

**University of Pennsylvania  
School of Social Policy & Practice**

**Social Work from a Global Perspective**

Social work is a global profession. Global interdependence, the transnational nature of issues such as poverty and violence, the movement of people across borders, advances in communications and information technology, and the development of the social work profession around the world, make a global perspective an essential part of social work education.

In this course, students travel to Finland to learn about how social work is understood and practiced in different parts of the world. Together with students and faculty from other countries, we explore social issues, social work responses to those issues, and ways of communicating across cultural and language differences. We also consider how our common identification with the social work profession connects us and might enable us to work together to improve the lives of people worldwide. Finally, we learn about the progressive social welfare system and cultural treasures of Finland.

The first week of the course takes place at the University of Lapland in Rovaniemi Finland. We attend lectures by participants from different countries and participate in small group discussions on topics germane to global social work. We begin the second week with a field trip to Utsjoki, near Finland's northern border with Norway. As the only municipality where indigenous Sámi people are the majority population, Utsjoki offers a unique opportunity to learn about Sámi culture and the provision of social services in a remote, sparsely populated locale. During our visit, we stay at Kevo, a sub-arctic research station run by the University of Turku. While at Kevo, we experience and learn about the northern Lapland environment and how it influences the lives of people living in this region of the world.

Our second excursion is to Helsinki, Finland's capital and largest municipality. In Helsinki we visit social service organizations and sample some of Helsinki's many cultural offerings.

**Course Objectives:**

1. Explore social work issues and the social work profession from the perspectives of different cultures.
2. Learn about the Finnish social welfare system and social work services.
3. Learn about Sámi culture and social work issues related to this population.
4. Consider the meaning and application of social work values and ethics across cultures.

5. Reflect on one's own acculturation and ethnocentricity and its implications for social work.
6. Consider how to advance cross-cultural understanding and culturally sensitive practices.
7. Engage in dialogue about social work issues with international colleagues.
8. Consider the meanings of social transformation within a global context.

## **Readings**

Several articles and book chapters are required background reading for the course (see reading list on pages 6-7). They can be accessed through the UPenn course CANVAS site. The readings were selected to provide contextual information that will enable you to better understand and participate in course lectures and discussions. MSW students entering their concentration year should propose two additional concentration-related readings germane to the course.

## **Assignments**

1. Reflective journal. See attached description.
2. Participation. Students are expected to participate in all course activities. This includes attending all classes, agency visits, and required cultural activities. It also includes being a responsible and constructive participant of the program: showing up on time, contributing ideas, asking questions, sharing your knowledge about social work in the U.S., and being open to different ideas.
- 3 Supplemental readings (concentration year MSW students only). Students will propose two readings related to the course and to your concentration/specialization area. These readings must be approved in advance by the instructor.

## **Evaluation**

1. Journal:               75%

Journals will be evaluated relative to completeness (daily entries, significant events), quality of analyses, and integration of readings where appropriate. Concentration year students should also discuss issues as they relate to their chosen concentration and supplemental readings.

2. Participation: 25%

Students are invited to propose a grade that reflects their assessment of their participation and contribution to the overall learning environment of the course taking into account the criteria identified above.

### ***Outline of Structured Journal***

The purpose of the journal is to keep an ongoing record of your experiences, reactions, reflections, questions, and learning during the program. Additionally, the journal should reflect your thoughts about the meaning of social work when considered from a global perspective. It should be descriptive, reflective, and analytical. Use course readings to supplement your entries.

There is no required writing style. Feel free to express yourself in whatever ways best capture your experience and ideas; for example, in previous years some students have integrated photos and poetry. Typing is appreciated but not required; however, I do require legible handwriting. The only formatting requirements are that you *date your entries, number your pages, and use the outline below as subheadings*.

**It is expected that you will comment on all significant course activities: each lecture and discussion group, agency visits, museum visits, significant cultural experiences (e.g., sauna) as well as the topics outlined below. Significant journal omissions will result in a lower grade for the course.**

I suggest purchasing a notebook to record your impressions, questions, and reflections. *Try to write something every day*, beginning from the day of departure (May 20) through the day we return (June 6). Also, there is a pre-departure entry (see #1 below) and a post-return entry (see #7 below) one week before and after the course.

**Journals are due no later than June 15. Not returning to the U.S. after the course ends is not an acceptable reason for turning in your journal late. If this will present a hardship, consult with me to work out an alternative plan.**

### **Journal Outline**

1. ***Background, anticipations, expectations*** (to be completed from one week to three days prior to departure)

Write *briefly* about aspects of your background (e.g., previous travels, work experiences, educational experiences, family, ethnicity) that might relate to your interest in and experience of the course; include any hopes and concerns (e.g., travelling abroad, being part of a multinational group, being viewed as a representative or spokesperson of the U.S.).

## 2. *First impressions*

Describe your first impressions of:

- Finland, people, language (e.g., Finnair, Helsinki airport)
- Rovaniemi
- Your living environment, the University
- Language, light, weather
- Other participants in the course (intro exercise)

### *Reactions to persons and place*

#### *a. Interpersonal issues:*

Language & communication - being an English speaker in a non-English speaking environment, interaction style: interpersonal distance, eye contact, nonverbal communication,

Getting acquainted: your reactions, others reactions to you - e.g., as a U.S. citizen, a student, a native English speaker

Management of identities – who are you (or would like to be) in this context?

#### *b. Physical environment*

Impressions of the city and university: architecture, physical layout, organization  
Geography

#### *c. Social environment*

Similarities and differences (from the U.S.) of academic and social contexts  
Cultural topics e.g., sauna, food

## 3. *The University of Lapland*

*For each lecture and panel:*

What did you find most interesting or surprising? Why?

What did you find potentially useful to your work?

Other reactions?

Note: There is no need to summarize the lectures or discussions.

*For each small group discussion and whole class follow-up*

Topic, group composition, nature of discussion, group dynamics (including yourself), what you learned (see lecture)

*Own panel discussion*

Experience of presenting to international group

Assessment of experience

*Other activities* e.g., international night

#### 4. Excursions

##### Kevo/Utsjoki

Impressions of Northern Lapland - Physical and social environment: bus trip, Kevo

Impressions of Sámi culture? (Utsjoki, Siida, Sámi parliament - Sajos)

How is the relationship of Sámi people to the majority culture similar to and different from minority-majority group relationships in the U.S.?

##### Impressions of Helsinki

Reflections on agency visits:

General impressions

What struck you as similar or different to social work or education in the U.S.?

What ideas or practices do you think could be useful in the U.S.?

Compare life in Helsinki to life in Lapland

Other visits e.g., museums

#### 5. Departure

Feelings on departing

What are you “bringing home?”

#### 6. *Overall reflection (one week after returning)*

What were the most important things you learned?

What did you learn about social work outside of the U.S. that can be imported or adapted to U.S. social work?

How did your experience influence your views about global social work?

Comment on the relationship between your expectations, hopes, anxieties about the course and your experience.

Reflect upon a) your openness to new experiences, ideas, people; b) your own ethnocentrism; c) your contributions to the group learning experience; your experience of “reentry” to the U.S.

What advice would you give future students taking this course?

### **7. MSW Concentration year students**

What have you learned about the Finnish social work or the social welfare system or social work in other countries that has relevance to your professional development or work in your area of focus or concentration?

### **Readings**

In addition to these readings, concentration year students should select at least two additional readings relevant to their areas of interest and the overall theme of the course. **These additional readings should be submitted to me no later than May 11.**

1. Witkin, Stanley. (1999). "Letter from Lapland", *Social Work*, 44, (5), 413-415.
2. Witkin, Stanley. (2000). "Noticing", *Social Work*, 45, (2), 101-104.
3. Midgley, J. (2017). Professional social work in the international context. In J. Midgley, *Social welfare for a global era*, (pp. 91-107). Los Angeles: Sage.
4. Elliot, Doreen (2012). Social development and social work. In L.M. Healy & R.J. Lind (eds.). *Handbook of international social work*. (pp. 102-108). NY: Oxford University Press.
5. Nadkarni, Vimla, & Dhakse, Govind (2012). Poverty and human needs. In L.M. Healy & R.J. Lind (eds.). *Handbook of international social work*. (pp. 232-236). NY: Oxford University Press.
6. Lorenz, W. (2017). European policy developments and their impact on social work. *European Journal of Social Work*, 20(1), 17-28.
7. Paul De Roo, Sarah Braeye, Alexandra De Moor (2016). Counterbalancing the integration policy for migrants through social work. *International Social Work*, 59(2) 210–223.
8. Lähteinen, Sanna, Raitakari, Suvi, Hänninen, Kaija, Kaittina, Anniina, Taru, Kekoni, Krok, Suvi, & Skafari, Pia (2017). Social Work Education in Finland: Courses for Competency. National University Network for Social Work – SOSNET.
9. Järvensivu, Linda, Pohjola, Anneli, & Romakkaniemi, Marjo (2016). Locating Sámi social work in Finland: Meanings produced by social workers in working with Sámi people. *International Social Work*. 59(5) 600– 613.

10. Hildegard Theobald (2011). Multi-level governance and universalism: Austria and Germany compared. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, Vol. 31 No. 3/4, 209-221.
11. Randall, Matthew (2015). A Restrictive Social Work. Working with Asylum-seekers in Austria. *Czech and Slovak Social Work*, 15(3), 27-33.
12. Chandler, J., Berg, E., Ellison, M., & Barry, J. (2017). Reconfiguring professional autonomy? The case of social work in the UK. In Blom, Björn, Evertsson, Lars, Marek Perlinski (eds.), *Social and Caring Professions in European Welfare States: Policies, Services and Professional Practices*, (pp. 69-82). UK: Policy Press.
13. C. W. Lam and Eric Blyth (2014). Re-Engagement and Negotiation in a Changing Political and Economic Context: Social Work in Hong Kong. *British Journal of Social Work*, 44, 44--62.
14. Ugiagbe, E. O. (2015). Social work is context-bound: The need for indigenization of social work practice in Nigeria. *International Social Work*, 58(6), 790-801.
15. Ragab, Ibrahim A. (2017). The Islamic Perspective on Social Work: A Conceptual Framework. *International Social Work*, 59(3), 325-342.