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USC to offer first undergraduate course on homelessness



Created by Director of the USC Initiative to End Homelessness, Brenda Wiewel, and associate professor of social work Benjamin Henwood, the University's first academic class on homelessness and its complexities, challenges and possible solutions will be offered in Fall 2021 by the Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work. The two unit undergraduate class will provide "the real basic foundation" to students looking to learn about the issue, said Wiewel.

The curriculum addresses people experiencing homelessness in its "modern day version" as it has changed throughout history. Students gain an important understanding of how homelessness looks the way it does today, particularly with social policy and decisions, Henwood said.

"[The class] looks at [homelessness] both upstream and downstream," Wiewel said. "[It looks at] what's happening to the people who are actually living on the streets chronically for years, and it also looks at people who are at risk [with] housing insecurity and how does that lead to homelessness."

Currently, The Center for Homelessness, Housing and Health Equity Research at the School of Social Work provides special leadership development and skill-based training to master's students going into the homelessness field, according to Henwood. However, Wiewel said undergraduate students working in service learning or internships are going into the field without essential background knowledge.

"At any level, this is a problem [people] see with their own eyes every day," Henwood said. "Having the expertise at USC and not utilizing it to help educate undergrads and be aware of the social justice issues that are involved in this topic seems like a missed opportunity." The class aims to give students a better understanding of the history and contributing factors behind people experiencing homelessness through multiple perspectives.

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