in this course means in addition to doing satisfactory work as outlined for a C, applying a conceptual framework to the analysis of some policy issue or problem related to families and coming to some conclusion about the implications of existing or proposed solutions to the problem for families, using both a policy and family framework in the analysis. A B represents 80% of possible total of accumulated points.

Outstanding work or an A in this course means being able to achieve at both C and B levels and in addition being able to compare and contrast the merits of different policy proposals related to families based on the conceptual frameworks presented in class. An A represents 90% of possible total of accumulated points.

For an A, students must achieve at the required level (see above), write a 3-5 page analysis of the legislative hearing they attended, and in addition, write a 8 to 10 page library-researched paper analyzing any family policy issue of their choice (typewritten, double spaced, and properly referenced). Students should frame their paper around a question that relates to both policy and families, and one of the family and policy frameworks. Due on March 5th or before.

The following outline may help in organizing the paper:

- a statement of the problem (as it relates to families and policy, i.e., poverty, domestic abuse, the high cost of health insurance, school choice)
- the significance of the problem for families and society the policy framework being used to guide the
- paper policy proposals or actual programs that address the problem factors that might explain a
- proposal's or program's likely or actual success, drawing on both policy and family frameworks
- discussion and conclusion about the implications of the program's or proposal's likely success or failure for
- families and their well-being, drawing on one of the family frameworks

The paper should be analytical and conceptual, drawing on one of the policy and family frameworks presented in class. The framework that is being used should guide the development of the paper. Conclusions about the implications of the policy or policy proposal for families and their well-being should be based on evidence presented earlier in the paper and be drawn from one of the family frameworks discussed in class. Use an outline and topical headings in organizing the paper, such as the topical headings listed above.

### **GRADUATE STUDENT PAPER**

A 15-20 page paper (typed and double spaced) dealing with a policy question related to families. The paper should be properly referenced and include the following:

- the policy question or problem (related to families)
- the importance of the question or problem from both a family and policy perspective
- the conceptual framework(s) used to answer the question
- policy response(s) to the problem

- research evidence that speaks to the effectiveness of the response in addressing the problem
- the implications of the evidence for family well-being, drawing on the family framework used to frame the question and answer it

The paper is due June 4. Papers will be graded on substance, organization, integration and accuracy in the use of concepts, analytic logic, and clarity of writing. Students should read their papers for misspelled words, typos, punctuation and so forth before submitting them; these are a distraction and a sign of carelessness. Late papers will be marked down half a grade. Because first drafts of papers are seldom satisfactory, students should allow plenty of time for writing their papers.

Journals useful to explore in preparation for the paper include: Family Relations, Family Issues, Social Service Review, Public Interest, the New Republic, Social Policy, Policy Studies Review, Policy Studies Journal, Social Security Bulletin, Monthly Labor Review, and Journal of Family and Economic Issues Transaction -- and others.