The Social Policy concentration explores how policies function as the guiding principles on which social programs are based. Students interested in public service, public policy, public health, and law typically choose to follow the requirements of the social policy concentration.

Courses analyze how social policies and social institutions influence the course of human lives and how people can influence social policies. Students develop a strong interdisciplinary foundation in the social sciences and gain an understanding of current social policy issues, drawing on research in anthropology, communication studies, economics, ethnic studies, gender studies, history, philosophy, political science, public health, and sociology. Examples of interdisciplinary specializations include education policy and reform, urban issues and policy, health care issues and policy, legal issues, and environmental issues and policy.

Students are encouraged to use elective credits to build specialties in such areas as juvenile justice, advocacy programs, and policy analysis and to develop the oral and written communication skills important to success in law school and public policy positions.

Program of Study

- Social Policy Major (https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/education-social-policy/social-policy/social-policy-major/)

SOC_POL 201-0 Introduction to Social Policy (1 Unit) Social policy formulation: the substance of major American social policies, the agenda-setting process, and how the political system shapes social policy in this country.

SOC_POL 304-0 Social Policy & the Human Services (1 Unit) Development of social policy for human services in the United States. Human service policies for education, mental health, physical health, prisons, income, and aging.

SOC_POL 305-0 Law and Social Policy (1 Unit) Use and influence of the legal system in and on social institutions and policy.

SOC_POL 307-0 Educational Policy (1 Unit) Conflict between societal imperatives to select and prepare young people for future careers and to offer youths opportunity; how society and schools address this conflict; various approaches to policy reform.

SOC_POL 310-0 Legal Aspects of Education (1 Unit) School governance structure and decision making; relevant state and federal legislation; role of the US Supreme Court in affecting public schooling.

SOC_POL 311-0 Social Policy and the United States Health Care System (1 Unit) Examines the health care delivery system in the United States through a review of US health policy issues.

SOC_POL 312-0 Social Policymaking and Implementation (1 Unit) Examines the process by which social policies are made, the process and realities of their implementation, and the attendant politics.

SOC_POL 313-0 Race, Inequality, and the Political Analysis of Public Policy (1 Unit) The purpose of this course is to make you a better political analyst. This course will familiarize you with substantive research on politics that has concrete insights for reformers, political advocates, and other public policy stakeholders. The class will cover substantive issues in politics along with how they intersect with class, race, gender and partisanship. While the main focus of the course is to discuss critical issues, there will also be an emphasis on public policy and political science writing formats, styles and standards. It cannot be emphasized enough how important research, analytic and writing skills are to virtually all careers; nothing is more quickly discrediting of good ideas than bad writing. The first half of class is mainly lecture and discussion. The second half of class has been designed to promote your learning as a writer and thinker in public policy. It will provide students with a designated forum for developing and “work shopping” their written work and discussing issues covered in class. The TA will offer feedback on questions as students write, edit, and revise their papers. We will also frequently practice skills in responding critically to colleagues’ texts. One or more quizzes may be administered as well.

SOC_POL 330-0 Economics of Social Policy (1 Unit) Economic concepts and empirical tools to analyze the design and effects of social policies. Topics include the social safety net, health insurance, minimum wage, and taxation. Pre-Requisites are Econ 281 and Econ 310-1 or SESP 310 for SESP students.

SOC_POL 331-0 Economics of Inequality and Discrimination (1 Unit) Economic concepts and empirical tools to analyze the causes and consequences of inequality and discrimination. Topics include housing policy, crime, earnings inequality, and the role of education. Prerequisites: ECON 202-0 and SESP 210-0 or equivalent.

SOC_POL 332-0 Economics of Education Policy (1 Unit) Economic concepts and empirical tools to analyze the design and effects of education policies, including school choice, accountability, education finance, class size policy, and teacher compensation and retention. Prerequisites: ECON 202-0 and SESP 210-0 or equivalent.

SOC_POL 333-0 Economics of Health, Human Capital, and Happiness (1 Unit) Understanding causal relationships is a central goal in social science and science in general. Correlations help to predict outcomes, but if we want to influence outcomes we need to understand causal pathways. It is not sufficient to observe what is happening, we need to know why it is happening. In this course students will learn the toolbox of causal inference econometrics with applications to the economics of health, human capital, and subjective wellbeing. The empirical methods we will cover include multivariate regressions, panel data, difference-indifference designs, instrumental variables, randomized control trials, and regression discontinuities. We will also discuss causal evidence derived from theoretical models and machine learning. Health, human capital, and subjective wellbeing (“happiness”) are core dimensions of social welfare and inequality in our society. They matter as an outcome for people’s lives and they matter as an input into economic and social productivity. Moreover, health, human capital, and happiness are impacted by behaviors and by social and environmental conditions – factors that can be impacted via social policies. To develop effective social policies, however, it is crucial to understand the causal mechanisms driving these factors. We will discuss fetal origins, the impact of air pollution on health, causes and consequences of mental illness in childhood and youth, the impact of income on health, trends in mortality, the economic drivers of fertility, happiness across countries and over time, and the roots of midlife crisis. Prerequisites: ECON 202-0 (Intro to Microeconomics) and a 200-level statistics class (SESP 210-0, STAT 202-0, STAT 210-0 and PSYCH 201-0 are all suitable).

SOC_POL 351-0 Special Topics in Social Policy (1 Unit) Advanced work on special topics.

SESP 114-0 Summer Internship (0 Unit)

SESP 115-0 Internship (0 Unit)
SESP 195-0 Community Engagement (1 Unit) Critical reflection on community service experiences in relation to broader societal issues. Conceptual frameworks for understanding the meaning and nature of community. For Civic Engagement Certificate students only.

SESP 200-0 Understanding Knowledge (1 Unit) N/A.

SESP 201-0 Human Development: Childhood and Adolescence (1 Unit) Personal, social, and cognitive development from birth through adolescence. Interplay of biological and experiential factors on linguistic and conceptual development, ego, and personality.

SESP 202-0 Introduction to Community Development (1 Unit) Historical and contemporary community-building efforts, focusing on Chicago’s neighborhoods. Community development strategies: the settlement house, community organizing, and community economic development.

SESP 203-0 Human Development: Adulthood and Aging (1 Unit) Psychological, sociological, and biological factors influencing socialization and development from young and middle adulthood through old age. Influences of family, school, and work on the individual.

SESP 204-0 Designing for Social Change (1 Unit) Processes, challenges, and ethics of designing programs, at home and abroad, for realizing human rights and meaningful social change.

SESP 210-0 Introduction to Statistics and Research Methodology (1 Unit) Definitions and classifications of terms used in quantitative methods; measures of typical and maximum performance, reliability, and validity checks; reporting and displaying data; interpreting results.

SESP 218-0 Leaders Lab (1 Unit) N/A.

SESP 251-0 Community Based Research Methods (1 Unit) N/A.

SESP 272-0 Field Research Methods (1 Unit) Guided practice in systematic and participant observation. Observer bias, field notes, unobtrusive measures.

SESP 291-1 Peer-Led Learning: Theory and Practice (0.25 Unit) SESP 291 is the training program for students working as first-time mentors in the Peer Leaders program. It is taken over two academic quarters, with each quarter offering .25 credit (a total of .5 credit). You will receive a “K” grade for fall quarter, which means you are continuing in the course. After winter quarter, you will receive a letter grade which will be retroactively applied to fall quarter.

SESP 291-2 Peer-Led Learning: Theory and Practice (0.25 Unit)

SESP 295-0 Theory and Practice of Community Consulting (1 Unit) Course on the importance of community capacity building and the community-consulting process; start of preliminary work for the Certificate in Civic Engagement capstone project.

SESP 298-0 Student Organized Seminar (1 Unit) Courses proposed by students and supervised by faculty sponsors on special topics approved by the SESP undergraduate education director. May be taken only once per quarter; pass/no credit only. Consultation with the SESP student affairs assistant dean advised.

SESP 299-1 Civic Engagement Capstone Research (1 Unit) Independent study courses leading to completion of the Certificate in Civic Engagement capstone project.

SESP 299-2 Certificate in Civic Engagement- Capstone Project (1 Unit) Independent study courses leading to completion of the Certificate in Civic Engagement capstone project.

SESP 310-0 Methods for Causal Inference (1 Unit) N/A.

SESP 317-0 Gender and the Life Course (1 Unit) How gender influences major life stages. Focus on the psychosocial effects of gender on children, young, midlife, and old adults; societal institutions, and selected social policy issues.

SESP 320-0 Race and Education (1 Unit) Conceptual underpinnings of the construct of race and how conceptions of race have influenced the course of education in the United States.

SESP 322-0 Crafting Child Policy (1 Unit) N/A.

SESP 323-0 Trauma and Atrocity: Holocaust Memory, Memorials and Museums: (1 Unit) N/A.

SESP 324-0 Pedagogies for History and Injustice: Holocaust Education Design (1 Unit) N/A.

SESP 325-0 Race, Adolescence, and School Discipline (1 Unit) In recent years, racial disparities in school discipline have attracted the attention of educators, policymakers, parents, and the general public. Why is it so hard for legal, political, and educational institutions to improve school discipline? How do intersections of race, gender, and social class matter for students’ experiences of school discipline? Are there schools that are getting discipline right? What does that look like, and to what extent can other schools learn from their successes? In this course, we will learn about evidence-based policy improvements and imagine how to create schools where race does not predict discipline.

SESP 351-0 Special Topics (1 Unit) Advanced work on special topics.

SESP 351-SA Special Topics (1 Unit) Advanced work on special topics. This course is limited to students approved to study abroad through the Global Learning Office (GLO).

SESP 382-0 Practicum in Human Development; Learning Sciences (4 Units) Real-world participant observation in professional activities and projects; development of analytical field studies of the practicum experience based on field notes, recorded observations, and class discussions; culminates in a final research paper. Prerequisites: SESP 272-0; consent of SESP practicum director 2 quarters before registration (3 quarters if a Summer Session practicum). For LRN SCI students only.

SESP 384-0 Practicum in Human Development - Washington, D.C. (4 Units) See description for SESP 382-0. Offered during Summer Session only. Prerequisites: SESP 272-0; consent of SESP practicum director 3 quarters before registration. For participants in the Washington, DC, field study program only.

SESP 386-0 Practicum: Human Development & Psychological Svcs. (4 Units) See description and prerequisites for SESP 382-0. For HDC students only.

SESP 387-0 Practicum: Learning& Organizational Change (4 Units) See description and prerequisites for SESP 382-0. For LOC students only.

SESP 388-0 Practicum: Social Policy (4 Units) See description and prerequisites for SESP 382-0. For SOC POL students only.

SESP 389-0 Practicum in Human Development - San Francisco (4 Units) See description and prerequisites for SESP 382-0. Offered during Summer Session only. For participants in the San Francisco field studies program only.

SESP 390-0 Research Apprenticeship (1 Unit) Opportunity to participate in faculty research projects. Prerequisites: consent of the faculty member and the SESP assistant dean for student affairs; submission of completed Request for Independent Study/Special Courses Form at registration.

SESP 391-0 Advanced Research Design (1 Unit) Overview of research methods that may be used to design and implement the honors thesis. Prerequisites: SESP 210-0 and SESP 272-0 recommended.
SESP 392-0 Experiential Learning: Practicum (4 Units)

SESP 398-0 Senior Thesis Seminar (1-3 Units)  Students develop, design, implement, and evaluate a research project under a faculty advisor's guidance. Prerequisites: senior status, cumulative GPA by the end winter quarter of the junior year, recommendation for the honors program from SESP 391-0 instructor(s); consent of program director.

SESP 399-0 Independent Study (1 Unit)  Faculty-supervised study of special topics of the student's own choosing and not covered in regular courses. Prerequisites: consent of the supervising faculty member(s) and the SESP assistant dean for student affairs; submission of completed Request for Independent Study/Special Courses Form at registration.