The primary aim of this graduate course is to introduce students to key characteristics, themes, and debates regarding social welfare in the United States. The course is organized into four sections:
Section I focuses on a contextual framework for understanding the form and substance of U.S. social welfare; Section II examines facets of gender and race; Section III highlights select policy areas and issues; and Section IV provides an introduction to sectors that have been proposed for the delivery of social welfare.

In 2008, UEP adopted a number of competencies that students should have familiarity with via courses and other learning activities. This course reflects a number of these competencies, including, “…relationship between the market and polis…; role(s) of government, governance…; history, theory and processes of both policymaking and planning…with implementation…; administrative, legal, and political aspects of policy…; areas of specific policy or planning content-based knowledge related to professional interests…” Within this context, students will have opportunities to explore specific social policies via readings and completion of course requirements. I will use select presentations throughout the course to highlight specific policies in the areas of public health, social security, welfare reform and poverty, and other areas.

The course readings and discussions cover basic questions about U.S. social welfare:

- What are the key characteristics of the U.S. social welfare state?
- What social and demographic factors mold social welfare policies?
- What are some of the major debates about social policy?
- What kinds of social welfare initiatives have been implemented by national administrations?
- How do political institutions, political parties, and the courts influence social welfare policies?
- How does ideology mold the conceptualization, implementation, and evaluation of social welfare?
- How has race and gender molded social policies?
- What are characteristics of poverty? How does welfare reform address this issue?
- What is, or should be the role of the “free market” or “privatization”, or faith-based sector, in the production or distribution of social goods?

These questions will be explored through the required readings, presentations, and small group discussions. The questions provide a framework to investigate and discuss specific social policies.

Course requirements include:

1) Completion of all required readings; presentations based on assigned readings are very important in this class; periodically, I will also assign short presentations based on news articles or development on various topics;

2) Completion of two policy memos (and, to be presented in class) on a social policy / program that interests you; more details in class.

Most required readings are included in the course packet and available from Gnomon Copy. A few selections (marked with an asterisk *) will be emailed to students in pdf format.
Session 1 (9/08): Introduction to U.S. Social Welfare

The first session will be devoted to an overview of the course and readings; expectations regarding readings and contributions; discussion about the final papers; introductory remarks about social welfare in the U.S.

Session 2 (9/15): Key Characteristics of U.S. Social Welfare and Major Debates (what are major components or ideas that mold the U.S. social welfare state; some of these components have been long debated – and what are the key political questions or debates that affect our society; how does the U.S. compare to other welfare states in some areas)


Session 3 (9/22): U.S. Social Welfare From the ‘New Deal’ to Present (why is it important to understand the genesis of the New Deal period, today; how did various national administrations and presidents approach social welfare; why does the Reagan period stand out)

I. Katznelson, “White Veterans” When Affirmative Action was White (W.W. Norton, 2005) - packet

Session 4 (9/29): Explaining U.S. Social Welfare: Institutions, the Courts, and Politics (how do institutions, re: political parties, the Supreme Court, interest groups, or the administrative state mold public policies and the social welfare state; what is the role of civic values, or ideology, in the U.S. social welfare state)

Read: The Federalist Papers, No. 10 and No. 51 - packet
Part II

Session 5 (10/06): Gender and the U.S. Social Welfare State (how is gender hierarchy reflected in social policies; the single-female head household as a metaphor for social policy; what are policy strategies for gender equality)


Session 6 (10/20): Race and the U.S. Social Welfare State (what is the nature of racial hierarchy in U.S. society; what historical dynamics have shaped race –and are such relevant for understanding social welfare today; the criminal justice system as part of the social welfare state)

B. Western, “Reentry: Reversing mass imprisonment” Boston Review (July/August 2008) - packet

Part III

Session 7 (10/27): U.S. Social Welfare and Poverty (history of poverty and begging; social policy as regulation of labor and low-income groups; taxonomy of U.S. poverty)


Session 8 (11/03): U.S. Social Welfare and Welfare Reform (causes and effects of urban poverty; the politics of research and welfare reform; welfare reform as labor policy)

L. Simmons, “…Imperative of Organizing Low-Wage Women Workers” Working USA (Winter 2002-3) - packet
Session 9 (11/10): U.S. Social Welfare and Public Health (major public health challenges; political and economic faces of public health; the ‘social determinants’ school)

N. Freudenberg, et al., Cities and the Health of the Public (Vanderbilt University Press, 2006) *

Part IV

Session 10 (11/17): U.S. Social Welfare: the Free Market and Social Security (essential features of the free market and social welfare; debate about free market versus government / civic arena for delivery of social welfare; pro’s and con’s privatization of social security)

M.Hieger / W.Shipman “Common Objections to Market-Based Social Security System: A Response” CATO Institute, July 22, 1997) *
G.Anrig / B. Wasow, “Twelve Reasons Why Privatizing Social Security is a Bad Idea” (DISCOVERY Foundation, 2005) *


Read: N. Folbre, “Demanding Quality: Worker/Consumer Coalitions and ‘High Road’ Strategies in the Care Sector” Politics and Society, vol.34, no.1 (March 2006) *

Session 12 (12/01): U.S. Social Welfare and the Faith-based Sector (overview of history and contemporary impact of faith-based organizations in social welfare; pro’s and con’s re: faith based sector as key for delivery of social welfare)

J.C.Green, American Congregations and Social Service Programs, Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy at Pew Charitable Trusts, (2007) *

Session 13 (12/08): Completion of class presentations