

SocW 531B

Multigenerational Policy and Social Justice: A Feminist, Multicultural Lens

Instructors for Fall 2003:

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Introduction and background

The dramatic growth of the older population, especially among women and populations of color, has resulted in a corresponding increase in the number and diversity of multigenerational (three to five generations) families. Social workers in all practice settings and with all age groups increasingly encounter older adults as members of multigenerational families. They also confront structural inequities and health disparities that increase across the lifespan, with older women of color forming the poorest and most functionally disabled group in our society. Given these structural inequities and the wide range of practice and organizational settings involving multigenerational families, social workers need the skills, knowledge and values to analyze, critique and advocate for policies and process that will support multigenerational families. Current social and health policies are typically designed as categorical, age-based approaches. Accordingly, policies such as Social Security or Medicare are often viewed as serving primarily older adults, without recognizing how multiple generations within families benefit. This course will challenge our thinking about ways to foster multigenerational, culturally sensitive, collaborative, and empowerment approaches to policy development and change. Such an approach is congruent with the School's mission related to social justice, multiculturalism, community linkages and social change.

In contrast to courses focused only on aging policy, this course presents a feminist, multicultural and multigenerational perspective or lens to critically analyze how historical and current

structures, policies and process support or undermine multigenerational families across the life span. Congruent with the objectives across all policy/service courses, this course intends to provide an advanced critical overview of relevant policies, regulations/laws, services and ethical principles. Such critical analyses will include Medicaid and Medicare; Social Security and Supplemental Security Income; the Family and Medical Leave Act and the National Family Caregiver Support Program, long-term care and options and intergenerational programming. Feminist and multicultural lens will be brought to bear on relevant structural inequalities, including the central role of unpaid and underpaid caregivers (e.g., direct care or chronic care workers), largely women of color, to current health and long-term care systems. Congruent with the goal of all policy service courses to envision conditions, processes and actions that might constitute socially just policies, institutional arrangements, and services, a feminist, multicultural approach aims to eliminate sources of disparities based on age, race, gender, sexual orientation and extent of disability; this perspective can also help frame social just alternatives toward which social workers can strive. Cross-generational advocacy and social change strategies will be identified to address the structural factors that such inequities.

Underlying course assumptions:

- * The problems related to old age are to some extent socially constructed; therefore, attention must be given to the social, political and economic context in which policies are developed and implemented. These contexts include dramatic demographic changes, reduced public resources, privatization, and growing racial, class and gender inequities across the life span.
- * Social policies, even age-based ones such as with Social Security, typically benefit multiple generations. With the rapid growth of four and five generation families, a paradigm for policy development should take account of common needs, reciprocity and interdependence across generations, including family members, friends, colleagues and community stakeholders.

* A feminist and multicultural approach toward policy development builds upon such interdependence and recognizes the intersections of age, race and gender across a range of substantive areas, such as health and mental health, substance abuse, interpersonal violence and child welfare. For example, the growth of kinship care, especially (great) grandparents caring for grandchildren, reflects the intersections of race, class, age and gender on policies that impact schools, child welfare, income maintenance and aging.

* A life span approach toward policy development aims to prevent inequities and health disparities that increase across the life course, with older women of color forming the poorest and most functionally disabled group in our society

* A multigenerational approach toward policy can foster coalition building, alliances and collaboration around common issues (e.g., poverty, long term care for individuals with disabilities across the life span) among different age groups and builds upon the strengths and contributions of each generation.

Course objectives

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

* Build on their knowledge of social policy, social justice, and inequality developed in the HUB and foundation policy courses, with particular attention given to structural causes of historical and contemporary inequalities, universal vs. selective policy responses, and strategic advocacy for change at the macro level.

* Describe the changing demographic, societal/familial, and economic context that create an impetus for reconceptualizing aging policies

* Articulate how current aging-based policies can create inequities by age/race/ethnicity/gender, class, and sexual orientation across the life span

- * Recognize the multigenerational implications and benefits of current policies such as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and the Aging Network
- * Articulate and critique the major components of a multicultural, multigenerational and feminist policy paradigm
- * Formulate a multigenerational, feminist and multicultural lens for your analysis of social inequalities and formulation of social just social policies
- * Critically analyze at least three current proposals to change existing policies (e.g., Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, prescription drug coverage), with particular attention to arguments for and against privatization of such services
- * Identify at least three examples of current policies that benefit age groups across the life span
- * Highlight the major policy and organizational factors that underlie effective intergenerational/cross generational programs
- * Formulate strategies for strategic advocacy or policy development/change that are congruent with a multigenerational, feminist, multicultural and socially just paradigm