University of Wisconsin-Madison

Sociology 496: Poverty, Inequality and Social Policy
Spring 2018

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Section 1: Tuesday, Thursday 9:30-10:45am
Office: Room 6102
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Office hours: Thursdays 11am-12pm, or by appointment (send email)

Course Description

This course examines aspects of poverty and inequality from a sociological perspective, while incorporating insights from other fields, including demography, psychology, and economics. The course also considers social policies that are designed to support low-income individuals and families. The focus is primarily on the U.S., although cross-national data are presented at several points. Contemporary debates and issues are explored, with emphasis on research evidence and considering potential implications for public policy. A major goal of the course is to encourage students to critically evaluate their own assumptions about poverty, inequality and social policy as we together consider the research evidence and discuss the larger issues and implications. This is a general education course with face-to-face instructional mode for 3 credits, determined via the traditional Carnegie definition (2 ½ hours of instruction per week plus out-of-class student work).

Prerequisites

This course is open to upper-level undergraduates; students must have at least junior status or permission of the instructor.

Readings

Students are expected to read the assigned readings for each week before coming to class. Books are listed below. Other readings are either found at the web addresses listed or are posted on the course website. All books are required (and are listed in the order in which we will read them).


**Course Requirements**

Students will be evaluated on five short in-class quizzes (20%), two non-cumulative in-class exams (20% + 20% = 40%), a short paper (20%), discussion Qs (5%), and attendance, participation and discussion (15%).

1. **Quizzes.** There will be five in-class, short-answer quizzes on the material. These quizzes will be given during the first 15 minutes of class (and include the readings assigned for that day). The quizzes will be held on February 1, February 15, February 27, April 5 and April 17. I will drop your lowest grade and count your four highest quiz grades toward your final grade (4 * 5% = 20%).

2. **Exams.** There will be two in-class exams held during regular class sessions on Thursday, March 8th and Thursday, May 3rd. The first exam will cover the course material (including readings, lectures and videos) through March 6th, and the second exam (non-cumulative) will cover the material from Exam 1 through May 1st. These will consist of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. Each exam is worth 20% of your grade (20% + 20% = 40%). (Note that there will be NO exam during the scheduled final exam time.)

3. **Paper.** A short paper is due on Thursday, April 19th in hard copy in class (but you should feel free to submit it earlier); a brief topic description with references is due March 20th. The paper assignment will be distributed in class (and posted on the course website). The paper should be no more than 8 pages in length (double-spaced, 12-point font). I will give you guidance about how to cite relevant references. The short paper will count for 20% of your final grade. Late papers will not be accepted (and will receive a grade of zero).

4. **Attendance, Participation and Discussion.** As Woody Allen says, “Eighty percent of success is just showing up!” I believe it’s important for you to show up and contribute to our class environment. I will take attendance each class, and more than two unexcused absences will count against your participation grade. Students should come to class prepared to demonstrate an understanding of the assigned readings. This entails reading all of the assigned material before each class and actively participating in class discussion. Class attendance, participation and discussion counts for 15% of your final grade. An additional 5% of your grade comes from submitting thoughtful discussion questions by the assigned dates about each of the 3 books we will discuss in class (details about Qs will follow).

**Grading**

The course is graded according to the following scale:

- **A** 94-100
- **AB** 88-93
- **B** 84-87
- **BC** 78-83
- **C** 70-77
- **D** 60-69
- **F** 59 or less
Expectations and Information

Course Policies. The professor adheres to all Department, College, and University policies regarding accommodations for students with disabilities, religious holidays, incompletes, plagiarism, and student evaluation of the course and its instruction.

Accommodations. Please send me an email by the end of the second week of the course if you are eligible for special arrangements or accommodations for testing, assignments, or other aspects of the course. This may be the case if English is your second language or you experience a physical or psychological condition that makes it difficult for you to complete assignments and/or exams without some modification of those tasks. Accommodations are provided for students who qualify for disability services through the McBurney Center. Their website has detailed instructions about how to qualify: [http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu](http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu). Provide a copy of your accommodations request (VISA) to the instructor by the end of the second week of class. We try to reserve rooms and proctors by the third week in class, so we must know of all accommodations by then.

If you wish to request a scheduling accommodation for religious observances, send an email by the end of the second week of the course stating the specific date(s) for which you request accommodation; campus policy requires that religious observances be accommodated if you make a timely request early in the term. See the university’s web page for details: [https://kb.wisc.edu/page.php?id=21698](https://kb.wisc.edu/page.php?id=21698).

Writing Center. Students are encouraged to take advantage of the resources and classes offered by the Writing Center (located at 6171 Helen C. White Hall) to help with organization, thesis statements, grammar, sentence structure, and appropriate citations. See: [www.writing.wisc.edu](http://www.writing.wisc.edu). Before submitting your short paper, you are expected to be familiar with the guidelines on the Writing Center website about “Quoting and Paraphrasing Sources” (see: [http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QuotingSources.html](http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QuotingSources.html)). See next section regarding ‘Academic Integrity.’

Academic integrity. As with all courses at the University of Wisconsin, you are expected to follow the University’s rules and regulations pertaining to academic honesty and integrity. The standards are outlined by the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards: [https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-integrity](https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-integrity). According to UWS 14, academic misconduct is defined as, an individual:

- Seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation;
- Uses unauthorized materials or fabricated data in any academic exercise;
- Forges or falsifies academic documents or records;
- Intentionally impedes or damages the academic work of others;
- Engages in conduct aimed at making false representation of a student's academic performance;
- Assists other students in any of these acts.

For a complete description of behaviors that violate the University’s standards as well the disciplinary penalties and procedures, please see the Dean of Students’ website (above). If you have questions about plagiarism specifically, you should consult the information on the Writing Center
website regarding “Quoting and Paraphrasing Sources” (http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QuotingSources.html). Knowledge of these rules is your responsibility, and lack of familiarity with these rules in no way constitutes an excuse for acts of misconduct. If you have questions about the rules for any of the assignments or exams, please do not hesitate to ask.

Departmental notice of grievance and appeal rights. The Department of Sociology regularly conducts student evaluations of all professors and teaching assistants near the end of the semester. Students who have more immediate concerns about this course should report them to the instructor or to the Chair, Professor James Raymo, 8128 Social Science (jraymo@ssc.wisc.edu).

Departmental learning objectives. Beyond the specific substantive and methodological content I will cover in this course, I have designed this course to achieve the following instructional objectives designated as priorities by the Department of Sociology:

• **Critically Evaluate Published Research:** Sociology graduates will be able to read and evaluate published research as it appears in academic journals and popular or policy publications.

• **Communicate Skillfully:** Sociology majors write papers and make oral presentations that build arguments and assess evidence in a clear and effective manner.

• **Critical Thinking about Society and Social Processes:** Sociology graduates can look beyond the surface of issues to discover the “why” and “how” of social order and structure and consider the underlying social mechanisms that may be creating a situation, identify evidence that may adjudicate between alternate explanations for phenomena, and develop proposed policies or action plans in light of theory and data.

• **See Things from a Global Perspective:** Sociologists learn about different cultures, groups, and societies across both time and place. They are aware of the diversity of backgrounds and experiences among residents of the United States. They understand the ways events and processes in one country are linked to those in other countries.

• **Prepare for Graduate School and the Job Market:** Students use their social research skills to identify opportunities for employment or further study, assess their qualifications for these opportunities, and identify strategies for gaining the necessary knowledge and experience to improve their qualifications. Students are encouraged to develop and maintain portfolios of their written work and educational experiences to aid them in preparing applications. (Also, I would encourage you to visit the L&S SuccessWorks’ website for information about careers and professional development: https://careers.ls.wisc.edu.)

**Useful Websites**

I encourage you to become familiar with various on-line resources related to the course material:

- Center on Budget and Policy Priorities – www.cbpp.org
- Center for Law and Social Policy – www.clasp.org
- Century Foundation – www.tcf.org
- Child Trends – www.childtrends.org
- Future of Children – www.futureofchildren.org
Institute for Research on Poverty (University of Wisconsin) – www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp
Luxembourg Income Study (cross-national research) – http://www.lisdatacenter.org
MDRC (experiments and evaluations) – www.mdrc.org
National Center for Children in Poverty – www.nccp.org
Poverty Solutions (University of Michigan) – http://poverty.umich.edu
Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality -- https://inequality.stanford.edu
UNICEF (children) – https://www.unicef.org
Urban Institute – www.urban.org
U.S. Census Bureau (population info and poverty statistics) – www.census.gov
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:
  Administration for Children and Families – www.acf.hhs.gov
  Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation – www.aspe.hhs.gov
Sociology 496: Poverty, Inequality and Social Policy

Schedule and Required Readings

Section I: Poverty – Measurement, Causes, Consequences, and Public Policies

Introduction to and Perspectives on Poverty

Tues., Jan. 23: Introduction (to the course and each other)

Iceland, “Introduction” (pp. 1-10).

Thurs., Jan. 25: Views and Values about Poverty

Iceland, chapter 1, “Early Views of Poverty in America” (pp. 11-21).


Measuring and Understanding Poverty

Tues., Jan. 30: How Do We Measure Poverty?

Iceland, chapter 2, “Methods of Measuring Poverty” (pp. 22-38).


Thurs., Feb. 1: Who Is Poor, and What Does It Mean to Be Poor?

**Quiz #1 in class.

Iceland, chapter 3, “Characteristics of the Poverty Population” (pp. 39-60).


[Start reading Halpern-Meekin et al. book for discussion Feb 20th.]

Tues., Feb. 6: Child Poverty

https://www.childtrends.org/indicators/children-in-poverty (And look at Appendix data to get a sense of trends over time.)

Explore the Kids Count website (Annie E. Casey Foundation). How does Wisconsin fare compared to other states? See: http://datacenter.kidscou nt.org/  See full 2017 Kids Count report at:  

In class: Watch PBS Frontline Documentary “Poor Kids: Poverty through the Eyes of Children,” 2012 (53 mins.) plus discussion

Causes and Consequences of Poverty

Thurs., Feb. 8: What Are the Causes of Poverty?

Iceland, chapter 5, “Causes of Poverty” (pp. 79-113).


Tues., Feb. 13: What Are the Consequences of Poverty?


Policies to Reduce Poverty

Thurs., Feb. 15: Welfare Reform, Anti-Poverty Policies and the Working Poor

Guest lecturer – Christine Schwartz, Professor of Sociology, UW-Madison
(see: https://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~cschwart)

**Quiz #2 in class.

Iceland, chapter 7, “Poverty and Policy” (pp. 130-155), and chapter 8, “Conclusion” (pp. 157-163).

Matthews, Dylan. 2016. “If the goal was to get rid of poverty, we failed: the legacy of the 1996 welfare reform.” Vox. [http://www.vox.com/2016/6/20/11789988/clintons-welfare-reform]

**Please post 2 discussion questions about the Halpern-Meekin et al. book by Friday, Feb 16th

Tues., Feb. 20: One Perspective on Living in Poverty amidst Current Public Policies


**Lead author, Sarah Halpern-Meekin, will join us! She’s Associate Professor, Human Development & Family Studies, School of Human Ecology at UW-Madison (see: https://sohe.wisc.edu/staff/sarah-halpern-meekin)

Section II: Inequality, Variations across Groups and Places, Wealth and Privilege

Measuring and Monitoring Inequality

Thurs., Feb. 22: Measuring Inequality and Patterns/Trends


Go to NYT website and find YOUR social class:

Tues., Feb. 27: Differences in SES by Race/Ethnicity

**Quiz #3 in class.


Thurs., Mar. 1: Differences in SES across the Globe and U.S. Regions

Iceland, chapter 4, “Global Poverty” (pp. 61-78).


[Start reading Edin & Kefalas book for discussion March 22.]

Wealth and Privilege

Tues., Mar. 6: Transmission of Privilege and the ‘Top 1%’


Stiglitz, Joseph E. 2011. “Of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%.” Vanity Fair. (2 pages)
http://www.vanityfair.com/society/features/2011/05/top-one-percent-201105

In class: Watch PBS documentary “Park Avenue: Money, Power & the American Dream,” 2012 (54 mins.) plus discussion

Thurs., Mar. 8: ** In-class Exam 1 **
Section III: Early Childhood, Socioeconomic Mobility and Higher Education

Tues., Mar. 13: The Importance of Children’s Early Years

http://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/docs/17_02_07.pdf


Thurs., Mar. 15: Social and Economic Mobility

Guest lecturer -- Tim Smeeding, Lee Rainwater Distinguished Professor of Public Affairs and Economics, La Follette School of Public Affairs, UW-Madison  
(see: https://www.lafollette.wisc.edu/faculty-staff/faculty/timothy-smeeding)


http://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/focus/pdfs/foc262g.pdf

**Please post two questions about the Edin & Kefalas book by Monday, March 19th**

Tues., Mar. 20: Higher Education

**Paper topic due in class.


[Start reading Vance book for discussion April 10th]

Section IV: Key Topics Related to Poverty, Inequality and Social Policy

Families

Thurs., Mar. 22: Family Formation among Disadvantaged Women


SPRING BREAK – ** March 26-30 **

Tues., Apr. 3: Families and Inequality


Thurs., Apr. 5: Policies to Prevent Fragile Families and Encourage Strong Families

**Quiz #4 in class.


**Please post 2 questions about the Vance book by Friday April 6th

Tues., Apr. 10:

Other Topics: Health, Housing, Incarceration and Immigration

Thurs., Apr. 12: Health and Inequality


In class: Watch PBS Documentary “Unnatural Causes... Is Inequality Making Us Sick?,” (Part 1, 'In Sickness and In Wealth'), 2008 (56 mins.) plus discussion

Tues., Apr. 17: Housing and Housing Policy

**Quiz #5 in class.


Thurs., Apr. 19: Crime and Incarceration

**Paper due in class.


Tues., Apr. 24: Immigration


Thurs., Apr. 26: ** NO CLASS ** But, please spend your class time watching this video on your own:


Wrap-Up and Exam

Tues., May 1: Bringing It All Together

Discussion and brief exam review.

Thurs., May 3: ** In-class Exam 2 **

(Note: There will be NO exam in the scheduled final exam time.)

Revised: January 23, 2018