Social Security in a Changing America
HONR 279B
Fall 2014
Syllabus

Course Information

Course meetings
Mondays 7:00pm-9:30pm
0124 La Plata Hall

Instructor
Scott Szymendera, Ph.D.
202-707-0014
sszymend@umd.edu

Required Books


Additional Readings

Additional required readings will be available online or will be provided to students.

Method for Communication with Students Outside the Classroom

Communication between the instructor and students will be primarily through email. However, students may contact the instructor by phone and may set up appointments for personal meetings.

Course Description, Goals, and Expectations

Course Description

This seminar will explore the development, operation, and future of the Social Security system as America undergoes economic and demographic changes. In addition, this seminar will examine various policy options for Social Security reform as well as examine Social Security policy in the broader political, economic, and social context and allow students to better understand the forces that shape the decisions made regarding Social Security policy.
Course Goals and Student Outcomes

At the conclusion of this course students will be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of fundamental concepts and ideas of America’s Social Security system and social welfare policy;
- Demonstrate critical thinking in evaluating causal arguments regarding Social Security policy by analyzing major assertions, background assumptions, and explanatory evidence;
- Explain how culture, social structure, diversity, or other key elements of historical context have an impact on individual perception, action, and values regarding the proper role of society in providing for the welfare of its aged and disabled citizens;
- Articulate how historical change shapes ideas and social and political structures and how these changes have affected the Social Security system and social welfare policy;
- Explain how history or social science can be used to analyze contemporary issues facing the Social Security system and to develop policies for social change and policy reform; and

Expectations for Students

As active participants in this seminar, the following will be expected of all students:

- Regular class attendance and participation and attending class prepared to actively participate by having done all assigned readings;
- Respecting the opinions and analysis of other students during class discussions;
- Completing all assignments on time and in accordance with all university policies;
- Full participation in any group or team assignments;

Grading Procedures

Student grades will be based on performance in the following areas:

- Class participation (graded after each session): 10%
  - Grades will be based on each student’s level of preparation for each session, ability to ask and answer questions in class, and overall level and quality of each student’s participation
- Mid-term examination: 20%
- Group policy presentation: 30%
- Final policy paper: 40%
Major Due Dates

- Selection of topics for policy presentation and paper: November 3, 2014
- Mid-Term examination: October 27, 2014
- Policy presentations in Class: December 8, 2014
- Final policy paper: December 15, 2014

Course Procedures and Policies

Attendance Policy

Regular attendance and participation in this class is the best way to grasp the concepts and principles being discussed. However, in the event that a class must be missed due to an illness, the policy in this class is as follows:

1. For every medically necessary absence from class a reasonable effort should be made to notify the instructor in advance of the class. When returning to class, students must bring a note identifying the date of and reason for the absence, and acknowledging that the information in the note is accurate.
2. If a student is absent more than once, the instructor may require documentation signed by a health care professional.
3. If a student is absent on days when tests are scheduled or assignments are due he or she is required to notify the instructor in advance, and upon returning to class, bring documentation of the illness, signed by a health care professional.

Examinations will not be scheduled on religious holidays.

Academic Integrity

The University has approved a Code of Academic Integrity (http://www.shc.umd.edu/code.html) which prohibits students from cheating on exams, plagiarizing papers, submitting the same paper for credit in two courses without authorization, buying papers, facilitating academic dishonesty, submitting fraudulent documents, and forging signatures. Plagiarism policy: all quotations taken from other authors, including from the Internet, must be indicated by quotation marks and referenced. Paraphrasing must be referenced as well. The following University of Maryland Honor Pledge, approved by the University Senate, should be handwritten and signed on the front page of all papers, projects or other academic assignments submitted for evaluation in this course: "I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this assignment/examination."

Accommodations

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact me and Disability Support Services (301-314-7682), as early as possible in
the term, but *not later than the second week of class*. Disability Support Services will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

**Copyright Notice**

The instructor’s lectures and course materials, including power point presentations, tests, outlines, and similar materials, are protected by copyright. The instructor is the exclusive owner of copyright in those materials he creates. You may take notes and make copies of course materials for your own use. You may not allow others to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly whether or not a fee is charged without the instructor’s express written consent. Similarly, you own copyright in your original papers and exam essays. If the instructor is interested in posting your answers or papers on the course web site, he will ask for your written permission.

Persons who publicly distribute or display or help others publicly distribute or display copies or modified copies of an instructor’s Course Materials may be considered in violation of the University Code of Student Conduct, Part 9(k).

**Inclement Weather Policy**

In case of inclement weather: we will not hold class if the university is closed due to weather. Check the UMD website for updates when bad weather is expected.

**Syllabus Subject to Change**

This syllabus may be subject to change. Students will be notified in advance of important changes that could affect grading, assignments, etc.

**Course Schedule**

September 8, 2014: Course introduction, America today, Social Security today

September 15, 2014: The law and political context

September 22, 2014: How Social Security came to be
   *Readings: Altman-chapters 2-6*

September 29, 2014: From retirement to disability
   *Readings: Altman-chapters 7-10*

October 6, 2014: Social Security and the budget
   *Readings: Social Security Administration budget documents*
October 13, 2014: The trust funds
   Readings: Social Security trustees report

October 20, 2014: The problems
   Readings: Blahous-chapters 4-7

October 27, 2014: Mid-term examination

November 3, 2014: 1983-the year that changed everything
   Readings: Altman-chapters 12-13; Blahous-chapter 2

November 10, 2014: Policy roundtable discussion on Capitol Hill

November 17, 2014: SSI
   Readings: Berkowitz-chapters 1-4; Boston Globe SSI Series

November 24, 2014: Private accounts
   Readings: Altman-chapter 15; Blahous-chapters 8 and 10

December 1, 2014: What is the future of Social Security?

December 8, 2014: Policy presentations in class

December 15, 2014: Policy paper due