

Overview:

Poverty is an essential component of a stratified capitalist society. However the facts of poverty and experiences of the poor have rarely been emphasized in contemporary public discourse. In recent years brief mentions of poverty have reflected either the hailing of the alleged “success” of welfare reform, or the emphasis on the growing disparities between the super-wealthy and working families. As the United States continues to experience economic struggle and skyrocketing costs of living, issues of poverty have come back to the public mind under the umbrella of “working-families” more generally. In this course we will look close up at the multi-faceted experiences of low-income families who struggle to make ends meet to understand the source of these arguments as well as what they leave out. This approach will emphasize both living experience and variations within that experience by issues of race, ethnicity, gender, income-level, immigration and other diverse statuses.

Course Goals:

- Students will develop an understanding of poverty as a multi-faceted experience and those who live within it as a diverse body of individuals who live a variety of experiences as shaped by variations such as race, ethnicity, nationality, language, parenting status, gender, age and other diverse qualities.
- Students will build an understanding of the way that poverty influences and affects their own lives and the society in which they live.
- Students will build an understanding of low-income people as fellow community members who share universal human needs. Students will explore and work through and beyond social stereotypes about the poor and views of low-income individuals/families as “other” or “less than” individuals/families who have higher incomes.

A Core Course:

As a core course in sociology this course will meet the following additional goals.

- a) Help students to ask, and answer "perennial questions"
- b) Cultural diversity
- c) Present an historical view of the subject
- d) Demonstrate the methodology of the discipline
- e) Writing component
- f) Challenge students to create a personal philosophy

In this class students will work to answer the **perennial questions** connecting the personal and familial experiences of poverty to larger social structures and forces including public policy, discourse, controlling images and stereotypes and capitalist market systems. Our approach to building this understanding will strongly emphasize the **diversity** of experiences of poverty as marked by differences in gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, language, parenting status, gender, age and other diverse qualities. We will build an understanding of contemporary poverty by developing a **historic** perspective examining how changing social forces over time have developed into present-day structures, policies, and attitudes that influence the situation of poverty today. Students will engage the topic through hands on research assignments to develop both a conceptual understanding of poverty, as well as a **methodological understanding** of social science research within the field of sociology. Finally throughout the course students will engage in **multiple written assignments** in order to demonstrate their development of a sociological understanding of poverty in America and a **personal philosophy** through which students will build an understanding of the way that poverty influences and affects their own lives and the society in which they live.

Assignments & Expectations:

As a student in this course *you are expected to attend classes regularly and actively engage in class discussions.* Class discussions, presentations and/or lectures are essential to building understanding and will be considered required and important course materials (Take Good Notes!) Please come to class prepared to discuss the assigned material for the day and make connections between the readings and any additional materials presented in class. **EVERY STUDENT SHOULD COME PREPARED TO EACH CLASS WITH SOMETHING TO SAY ABOUT THE TOPIC.** This could be a question, a passage you appreciated, something you found confusing, or a comment related to the material. I understand that students have many different learning styles and there are many ways to demonstrate participation. In addition to in class participation, participation points can be earned outside class through visiting during office hours, e-mailing questions or additional thoughts after the discussion or sharing current events related to poverty in America at the beginning of class or through e-mail for me to announce.

Participation (20%) ~ Based on: attendance, in-class participation & activities, & outside class interaction
Class Journal (30%) ~ Due February 26th, April 7th, May 11th
Group Project (25%) ~ To be presented in class March 17th & 19th
Research Paper (25%) ~ Due April 30th
Extra-Credit Opportunities ~ Due within 3 class periods from the date of the event. All extra credit papers must be submitted by April 30th to receive credit.

Extra Credit:

If it is brought to my attention that there is a local event on or off-campus that directly relates to issues of Poverty in America, students can receive 2% extra credit for attending such an event, discussing it in class, and writing a one page summary and reflection on the event. A maximum of 3 such events may be used toward extra credit for a total of 6 extra credit percentage points toward the final grade. Students who meet the 3 components of the task will receive full-credit, or ½ credit equaling 1% or 2% extra credit towards the final grade accordingly. *Students who do not personally attend the event **will not** receive any extra credit.*

ANY EVENTS TO BE CONSIDERED FOR EXTRA CREDIT MUST BE BROUGHT TO MY ATTENTION AT LEAST ONE WEEK IN ADVANCE OF THE EVENT IN ORDER TO REVIEW & APPROVE THE EVENT AND ANNOUNCE THE OPPORTUNITY TO THE ENTIRE CLASS.

Alternate Proposals:

Grading procedures are implemented in order to provide a means for students to communicate, and teachers to evaluate, how successfully a student has engaged the course material. If you find that the proposed means of assessment does not meet your needs or allow you to best demonstrate your engagement of the course you are invited to propose an alternate means through which you will be evaluated. If you are interested in an alternate grading structure please write a written evaluation proposal and submit it to me no later than **January 27th**. If I find that your proposal mutually meets the needs of all parties (student, professor, and university) I will approve your request, or discuss any necessary compromises in order to meet university and instructor requirements.

Required Readings:

Kathryn Edin & Laura Lein, Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare & Low-Wage Work.

Additional Readings Available on Online Course Reserves (Indicated by an asterisk)*

To Access Online Course Reserves:

Visit the Library Home Page at: www.bc.edu/libraries click “course reserves” under the section entitled “Find Library Materials” (in the top left hand corner of the page). Enter your BC user name and password. You can search for the course. The fastest ways to find all the readings is searching by the course number (SC020) or the instructor’s last name (Green). *All books and videos used in this class are on reserve at O’Neill Library.*

Course Calendar:

THEORY

January 15th

Syllabus, Assignments, Required Readings, Etc.

Michelle Tea Introduction to *Without a Net: The Female Experience of Growing Up Working Class** (In Class)

Handout: What is Poverty?

January 20th

Patricia Hill Collins “Toward a New Vision: Race, Class & Gender as Categories of Analysis & Connection”*

January 22nd

Gregory Mantsios, “Media Magic: Making Class Invisible”*

Lucy A. Williams, “Race, Rat Bites & Unfit Mothers”*

January 27th

Kathryn Newman “Family Values” Chapter 7 pp 186-229 in *No Shame In My Game: The Working Poor in the Inner City* 1999.*

PREVIEW GROUP PROJECT

WELFARE

January 29th : *What is “Welfare”?*

Dorothy Roberts, “The Welfare Debate: Who Pays for Procreation”*

February 3rd:

Making Ends Meet Chapters 2 & 3

SELECT GROUPS FOR PROJECT

February 5th: *After AFDC – Workfare, Public Assistance, Etc.*

Alejandra Marchevsky & Jeanne Thomas “The End of Welfare As We Know It” *

Linda Burnham “Welfare Reform, Family Hardship & Women of Color”*

Tanya Mitchell “If I survive it will be despite welfare reform” *

OPTIONAL: Eileen Boris “When Work is Slavery” (This article talks more about the WEP program discussed in the video)

Video: A Day’s Work, A Day’s Pay

February 10th

THE WORKING-POOR

Beth Shulman “3 Workers”*

David Shipler “Work Doesn’t Work”*

Video: 30 Days “Minimum Wage”

February 12th

Making Ends Meet Chapters 4 & 5

February 17th

Making Ends Meet Chapters 6 & 8

February 19th

William Julius Wilson “The Meaning and Significance of Race: Employers and Inner-City Workers”*

Greg Halpern *Harvard Works Because We Do*

This book is primarily a photography collection with personal narratives interspersed with the photographs. The book will be on hard copy in-house reserve at the library. Please read at least 2 narratives and look at the pictures in the book.

February 24th :

THE NEAR-POOR & WORKING-CLASS

Kathryn Newman & Victor Chen, “The Missing Class”*

February 26th

Crittendon Women’s Union “Fits & Starts”*

&

Colorado Women’s Foundation “The Cliff Effect”*

JOURNAL DUE

RESEARCH PAPER PROJECT HANDED OUT

CHECK-IN TIME FOR GROUP PROJECTS

SPRING BREAK March 2nd – 6th HAVE FUN!

March 10th

FAMILY ISSUES

Lisa Dodson “Wage Poor Mothers & Moral Economy”*

Ellen Bravo. “What if John Edwards Worked at Walmart?”*

March 12th

Mark Greenberg, “Next Steps for Federal Child Care Policy”*

March 17th

GROUP PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

March 19th

GROUP PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

Abstracts for Research Paper Due

March 24th:

Annette Lareau, “Katie Brindle” from *Unequal Childhoods* *

Julie Bettie, “How Working Class Chicas Get Working Class Lives”*

Optional: Jay MacCleod “Ain’t No Makin It” ch 6 & 7*

March 26th

Lizzy Ratner “Failing Low-Income Students: Education and Training in the Age of Welfare Reform”*

March 31st

Christopher Jencks and Kathryn Edin, “Do Poor Women Have the Right to Bear Children?”*

Lisa Dodson “Choice & Motherhood in Poor America”*

April 2nd

Kathryn Edin. 1995. "Single Mothers and Child Support: The Possibilities and Limits of Child Support Policy."*

Kevin Roy “Low-Income Single Fathers in an African-American Community and the requirements of welfare reform”*

April 7th : COMMUNITIES, NEIGHBORHOODS, HOUSING

Housing/Homelessness

Joint Center for Housing Studies: Housing Challenges & Affordability Challenges*

Short Newspaper Articles

Scott S. Greenberger, “Report Rates Boston Most Expensive City”*

Robert Kuttner “The Housing Squeeze”*

Joe McGonegal “Tenants Cry Foul Over Housing Market Tactics”*

Tony Pugh “Nation’s Poor Hit By Housing Crunch”*

Video: Poverty Outlaw

SUBMIT JOURNALS

April 9th

No Class Have a Good Break!

April 14th

Kathryn Newman & Victor Chen “Whose Neighborhood is This Anyway?”*

Video: Holding Ground: The Re-Birth of Dudley Street

April 16th

Shanta Pandey et al. Welfare Reform in Rural Missouri: The Experience of Families*

Alejandra Machevsky and Jeanne Theoharis “Poverty in the Suburbs”*

Alan Berube, Brookings Institution, Testimony to House Ways & Means Committee*

ISSUES IN POVERTY STUDIES

April 21st

Readings: TBA

April 23rd

Readings: TBA

April 28th

Readings: TBA

April 30th

Katherine S. Newman, “When the Working Poor are Poor No More”*

RESEARCH PAPER DUE

INCOMPLETES OR EXTENSIONS WILL ONLY UNDER SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES.