

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL OF SOCIAL POLICY & PRACTICE

Masters of Science in Social Policy

MSSP: 606_001 The Data for Equitable Justice Lab

Spring 2020

Data for Equitable Justice

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Course Number and Title Semester and Year: MSSP 606_303 Fall 2020

Office Hours: M/W/F from 10 am to 11:30 am EST

Class: Wednesdays 7:00- 8:30 pm EST

Class Meetings: Wednesday 7-8 pm until March 3rd, and then we will meet every other week, which will be posted on Canvas Announcements and Modules.

All class meetings will be held on Zoom. You can find the "Zoom" link on the left-hand side of the page marked Zoom. There will also be supplemental recordings found in "Class Recordings" to assist you with solutions to social problems and also to review the previous classes. I am available for emergency phone calls on WhatsApp for international students, however, you can email me, and we can set up an appointment on Zoom for all other queries.

Course Description

The Data for Equitable Justice Lab is a new venture from Penn's School of Social Policy & Practice that provides our Masters' students an opportunity to analyze some of today's most important social issues through data and, with faculty support, create a product for audiences well beyond our classrooms and campus.

With guidance from the lab faculty, students develop a project – either individually or as part of a team – to examine a contemporary social policy or political issue *through* or *on* data or digital technology. Through these projects students will produce an op-ed, blog post, podcast, academic article, short film, or other product of their choosing that creates or contributes to contemporary discourse.

Course Requirements and Expectations

The Data for Equitable Justice Lab provides an opportunity to work in a **structured** but independent way to produce content that can affect policy, practice, and issue-oriented

conversations beyond the classroom. Every person at SP2 is here because (a) you want to make an impact on social policy, largely with vulnerable populations in mind, and (b) you're ambitious. Why wait a year or two to make your mark when we can find ways, complementing and building from your other classwork, to do so now.

The goal of the lab is for each student to develop an evidence-driven deliverable that can be shared outside of the classroom and, given the right venue and audience, shape or impact social policy conversations. These can be op-eds, presentations, speeches, blog posts, infographics, short videos, podcast episodes, etc.

This is a workshop environment. It means everyone in this room is “critically friendly.” We encourage each other, praise each other, push each other, and, as important as anything else, are critical of each other's WORK. Deliverables are produced through ITERATIVE, STRUCTURED processes.

Social Policy and Data

Social policy is how a society responds to social problems. Any government enactment that affects the well-being of people, including laws, regulations, executive orders, and court decisions, is a social policy. In the United States, with its federal tradition of shared government, social policies are made by governments at many levels—local, state, and national. A broad view of social policy recognizes that corporations and both nonprofit and for-profit social-service agencies also develop policies that affect customers and those they serve and therefore have social implications. Social policies affect society and human behavior, and their importance for social-work practice has long been understood by the social-work profession. Modern social welfare policies, which respond to basic human needs such as health care, housing food, and employment, have evolved since their introduction during the New Deal of the 1930s as responses to the Great Depression. In the aftermath of the recent “Great Recession” that began in 2006, the nation has once again experienced the kinds of social problems that led to the creation of innovative social welfare policies in the 1930s. How policy makers respond to human needs depends on who has the power to make policy and how they conceptualize human needs and the most effective ways to respond to them. In the early 21st century, the idea that the state should guarantee the welfare and well-being of its citizens through progressive welfare state policies and services has few adherents among policy makers. The complex social problems resulting from the recession—the highest unemployment since the Great Depression of the 1930s, escalating budget deficits at all levels of government, an unprecedented housing crisis exemplified by massive foreclosures, increasing social and economic inequality, a nation polarized by corrosive political conflict and incivility—create a context in which social policies are debated vociferously. Social workers, long committed to the ideal of social justice for all, are obligated to understand how policies affect their practice as well as the lives of those they serve and to advocate for policies that will improve social well-being as the United States recovers.

How can new methods and open-source tools such as modes of change support and extend the use of data science for public/social policy and social impact? Functional use of data and various

computational methods are critical in creating malleable and personalized policies which ameliorate the lives of everyone in a measurable, equality, and equitable manner.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the University's Code of Academic Integrity, available at <https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/code-of-academic-integrity/>. Care should be taken to avoid academic integrity violations, including plagiarism, fabrication of information, and multiple submissions (see descriptions below).** Students who engage in any of these actions will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct, which investigates and decides on sanctions in cases of academic dishonesty.

1. Plagiarism: using the ideas, data, or language of another person or source without specific or proper acknowledgment. Example: copying, in part or in its entirety, another person's paper, article, or web-based material and submitting it for an assignment; using someone else's ideas without attribution; not using quotation marks where appropriate; etc.
2. Fabrication: submitting contrived or altered information in any academic exercise. Example: making up data or statistics, citing nonexistent articles, contriving sources, etc.

Class Format

Each week we will discuss an op-ed, podcast, video, or blog post selected by the instructor that uses data to advance an argument. Your job is to comment on how data were used to advance the author's point. What did the author(s) do well? Poorly? Did they use graphics effectively? Ineffectively? Could they have used more or fewer of them? How was their argument structured?

In addition to that, class time will largely be driven by student projects. Students will be expected to present, on a regular basis, on their project. These presentations can be largely informal and reflect progress and difficulties in a project.

We will also have guest speakers, as appropriate and time permitting.

Assignments

While this is a non-credit and ungraded course, structure (read: deadlines) is critical (see some more about the [Planning Fallacy \(Links to an external site.\) \(Links to an external site.\)](#) here). The expectation for the end of this class is a complete draft of a social-policy oriented deliverable. To facilitate that, please submit through Canvas by **September 23rd**, your idea for a project. It should be no more than 1 page and contain the following information:

- **You will Present your Topic and Argument**
- **Define the Problem. What is the problem? ...**
- **Clarify the Problem.**

- **What data is available, if you know?**
- **What type of deliverable/mode of change would like to produce?**
- **Define the Goals.**
- **Identify Root Cause of the Problem.**
- **A potential outlet for your deliverable/mode of change**
- **Develop an Action Plan.**
- **Execute Action Plan.**
- **Evaluate the Results.**
- **State How You Will Continuously Improve.**

In the first month, the class will meet weekly to discuss data, research, podcast, blogs, peer reviews, papers, etc. as solutions to social justice issues. This can be the onset to the topic you want to focus on or work within the future or a topic of personal interest.

From there, the class will meet twice a month to provide you time to work on and complete this project. We will discuss the various projects in class and provide constructive feedback to each group and individual. Students can also meet with me one on one for more assistance during my office hours. If the hours do not work with your schedule, please let me know ahead of time so I can make adjustments.

Each week a module will state what is expected of you and where you should be in reference to your project, which can be group or individual. The module will have a zoom link, or you can click on the zoom icon in Canvas. The modules will also have links to topics, relevant events, and resources.

The class will be based on the following steps:

- **Step 1: Define the social problem.**
- **Step 2: Clarify the problem.**
- **Step 3: Define the goals of your mode of change to produce a form of social change**
- **Step 4: Identify root cause of the problem via your mode of change**
- **Step 5: Develop an Action Plan.**
- **Step 6: Execute Action Plan as you formulate and execute your mode of change**
- **Step 7: Evaluate the Results.**
- **Step 8: Continuously Improve.**

References

Herrick, J. (2014, June 02). Social Policy: Overview. *Encyclopedia of Social Work*. Retrieved 19 Sep.2020, from [https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore- \(Links to an external site.\)](https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore- (Links to an external site.)) 9780199975839-e-607.