

Discussion Questions for 17.317, U.S. Social Policy

Part IV: Policy in Practice

- This part of the course examines a number of policies in practice. We will both employ what we've learned so far to examine new policy areas as well as learn about new concepts like implementation and the political implications of program design.

Gender in U.S. Social Policy: The Case of Family and Medical Leave

- This course has discussed the differential treatment of various groups with social policy – differential treatment by income level, working status, age, race
- Today we focus on gender: do we treat women the same or differently? How is gender the same or different from race? What do we do in terms of social policy about the fact that only women can have babies? How have notions changed about the arenas in which women should be treated differently or the same?
- Why has women's labor force participation increased over time?
- How did progressive era reforms try to reduce the burdens on the industrial era?
- What happened during the Depression and World War II with women's labor force participation
 - How did New Deal programs treat women and why?
 - Why different kinds of "social citizenship" for men and women, and how were these different versions realized in policy?
 - How did the government facilitate women's employment during WWII, and how did it also emphasize that such employment would be temporary?
 - During the 1950s, many women working despite stereotypes of that era. In what ways does policy enable and undermine women's status? What was the role of women in the union movement?
 - What policies during the 1960s and 1970s improved women's status, and what was the impetus behind these changes?
- What about private employers and women? What kinds of benefits and protections have women secured in the private realm?
- With the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act, why was the push for gender neutral legislation? What are the advantages and limitations of the legislation?
- What are some of the barriers to adopting the kinds of family-oriented policies that are common in European countries?
- Bringing these questions closer to home: what can universities do to increase the number of tenured women faculty? Is it best to treat women the same as men or differently? What are the pros and cons of each approach?