

**SWRK 746 2019A Political Social Work**  
**University of Pennsylvania**  
**School of Social Policy and Practice**  
**SWK 746 - Political Social Work - Spring 2019**

## **COURSE SYLLABUS**

### Course Description

This course focuses on the role of social workers and the social work profession in advocacy, including within the legislative and electoral arenas. In this course advocacy is defined as “purposive efforts to change existing or proposed policies or practices on behalf of and with specific groups of clients” (Ezell, 2001). The first half of the course examines social work’s professional basis for advocacy at the institutional and community levels and selected strategies and tactics of advocacy aimed at changing service delivery systems, legislation and community attitudes and behaviors. Specific topics include individual and group advocacy, lobbying, community education and public relations, electoral politics, and legal and ethical dilemmas in political social work. The second half of the course examines, in more depth, selected strategies and techniques for building or strengthening the power base for advocacy, including creating or strengthening grassroots membership groups, community organizing, working within professional associations and unions, using the mass media, raising funds for advocacy, and forging coalitions for specific policy changes.

### Course Purpose

Advocacy, while central to the origins and history of the social work profession, has too often been delegated to a few specialist practitioners in the field of community organization and, more recently, policy practice. This course seeks to provide social work practitioners – regardless of their specialization –with professional rationale, theories, real life examples, practice guidelines and introduction to basic skills necessary to support their increased engagement with advocacy throughout their professional careers.

### Educational Objectives

By the end of SW 746, students are expected to:

- Better understand power and think more politically, in a social work context
- Be well-versed in the difference between (and appropriate uses of) politics with a small p versus politics with a capital P – i.e. individual, group and community politics vs. electoral politics.
- Be familiar with the Declaration of Independence, Bill of Rights and the first ten amendments to the Constitution, and the UN Declaration of Human Rights, as foundational texts for advocacy, social action and social change in an American context.
- Be more familiar with and skillful in gathering and analyzing data on specific populations affected negatively by institutional, government and corporate policies, for the purpose of policy formulation.
- Have increased understanding of electronic media as important tools for political advocacy/social change.
- Recognize the connection between social change, political advocacy, action research, policy development and the delivery of social services, and increase understanding of specific strategies that individuals, groups and communities can use to achieve social change.

- Understand the roles that social workers can play in the political arena, including legislative advocacy/lobbying, electoral politics, public education and community organizing.
- Integrate into their professional identity an understanding of the professional ethical dilemmas associated with a commitment to political social work.

### Course Requirements

#### Books

- Willard C. Richan, Lobbying for Social Change, 3rd Edition (Haworth, 2006) –
- Mark Ezell, Advocacy in the Human Services, (Wadsworth, 2001)
- Lee Staples, Roots to Power: A Manual for Grassroots Organizing, 3rd Edition (Praeger, 2004)

The above books are available at the University of Pennsylvania Book Store/Barnes & Noble, 36th & Walnut Streets

Additional required and recommended readings will be available on Canvas.

Readings must be done prior to class sessions in order to provide for the most productive participation and mutual learning.

### Academic Integrity

Students are expected to conduct themselves consistent with the University of Pennsylvania's Code of Academic Integrity, which presents standards regarding plagiarism, multiple submissions and other actions. Students are expected to become familiar with the Code, which is found at [http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/ai\\_codeofacademicintegrity.html](http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/ai_codeofacademicintegrity.html)

### Course Assignments

- Due Feb. 21: Moving from Cases and Problems to Advocacy and Organizing – 6 pages, (20 points)
- Due March 21: Policy Brief, 7-8 pages (20 points)
- Due April 4: 10 hours of observation of/participation in political social work activity and Reflection Paper – 6 pages, (20 points)
- Due April 26th: Proposal to Launch an Advocacy or Organizing Initiative – 7 pages, (20 points)
- Class Participation and Attendance – (20 points) (attendance & participation 10%, class presentations/discussions 5 points each).

All written assignments are to be turned in, hardcopy, in class on the specified date, with the exception of the last assignment (Proposal to Launch an Advocacy or Organizing Initiative), which is due via Canvas by 11:59pm on April 26th.

### **Political Social Work Field Experience and Reflection Paper - 6 pages - 20% of class grade – Due April 4th.**

A. Choose an existing, proposed or needed public policy (federal, state or municipal) that impacts (or could impact) clients/communities you work with, care about and/or belong to. A “policy”

could be a law, a bill, a statute and/or budget line item or an official practice in the legislative realm (e.g. City Council, Congress), administrative realm (e.g. Governor's office/state departments, District Attorney's office, State Commissions), or judicial realm (cases before, or practices of, county or state Court systems). Examples of such policies include: Philadelphia police practice of "stop and frisk"; District Attorney's recent policy change to reduce the use of cash bail; Philadelphia's "sweetened beverage tax" to fund expanded Pre-K access, School District suspension policies, Supreme Court ruling in "Texas vs. Azar" regarding the Affordable Care Act, PA State Supreme Court pending case "William Penn School District vs. PA Department of Education"; and Philadelphia real estate tax abatements that spur development but reduce school district revenues. Volunteering for a campaign of a candidate for office might also be an appropriate experience (there is a major municipal primary election in May 2019; see instructor before pursuing).

B. Engage in 10 hours of political social work activity (defined below and in class) aimed at advancing or stopping the chosen policy/legislation (or related to the political campaign). These 10 hours must include at least two of the following:

- face-to-face meeting with a decision-maker (e.g. City Councilmember or State Legislator or their staffer, Family Court or prison system official or administrator in DHS or School District, etc.);
- participating in a lobbying effort with an advocacy group;
- observing or participating in public hearings (e.g. writing, giving and/or submitting testimony for the public hearing);
- participating in electoral work (e.g. participating in/observing political campaign activities of a candidate who espouses policies in line with social work ethics and goals);
- participating in community organizing activities (public demonstration or direct action aimed at a decision-maker or promoting or stopping your chosen policy);
- writing and submitting a letter to the editor or Op Ed piece about your policy position to a major media outlet;
- creating an on-line petition aimed at influencing a legislator.

Conferences, panel discussions, etc. that do not have direct connections to a campaign to influence a decision-maker or change a law, are generally not appropriate activities for this assignment. Further, these 10 hours of activity should be above and beyond students' field placement duties. See instructor for more details.

C. Write a 6-page (double spaced) reflection paper on this experience using the outline below.

- Pages 1-2: What did you observe and/or participate in, or initiate, (or who did you interview or meet with?) (the "5 W's – who, what, where, when, why); include organizational context.
- Pages 3-4: What concepts, themes, theories or methodologies from our class readings and class dialogue did you see on display (or did you employ) in the political social work experience/observation (must include at least 2 citations). Any conspicuously absent? Discuss the connections (or contradictions).
- Pages 5-6: What did you learn and how are you now different? Provide a reflection on your learning; any questions, inner conflicts or revelations sparked by the experience about your professional identity or future aspirations.

Examples of strong papers from a previous class are on Canvas.

Students will need to choose their policy of focus by Week 2 and start making a plan for interacting with decision-makers and/or advocacy groups working in that policy area, no later than week 3.

### **Moving from Cases and Problems to Advocacy and Organizing- Due Feb. 21st - 20% of class grade**

This is a 6-page, double-spaced, paper making the case that an existing agency/organization, that you are knowledgeable about or have experience with, should build on their direct service work by engaging in policy advocacy in order to better serve/improve conditions for clients and communities. *Ideally students should connect this assignment to their Political Social Work Experience/Observation and Reflection Paper.*

Your paper should be organized according to this outline:

- Describe the main social problem(s) or unmet need(s) of the consumers/community that this agency/organization serves (1 page).
- Present your case as to why you feel this situation calls for advocacy or organizing (1-2 pages)
- Give an initial analysis of and justification for the type of advocacy you feel is needed, using Ezell's distinctions: Agency, Legislative, Legal, and/or Community (1-2 pages)
- Provide an initial analysis of the decision makers who will be the targets of your advocacy (either internal and/or external) and justify why they are the appropriate targets (1-2 pages)

The audience for this paper is the leadership of the organization/agency you are writing about. A minimum of two citations are required (from the course readings or other academic/statistical sources).

Examples of reflection papers from a previous class are on Canvas.

### **Policy Brief – Due March 21 - 20% of class grade.**

This is an 8 page (double-spaced) document in two parts. The first part (4 pages max) makes a compelling case for the policy change you seek (*ideally, that you also wrote about in the "Moving from Cases" paper*) and the second part (4 pages max) makes a strong counter-argument against it. According to Willard Richan (p. 106), a Policy Brief "is a detailed set of arguments on both sides of a question, with supporting evidence; it is organized around a set of issues designed to cover all the bases regarding a policy proposal. By preparing two cases, your own and your adversaries', you are in position both to present forceful arguments and to answer questions that might be thrown at you." The audience is the same for both sides of the argument: the targeted decision-maker. Your Policy Brief should ideally focus on the policy you choose to do your political social work field experience on as well as connect to your first paper (Moving from Cases to Advocacy). Your Policy Brief should be structured as follows: answer, in this order, and with compelling documentation (from Richan, p. 106-7):

- What is the policy change (or delivery system change or other change) you are proposing and why is it needed? (and why is it needed now?) (1 page max)

- Will the proposed plan meet the need? (How so? How will this plan be better than/different from current approaches?) (1 page max)
- Is the plan feasible? Explain. (What power do you have or need to realize it, e.g. financial, political and/or administrative resources? What are the key decisions and steps to implement this plan?) (1 page max)
- Would the benefits of the plan outweigh any harmful consequences? (Can you prove it?) (1 page max)

After answering all four questions positively, from your stance as an advocate for a specific change, your task is then to take the opposing view and attempt to answer each point. A minimum of 4 citations from the course readings, or academic or statistical sources is required. Ideally, the policy discussed in this paper is the same policy you have chosen as the focus of your Political SW Observation/Experience & Reflection Paper and your Moving from Cases to Advocacy paper.

Examples of reflection papers from a previous class are on Canvas.

### **Proposal to Launch an Advocacy or Organizing Initiative - Due Apr. 26th - 20% of class grade.**

This is a 6 page max (double-spaced) paper that *ideally builds on your first three papers* and that presents a plan for launching an advocacy campaign to advance your policy change/position. Assume that the leadership of the agency that will engage in the advocacy is already bought-in (no need to convince them *whether* to do this); rather this paper is about *how* you will do this. A minimum of 4 citations (from both the course readings and other academic or statistical sources) is required. The paper must follow this outline:

- Page 1-2: What is the campaign and its goal? What will success or victory look like? How will the problems facing the clients/community be addressed or eliminated via this campaign?
- Pages 2-3: Describe the target(s) of the campaign: What decision-makers will need to be influenced and why? What is the nature of their power? What is their current position/presumption/focus? Why might they respond favorably to your proposal? Why might they resist?
- Pages 3-4: What kind(s) of advocacy will you engage in to influence the target, and why? What specific strategies and tactics will you employ? How will clients participate/play leadership roles?
- Page 4-5: What resources will you need to carry out this campaign (staffing, funding, etc.)?
- Page 5-6: What challenges/barriers might you face (internal and external)? How might you overcome them?

Examples of reflection papers from a previous class are on Canvas.

### **Class participation - 20% of grade (includes attendance and student-led discussions/presentations)**

Full, active participation in class is essential and required. Intellectual curiosity, attentiveness, creativity and work ethic are factors that will be considered in grading class participation. Use of

laptops is distracting and is discouraged, unless otherwise requested by the instructor. Cell phones are to be turned completely off before class starts.

### **Attendance**

Attendance at all classes is expected and will be considered a major factor in students' grades. Points will be deducted from the participation grade for each absence and cannot be made up by doing additional work (with rare exception). Lateness to class will also be considered in grading.

### **Student-led Discussions/Presentations:**

Twice during the semester (roughly during the mid-point and once in week 13 or 14) each student will prepare and lead a discussion on (and/or exercise related to) the advocacy campaign/legislation they are observing, writing about, that impacts their client group and/or that they are interested in. The mid-semester presentation/discussion should either

- 1). present the student's initial/developing ideas for the policy change/legislation/advocacy goal, give context, teach the class why this is an important political social work topic and, as appropriate, solicit input/feedback from the class that can shape their remaining work/writing on that topics or
- 2). Present some other political social work topic of interest that might not necessarily connect to the student's papers but connects to the course readings, etc. In either option, the student's goal is to be both teach the rest of the class, engage them in lively discussion, and solicit feedback for their own learning.

Students must send a paragraph summary of their discussion topic and/or summary of an exercise they wish to conduct, to the instructor 24 hours prior to class. Each presentation/discussion will last approximately 30 minutes.

For the end-of-semester presentation, students will be presenting a summary of their writing, observation, analysis they have done all semester on the topic of their final paper. The presenter should strive to engage the class with questions, and perhaps an exercise. Since the final paper isn't due until April 24th, this is another chance to solicit feedback. This discussion/presentation will also last approximately 30 minutes.

Together these presentations form 50% of students' participation grade or 10% of overall course grade.

## **Class Schedule**

**Week 1, Jan. 17:** Course Orientation and Review of Syllabus. What is political social work? Why are we interested in being “political social workers”? Orientation to major assignments. Discussion of opportunities for political social work observation/participation. Student-led reading discussion schedule.

**Week 2, Jan. 24:** Roots of Advocacy in US history and contemporary struggles for justice

Readings:

- Declaration of Independence (at <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document>.)
- US Constitution (at [usconstitution.net/const.pdf](http://usconstitution.net/const.pdf)).
- Intro to the UN Declaration of Human Rights <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>
- Declaration of Sentiments <http://www.nps.gov/wori/historyculture/declaration-of-sentiments.htm>
- MLK’s “I Have a Dream” Speech <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkhaveadream.htm>
- Howard Zinn, People’s History, ch. 4 & 5

Discussion of students’ policy change focus/interests & field observation plans.

**Week 3, Jan. 31: Advocacy in the origins and history of social work**

Readings:

- Mark Ezell, Advocacy in the human services, chs 1-3;
- Robert L. Schneider, Lori Lester, Julia Ochieng "Advocacy" Encyclopedia of Social Work.

Discussion of students’ policy change focus/interests & field observation plans.

**Week 4, Feb. 7: Advocacy to change social service systems**

Readings:

- Ezell, Advocacy, ch.4;
- NASW, Code of Ethics – go to <http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp> (Links to an external site.)
- Rebecca Myers , Christi Granstaff "Political Social Work" Encyclopedia of Social Work.

Discussion of students’ policy change focus/interests & field observation plans.

**Week 5, Feb. 14: Advocacy to change laws, public policies and funding**

Readings:

- Ezell, Advocacy, chs.5-6;

Discussion/Workshopping of First Paper: Moving from Cases and Problems to Advocacy and Organizing

**Week 6, Feb. 21 Advocacy to change community attitudes and practices.**

Readings:

- Ezell, Advocacy, ch 7;
- Megan Meyer "Political Interventions" Encyclopedia of Social Work.
- Richan, Lobbying for Social Change: Introduction

Guest Speaker: Brooke Feldman, President of Sparking Solutions, LLC and former Policy Advisor and Consultant to Candidate for PA State Representative.

Assignment Due: Moving from Cases and Problems to Advocacy and Organizing

**Week 7, Feb. 28 Advocacy skills – Preparing for effective lobbying.**

Readings:

- Richan, Lobbying for Social Change: Chapters 1, 2, and 3.
- What Calling Congress Achieves by Kathryn Schulz, The New Yorker March 6, 2017. (Links to an external site.

3 student presentations

**March 7 – SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS**

**Week 8, March 14: Advocacy skills – Meeting with Decision-Makers**

Readings:

- Richan, Lobbying, ch. 4,5 & 6

3 student presentations

Guest Speaker: K. Celeste Trusty, PA Regional Organizer for Families Against Mandatory Minimums - criminal justice reform

**Week 9, Mar. 21: Advocacy skills – Preparing and giving testimony; social/mass media.**

Readings:

- Richan, Lobbying, ch. 7-8.
- <http://www.piconetwork.org/tools-resources/document/0027.pdf>. "Technology Tools: What They Are, What They Do, Where to Get Them" From Your Guide to the E-Revolution, Pages 20-45 – PolicyLink

Assignment Due: Policy Brief - due March 21



**Week 10, Mar. 28: Building power for effective advocacy – Basics of organizing the have-nots**

Readings:

- Lee Staples, *Roots to power*, chs.1 and 2.
- James S. Mickelson, Karen S. Haynes "Political Process" *Encyclopedia of Social Work*

Discussion/workshopping of Experiential Reflection Paper

**Week 11, April 4:**

Building power – Reaching out, identifying members and leaders

Readings:

- Staples, *Roots*, ch. 3
- Staples, *Roots*, ch. 4
- Staples, pages 331-338

Assignment Due: Experiential Learning Reflection Paper Due - April 4

Guest Speaker: Beulah Osueke, Communications Director, POWER: An Interfaith Movement

**Week 12, Apr. 11: Building power – Selecting issues, designing action campaigns**

Readings:

- Richan, *Lobbying*, ch. 9
- Staples, *Roots*, ch. 5.

**Week 13, Apr. 18:**

Readings: **Coalitions: benefits, challenges and lessons learned**

- Richan, *Lobbying, chapters 10 & 11*
- Staples pages 309-330

3 Student Presentations/Discussions on Semester Papers

**Week 14, Apr. 25: Defining your stance and role in Political Social Work Practice.**

Readings:

- Mimi Abramovitz "Political Ideology and Social Welfare" from *Encyclopedia of Social Work*.

3 Student Presentations/Discussions on Semester Projects

Assignment Due April 26: Proposal to Fund and/or Launch an Advocacy or Organizing Initiative

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Grading: Each assignment is worth 20 points. At the end of the semester, the total of these points earned will be converted to a letter grade according to this scale:

A+ = 97-100

A = 93-96

A- = 89-92

B+ = 85-88

B = 81-84

B- = 77-80

C+ = 73-76

C = 69-72

C - = 65-68

D+ = 61-64

D = 57-60

F = below 57

### Select Bibliography for Further Reading

- Barber, William J. II (2016). *The Third Reconstruction: How a Moral Movement is Overcoming the Politics of Division & Fear*. Boston: Beacon Press
- Brown, Adrienne Marie (2017). *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. Chico, CA: AK Press.
- Branch, Taylor (1988). *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Bachrach, P., & Baratz, M.S. (1970). *Power and poverty: Theory and practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Balinsky, R. (1984). "The small group in community organization practice." *Social work with groups*, 7 (2), 87-96.
- Whitman, Gordon (2017). *Stand Up!: How to Get Involved, Speak Out, and Win in a World on Fire*. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
- Fisher, R. (2005). "History, context, and emerging issues for community practice," in Marie Weil, *The handbook of community practice*, pp. 34-58. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Haynes, K.S. & Michelson, J.S. (2000). *Affecting change: Social workers in the political arena* (4th). New York: Longman.
- Kretzman, J.P. & McKnight, J.L. (1993). *Building communities from the inside out*. Chicago: ACTA Publications. (See also [abcdinstitute.org](http://abcdinstitute.org) (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. for latest publications).
- Rothman, J. (1995). "Approaches to community intervention." In Rothman et al, *Strategies of community intervention*, 5th edition, Itasca, IL: Peacock.
- Sharwell, G.R. (1978). "How to testify before a legislative committee," in *Toward human dignity*. J.W. Hanks. New York: NASW
- Shdaimah, C., Stahl, R., & Schram, S. (2011). *Change Research*. Columbia University Press
- Alinsky, S. (1969). *Reveille for radicals*. New York: Random House.
- Alinsky, S. (1971). *Rules for radicals*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Comm-Org, the Online Website for Community Organizing. Go to [comm-org.wisc.edu](http://comm-org.wisc.edu) (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. for up to date resources on

research, training, networks, case studies and a listserv for organizers and students of organizing.

- Delgado, G. (1997). Beyond the politics of place. Oakland, CA: Applied Research Center.
- Bobo, K., Kendall, J. & Max, S. (2001). Organize! Organizing for social change. 3rd, Santa Ana, CA: Seven Locks Press.
- Rubin, H. & Rubin, I. (2008). Community organizing and development. 4th, Boston, MA: Pearson Education.
- Sen, R. (2003). Stir it up: Lessons in community organizing and advocacy. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Trapp, S. (1984). Basics of organizing. Chicago: National Training and Information Center. (download from <http://tenant.net/Organize/orgbas.html> (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.).
- Orr, M. (2007) Transforming the City. University Press of Kansas
- Warren, M. (2001) Dry Bones Rattling. Princeton University Press

Potential sites of information about policies impacting social work clients and communities:

[www.socialworkers.org](http://www.socialworkers.org). (NASW, links to political action efforts)

[www.statepolicy.org](http://www.statepolicy.org). (info sources on state policies)

[www.stateline.org](http://www.stateline.org). (info sources on state policies)

[www.pennbpc.org](http://www.pennbpc.org). (source of data and research on PA policies)

[www.legis.state.pa.us](http://www.legis.state.pa.us) (all about PA govt and links to lawmakers' websites)

[www.palwv.org](http://www.palwv.org) (League of Women Voters)

[www.philadelphiacitycouncil.net/](http://www.philadelphiacitycouncil.net/) - City Council of Philadelphia, schedule of pending legislation and committee meetings and hearings.

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