

Course Impact Report
Steve Hicks School of Social Work
The University of Texas at Austin
Social Work Leadership for the Public Good
May Term 2025

Overview

In May 2025, students from the Steve Hicks School of Social Work participated in a weeklong, immersive policy course designed to bridge academic learning with real-world governmental processes. Through site visits in Washington, D.C., and at the Texas State Capitol in Austin, students engaged directly with federal and state policymakers, national advocacy organizations, and nonprofit leaders. This course equipped students with tools to influence public policy and serve as future leaders in social work. Nine MSSW and four BSW participated in the course.

Program Objectives

The course was designed to:

- Develop professional-level advocacy skills rooted in a social work framework.
- Provide direct exposure to federal and state legislative processes.
- Build foundational understanding of evidence-based analysis and systems navigation.
- Foster connections between students and advocacy professionals across sectors.

Washington, D.C. Experience

The D.C. portion began with a powerful visit to the **U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum**, grounding students in historical context and moral imperatives for civic engagement. Over the next five days, students participated in more than a dozen formal sessions, panels, and tours.

Highlights included:

- A half day at the **National Association of Social Workers (NASW)**, where students met with national policy and practice staff and received briefings on federal legislative policy.
- Joint sessions with LBJ Students, including strategic discussions with Steven Eichenauer (Public Strategies) and Bill Shute (former UT Vice Chancellor for Federal Relations).
- Program and policy promotion briefings from **The Education Trust**, **Human Rights Campaign**, and the **U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants**, where students explored the intersections of education, human rights, immigration, and human trafficking.
- Meetings with the **Congressional Budget Office** and the Deputy Director Christi Hawley Anthony and staff helping students understand the fiscal analysis behind legislation.
- A guided **Monuments at Night tour**, **White House visit**, and cultural explorations at the **African American Museum**, **National Archives**, and **Belmont-Paul Women's Equality National Monument**.

Direct engagement with elected officials where students met with:

- Texas Republican Senator **John Cornyn** and his staff.
- Meetings with Texas Representatives **Tony Gonzales' (R TX-23)** Chief of Staff, **Lloyd Doggett (D TX-37)** and his legislative staff, and **Greg Casar (D TX-35)** and his legislative staff – for in depth policy conversations.

These meetings offered students access to the workings of Congress, staffer roles, and how policy promotion directly shapes legislative agendas.

Austin, Texas Component

Students extended their policy learning at the **Texas State Capitol**, where they:

- Met with Texas State Representatives **Gene Wu (D HD 137)**, and the Chief of Staffs for **John Bucy (D HD 136)**, and **Gina Hinojosa (D HD 49)**.
- Met with the legislative staffs and Chief of Staffs for Senators **Joan Huffman (R SD 17)** and **Sarah Eckhardt (D SD 17)**.
- Participated in Q&A sessions focused on state policy development, constituent engagement, and political strategy.
- Concluded with a historical tour of the Capitol to better understand the institutional setting.

Impact and Outcomes

This intensive course exceeded its objectives by providing students with:

- **Practical Advocacy Skills:** Through policy briefings, and real-time feedback, students practiced framing issues and presenting arguments aligned with social work values.
- **Systems Insight:** Exposure to the full continuum of government—from federal budgeting to grassroots organizing—deepened their understanding of how to navigate and influence policy systems.
- **Professional Confidence:** Students emerged with greater poise, clarity, and direction for engaging with decision-makers and advocating for structural change.
- **Career Connections:** The experience opened doors to future employment and internship opportunities across government, nonprofit, and academic sectors.

Conclusion

The Washington and Austin experiential learning program provided an unmatched opportunity to blend policy theory with practice. Students returned with not only sharpened policy and program promotion tools and deeper systems awareness, but also a profound sense of civic responsibility and inspiration to lead. I confidently affirm that this program fostered measurable student growth and advanced the mission of the Steve Hicks School of Social Work to prepare professionals to lead at the intersections of policy, equity, and community well-being toward the public good.

Acknowledgement

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