

Framing the Experience

March is National Social Work Month. To support the profession and advocate on behalf of clients and programs, NASW holds their annual Lobby Days in Sacramento each spring semester. This two-day event gives social work professionals, and students at the undergraduate and graduate levels from across the state, the chance to convene in Sacramento to meet each other, learn skills related to lobbying and advocacy, and meet with legislators to discuss issues related to social work policy, research and practice. Due to the state legislature's deadline for submitting and withdrawing bills for consideration (end of February) and the logical time for meeting with legislators before they take firm positions on those issues, NASW-CA is prepared to select (usually two) legislative bills that relate to current priorities and pre-existing set of policy statements in the latest edition of *Social Work Speaks* (NASW Press). Each bill selected for lobbying will be argued from the perspective of its relevance to NASW policies and/or ethics, plus any relevant current state data, so course preparation on advocacy can be done using any of the multiple issues in that volume. Specific preparation/briefings are provided to registrants by email during the week before Lobby Days and at the event itself. Therefore, it may be helpful to look at the experience as a chance to learn about the process of advocacy, lobbying and legislative action. It also gives students a chance to lobby on behalf of issues that might not be directly related to their area of study, but will have consequences for the profession as a whole, including the clients they serve.

Setting the Tone

Because the goal of Lobby Days is to create an enriching experience for professionals and students, it is suggested that faculty and staff adopt a neutral stance concerning the event's benefits. While faculty and staff are certainly free to hold opinions concerning the usefulness of this activity, each social work professional and student should have the freedom to decide whether they would like to participate in the event. To not overly discourage or encourage participation in Lobby Days, the following policy has been endorsed:

Lobby Days Policy

1. Missing class to attend Lobby Days will be an excused absence, as long as the student provides evidence to the instructor that they attended the event.
2. Although instructors should make every effort not to schedule student presentations, tests and quizzes on Lobby Days, if this becomes necessary, students attending Lobby Days will have the opportunity to make up the missed work.
3. Attendance at Lobby Days should not be punished or rewarded.

4. Students attending Lobby Days will be responsible for finding out what they will be missing in class and making arrangements to make up work, if necessary.

Lobby Days Opportunities

It is hoped that all faculty, staff and students see the benefits to learning how to lobby and advocate at the legislative level. However, if there are those who feel that the event is not everything it could be, they are highly encouraged to participate in the process of improvement. Faculty and staff are more than welcome to attend Lobby Days and help organize the event. Graduate students who are members of NASW and have attended Lobby Days before can be named as team leaders. It is the hope that Berkeley social work students can continue to be leaders in the process of advocacy and social justice.