**Chapter 1**

***Social Policy and the American Welfare State***

**CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Social welfare policy is arguably best viewed through the lens of political economy (i.e., the interaction of economic, political, and ideological forces). This chapter provides an overview of the American welfare state through that lens. In particular, it examines various definitions of social welfare policy, the relationship between social policy and social problems, and the values and ideologies that drive social welfare in the United States. In addition, the chapter examines the effects of ideology on the U.S. welfare state, including the import-ant roles played by conservatism and liberalism (and their variations) in shaping welfare policy. An understanding of social welfare policy requires the ability to grasp the economic justifications and consequences that underlie policy decisions. As such, this chapter contains a brief introduction to Keynesianism, free market economics, socialism, and communitarianism, among others.

**STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

* Students will be able to define social welfare policy, and identify how it drives social work practice.
* Students will understand how the redistributive role of social welfare policy may contribute to the maintenance and survival of our society.
* Students will understand the distinctive values and economic perspectives associated with Keynesianism, free market economics, and democratic socialism.
* Students will understand the political continuum from liberalism to libertarianism with an emphasis on the distinctive values and economic assertions of each.
* Students will understand some of the major systemic and personal implications for the current conservatism resurgence in America.

**TEACHING TIPS**

* It is important to create a comfortable, safe space for students to be able to discuss political perspectives. The instructor should lead the class in a discussion of how to participate in civil discourse in the classroom, and encourage students to develop a set of class expectations for mutual regard and respect.
* Begin by exploring the term “policy.” Ask student about the policies they follow in their personal lives, at work, or in any agencies they encounter in their daily lives.
* Challenge students to provide support for their opinions shared in class, and to develop skills in providing convincing and compelling arguments that are substantiated.
* Identify the swinging pendulum of how the United States has moved from liberal to conservative approaches historically in addressing social issues.
* Bring up a number of controversial topics such as immigration, reproductive health care services, adoption rights, and other similar challenges. Ask your students to explore how a libertarian, a liberal, or a conservative may solve each one.

**LECTURE GUIDE AND ASSET CORRELATION**

The below lecture guide and asset correlation indicates where discussion prompts, assignments, activities or online activities connect to a given topic. The full descriptions of these prompts and assignments follow the below guide.

***Discussion Prompts***

Throughout this chapter, various discussion prompts have been provided for in-class use. These prompts are developed to assist you in starting open conversation with students about key topics of the chapter.

***Assignments and Activities***

These assignments and activities can be used in place of or in supplement of the online activities available for students.

***Chapter Outline***

# Definitions of Social Welfare Policy (Discussion Prompt 1)

# Social Problems and Social Welfare Policy (Discussion Prompt 2)

# Social Work and Social Policy (In-Class Activity 5)

# Values, Ideology, and Social Welfare Policy (Discussion Prompt 3)

# The Political Economy of American Social Welfare (Out-of-Class Assignment 3)

# The US Economic Continuum (Discussion Prompt 4)

## Keynesian economics (In-Class Activity 4)

## Conservative or Free Market economics (In-Class Activity 1)

## The Global Financial Crisis

## Democratic Socialism

# The US Political Continuum (In-Class Activities 2 and 3)

## Liberalism and Left-of-Center movements (Out-of-Class Assignment 1)

### Neoliberalism

### Self-Reliance School

## Class Conservatives and the Far Right (Out-of-Class Assignment 2)

### Classic conservatism

### Neoconservatism

### Cultural and Social Conservatism

### Libertarianism

# Welfare Philosophers and the Neoconservative Think Tanks (Discussion Prompt 5)

# Conclusion

**DISCUSSION PROMPTS**

1. Since social welfare is a mechanism for redistributing resources from those in a society who have assets to those who do not, under what conditions do you think that social welfare is justifiable. Identify categories of people that you believe society should assist and categories of people that society should not assist. How do these groups of people differ? How are they alike?
2. What are the strengths and the weaknesses of the mixed welfare economy of the United States? Government agencies, for-profit corporations, and not-for-profit corporations all provide some social services. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of each with attention to the primary sources of revenue, potential for innovation, and capacity to respond to changing social problems.
3. What is the political ideology of one of your favorite family members? Describe how s/he feels about a free market economy. Does s/he tend to believe that government is the solution or the problem? What does s/he think causes poverty? Would s/he prefer that the poor solve their own problems, or that our society give the poor a little more help? Where does your family member sit on the U. S. political continuum?
4. What are the advantages to a free market economy in comparison to an economy in which the government is more active? Unrestrained capitalism tends to increase economic disparities between rich and poor, but may offer more opportunity for some to succeed. Which is more important, opportunity or equality? Why?
5. What is the great risk shift? Identify risks that you believe we all should share from risks that only the individual or family should face. How are these risks different? If the current political trend were more liberal, would any of the risks you identified be in another category?

**IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES**

1. **Identifying exceptions to a free market economy in the United States.** The authors identify three characteristics of a free market on page 9 – many buyers and sellers, perfect information, and free entry and exit. Many buyers and sellers make it impossible for one buyer or seller to influence the price of any product. Perfect information places neither buyer nor seller is at a competitive disadvantage. Free entry and exit into the market eliminates barriers for both buyers and sellers to get the best price. Students should break up into teams of three and identify specific companies or products that clearly indicate that the free market does not accurately describe the American economy. Share answers in class after teams are finished brainstorming exceptions.
2. **The politics of the President.** Break students into teams of 3-4 students and have them recreate the U. S. Political Continuum (pp. 12-17) with seven columns from Liberalism to Libertarianism. Teams should brainstorm at least 10 different policy proposals advanced during the current President’s administration and locate them within the appropriate column to identify the political orientation of the President. Share answers in class after teams are finished.
3. **Examining the political spectrum.** Chapter 1 introduces social welfare policy, and examines both economic and political continuums. Create a group at the Pew Research Center “Political Typology Quiz”, so that students can compare their own place on the continuum with their peers in the class. Ask students to examine their results, and be prepared to participate in a class discussion about those results, and the sources of their political ideologies.
4. **Liberal vs. Conservative Economic Views of Social Welfare.** Watch the YouTube video for an entertaining contrast of Keynes’ and Hayek’s viewpoints titled “Fear the Boom and Bust: Keynes vs. Hayek Rap Battle”. Use the video to illustrate and discuss these different perspectives.
5. **Self-reflection exercise.** Students write a one-page paper in class with the following prompt, “I believe that social welfare programs in the United States should be expanded (or restricted) because . . . .” On the back of the page, students should identify at least five groups of people that will benefit from the implementation of this proposal and at least five groups who will be penalized from the implementation of this proposal.

**OUT-OF-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS**

1. **The politics of the Republican or Democratic Party.** Students should access the website for the Republican Party or the Democratic Party. Have them review the materials available at the website. Compare the assigned party’s positions on contemporary issues to the Liberal to Libertarian political continuum discussed in the text and write a 2-3 page paper identifying the political ideology or ideologies of the assigned party.
2. **Media and political ideology.** Watch at least one hour on one of the cable news channels that you do not regularly watch (e.g., Fox News Channel, MSNBC, CNBC, Headline News, or CNN). Write a 2-3 page paper reflecting on the economic and/or political perspective of the commentators. Did they appear slanted toward any specific political or economic perspective? Was an effort made to present both sides of ideological issues? Compare this news source to the news source that you customarily prefer. Were there any significant differences?
3. **Richard Wilkinson: How economic inequality harms societies.** Watch the TED video titled “How Economic Inequality Harms Societies”. Write a 2-3 page paper reflecting on the economic system in the United States. How might the U. S. economy support economic inequality? If you wanted to decrease the economic inequality in the U. S., what changes might you suggest?

**STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

* Students will be able to define and identify social welfare policy.
* Students will understand the values underlying the different political positions.
* Students will connect the values in the social work profession to the economic and political orientation that is closely aligned to these.
* Students will acquire the knowledge necessary to assess economic and political positions vis-à-vis social work values and ethics.