Northwestern University  
School of Education and Social Policy  
Spring 2006  

Special Topics:  
Child Welfare, “Race”, and Systemic Perspectives  

Professor Brian Ragsdale, PhD  
Office: TBD, Office Hours, Wednesdays 10:30 to 11:30 am  
773-480-1981, cell phone  
Monday and Wednesday, 9 to 10:20 am  

Although we are keenly interested in the development of state and federal social policies relating to child welfare, we are also interested in learning how these policies impact various members of a family. Why and how is it that African American children who are involved in Child Protection Services are two times as likely than White children to be separated from their families? This course seeks to answer this question by examining the historical, sociopolitical, and legal contexts of the child welfare system. Drawing from several disciplines, psychology, social work, and law, we will explore the policies and practices of child welfare systems.  

Central to the construction of this course is that “interlocking systems of oppression” do exist (e.g., privilege, racism, sexism, and class), and using this framework will help to develop a critical consciousness about what families experience when they are mandated to engage with the juvenile court. To gain greater insight into how children are impacted by these decisions, we will read and analyze autobiographical essays written by youth involved in foster care.  

Goals/Objectives  

1. To review major federal policy and state statutes in child welfare  
2. To understand child welfare, foster care, and related social work and psychological theories as they relate to family intervention practices  
3. To understand different types of child maltreatment  
4. To develop an awareness of and integrate a critical consciousness about how oppression and privilege may effect the development and execution of various child welfare social policies.  

Required Texts  


Philip R. Popple and Leslie Leighninger - Arizona State University  
Subscription Price: USD $42? for 150 days, (SafariX eTextbooks Online, an electronic bookshelf where students can access fully searchable web editions of textbooks at significant savings over print editions).


Additional readings will be handed out in class or will be available in the SESP student affairs office.

Course requirements

There will be two reflection/response papers (4 pages each, doubled space, font size no less than 12 points, maximum length is 4 pages). These papers should demonstrate your depth of knowledge on a subject matter covered in the choice. These are graded by clarity, criticality, incorporation of your insight, integrating class discussions/lectures and your insight. Superior papers use actual passages from text to strengthen your opinion or argument. While emotion is a part of the development of intellect, try to show a balanced perspective when expressing your views.

Your final paper is to be between 8 to 14 pages including references, double spaced, using APA citation style. Here students may show some creativity, by approach or method of exploration. Please see the enclosed sample papers from prior years; each student approached their learning and combined them with their own intellectual understanding of the material. Papers are due in hard copy format in my mailbox by 5 pm of the assigned due date. These papers scored in the top 10% of the grades.

DCFS in the NEWS. By culling through Chicago Tribune or other media sources, students will be required to investigate whether or not DCFS policies and procedures were adhered to in the case under investigation. Students will be required to submit one document describing their group processes, and the group will present a 10 minute presentation about the case including their recommendations for approving policies.

Class Debate: Each student group will present a 30-minute in class debate. This is a group assignment and students will be required to meet at least 2 times outside of the class period. We will discuss this in greater detail, and finalize date in class

All assignments will cover the assigned readings, lectures, guest speakers, and videos shown in class or videos that are viewed over the internet. Extra/bonus points will be given for perfect or near perfect attendance (up to 5 points). No late assignment will receive a grade of A, and the grade may decrease by every hour or day it is late. No assignment will be accepted 2 days past the due date, unless I approve this under extreme circumstances. When a date and time deadline is agreed upon, in order to ensure fairness for all concerned we should adhere to these deadlines.
Students are encouraged to be engaged as both active listeners and verbal participants.
Classroom environment includes discussions, lectures, group assignments, and in-class experiential exercises. I will facilitate discussion and will try to move our discussions along. I also view class participation as a reflective and internal process, and this process can be reflected in your short essays. While students may have personal experiences that relate to the topic at hand, please try to show circumspect in sharing personal information. Students have told me that they feel awkward offering a critique or counter-viewpoint when a classmate expresses a person view point and their response might be perceived as potentially hurting a persons feelings. Engaged civility is the classroom environment we aspire to, this means we strive to listen to others with an open mind. Because we are open to others does not mean that we can not share our viewpoint….For example, something along this line usually works well…”I appreciate what student x said, but I have a slightly different perspective I would like to share…” When in doubt and when you might have strong reactions, please see me during my office hours, I might be able to share with you learning strategies of how to integrate these learning experiences.

Assignments

Two Reflection Papers 100 points each, 200 points total
DCFS in the NEWS 100 points for each member of the group
Debate 75
Final Paper 100
Class Interaction 25

Grading: The total possible points for this course is 500 points

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Evaluation: This is an extensive course where a fair amount of reading and class participation is required. Late assignments are not allowed unless prior arrangement has been made with the instructor. If you miss any class, it will be your responsibility to borrow notes from another class member. I do not take daily attendance but do make mental notes of unusual or extended patterns of absence and lateness. There are no extensions for final papers, please arrange your schedules accordingly.

Students are expected to comply with the policies found in the booklet, “Academic Integrity at Northwestern University: A basic guide”. All papers submitted for credit in this course may be required to be sent to me as as email attachments in addition to being delivered in printed form. Your written work may be electronically tested for plagiarized content. For details regarding academic integrity, please review: http://www.northwestern.edu/uacc/. If you would like a copy of the brochure please visit the SESP student affairs office.

Invisible and Visible Differences: The American with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal, anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe that you have a disability requiring accommodation, please contact the office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 467-5530 or ssd@northwestern.edu. SSD is located in the basement of Scott Hall. SSD also has a website at http://www.stuaff.northwestern.edu/ssd/.

Class/Lecture topics are indicated with underline, authors name follow chapter assignments, italics = course packet or handouts.

March 27 Introduction
  Getting to know each other; Teaching Philosophy and Course Overview
  --Create groups

March 29 Defining Privilege and Oppression
  Privilege, Power, and Difference:
  Introduction and Chapters 1 (Rodney King Question),
  Chapter 2 (We’re in Trouble), (1- 41)

April 3 Privilege in action
  Privilege, Power, and Difference:
  Chapter 4, Capitalism, Class and Matrix of Domination
  Chapter 5, Making Privilege Happen (42- 72)

April 5 Systems of Privilege at work
  Chapter 7 (Privilege, Power, Difference, and US),
  Chapter 8 (How Systems of Privilege Work) (73-115)
  (Short essay #1 due)
April 10  Social Work, Social Welfare, and American Society, Sixth Edition  
Philip R. Popple (SafariX)  
1: Politics, Rationalism, and Social Welfare  
2: Government and Social Welfare  
3: Defining Poverty: Where to Begin?  

April 12  History of Child Welfare  
Exploring Child Welfare (Chapter 1-21, Crosson-Tower)  
6: Ending Welfare As We Knew It: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (Popple)  

April 17  Child Welfare and African American Families  
Chap 4-Child Welfare policies and African American families (Goodley)  
“Destroying Black Families in the name of child protection” (v–28; stop before poverty and child maltreatment) (Roberts)  

April 19  Diversity, Civil Rights and Laws  
11: Addressing Civil Rights and Social Welfare: The Challenges of a Diverse Society  

April 24  Juvenile Court and Family Rights?  
Court services on behalf of Children (250-272, Crosson-Tower)  
The Systems Racial Harm (221–257, Roberts)  

April 25  Site Visit to Children’s Advocacy Center, attendance is optional  
6 to 8:30 pm  

April 26  Welfare and TANF  
6: Ending Welfare As We Knew It: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (popple)  
Chap. 2- Implications of Social Security reform for wealth development…(Goodley)  
(Short Essay #2 due)  

May 1  DCFS in the News  

May 3  Family Preservation  
Assault on family preservation (103 to 148, Roberts)  
Chap 7- African American women and health (Goodley)  
(Out of Class Assignment-view PBS show on Foster care)  
(Group A will read two teens from Heart knows diff, etc.)  

May 8  National Debates about Foster Care  
Class Discussion on Internet Video: –Frontline Report on “Fostercare”  
May 10  Classroom discussion, frontline report
Chap 7, handout-Protecting Children from Neglect and Abuse 221-285, Downs et al
Guest Speakers: Guardian Ad Litems

May 15  Teens in Foster Care
Small Group Discussion about Teens you read in two assigned essays.

May 17  Stigmatization
The Heart knows something different: How I lived my double life (121 – 134)

May 22  Child Welfare and Social Justice (267-276, Roberts)
Chap 5- From paper to people: An analysis...(Goodley)

May 24  Class Debate, Part 1 (Group A versus Group D)

May 29  Class Debate, Part 2 (Group B vs Group C)

May 31  Overflow or guest speaker

June 5  International Perspectives,
Kamerman handout

June 7  Final paper due, by the end of class period