POLS*6400
COMPARATIVE SOCIAL POLICY

Department of Political Science
University of Guelph
Winter 2017

Tuesdays 11.30-2.20
Room: MacDonald Stewart Hall 231

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Office hours: Tuesdays 3-5 PM, or by appointment

Course description
Social policies perform a crucial function in modern welfare states: they compensate for some of the inequalities that result from market capitalism, offer a safety net to those who run into economic difficulty, and offer protection to citizens in times of need. Today, the future of these policies is uncertain. Ageing populations and declining fertility rates, the emergence of the hour-glass economy, and competition on the global market place serious pressure on all countries’ system of social policies. Interesting to students of comparative social policy, however, the way that different countries have responded to these pressures is strikingly different. This seminar will focus on the question how and why social policies sometimes do, and sometimes do not change.

We will start the course with a brief introduction to theories of comparative social policy and the pressure for change modern welfare states are facing today. We then move on to reviewing different theoretical perspectives on social policy change. The remainder of the class is dedicated to a review of changes in different types of social policy, such as active labour market policies, transfer benefits, tax policies, health care, child care, women’s care, and immigrant integration policies.

Methods of instruction
This class is a seminar, and thus depends heavily on student participation. Students are expected to come to each session well-prepared and to be ready to share their ideas about the readings. Most classes will begin with a student presentation, to which other students are expected to respond. In short, the quality of the class depends crucially on the efforts of the students themselves.

Methods of evaluation
The final grade in this class will be determined by two main criteria:

1. Class participation and presentations (50%)

2. Short papers (50% - Students can submit a short paper on each week’s subject; the best eight will be counted towards the final grade)