Overview:

Poverty is a basic component of a stratified capitalist society. However, the facts of poverty and the experiences of the poor are rarely emphasized or explored 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 closely at the multi-faceted experiences of low-income families who struggle to make ends meet so that we can better understand the discourse on poverty, as well as what is often left 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, dominant images and stereotypes and capitalist market systems. Our approach to building this understanding will place a strong emphasis on the diversity of experiences of poverty as marked by differences in gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, language, parenting status, gender, age and other characteristics. We will build an understanding of contemporary poverty by developing an 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 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.

**Poverty, Family & Social Policy**

This course is part of the Sociology Department’s Poverty, Family & Social Policy series. As such, this course will address poverty-related issues throughout the duration of the course. A key theoretical approach within this course asks us to consider the intersections of race, class, gender, income level and other factors and how such intersectional identities yield distinct variations within the experience of poverty. Specifically, we will focus throughout the course on the impacts of poverty on family relations for various family members (parents, children, others). Finally, this course places a heavy emphasis on considerations of how social policy has worked in the past to help and/or harm low-income individuals and families and we will consider what social policies are needed for contemporary times.

If you are interested in learning more about the Poverty, Family & Social Policy series, please feel free to ask me or another member of the Sociology Department Staff.

**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 (in other words, 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 of class by 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. We will begin each class with an opportunity to discuss current events that relate to the experience of poverty in the United States.

**Participation (20%)** - Based on attendance, in-class participation & activities, & outside class interaction

**Essays (30%)** – Three short papers, 10% each. Due February 25th, April 15th, May 13th

**Group Project (25%)** - To be presented in class March 23rd & 25th

**Research Paper (25%)** - Due May 6th

**Extra-Credit Opportunities** - Due within 3 class periods from the date of the event. All extra credit papers must be submitted by May 6th 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.
Any work that is not turned in on time will be penalized one point for each day past the due date it is received. Incompletes or extensions will only be granted for emergencies or under special circumstances. You must notify me before an assignment is due if you wish to ask for an extension.

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 with 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 28th. 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:

Sharon Hays, *Flat Broke with Children: Women in the Age of Welfare Reform.*

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 name (Harker, David). *All books and videos used in this class are on reserve at O’Neill Library.*

Course Calendar:

Section 1: Theory

January 19th:

Syllabus, Assignments, Required Readings, Etc.

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

January 21st:

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

January 26th:

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

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

January 28th:


Preview Group Project
Section 2: Welfare: AFDC, Welfare Reform, TANF & Other “Social Programs”

February 2nd:
Hays, Chapters 1 & 2

February 4th:
Hays, Chapter 3

SELECT GROUPS FOR PROJECT

Alejandra Marchevsky & Jeanne Thomas, “The End of Welfare As We Know It” *
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 11th:
Edin and Lein, “Making Ends Meet on A Welfare Check”*
Hays, Chapter 4

February 16th:
Hays, Chapters 5, 6 and 7

Section 3: The Working-Poor

February 18th:
Hays, Chapter 8
Beth Shulman, “3 Workers”*
Video: 30 Days “Minimum Wage”

February 23rd:
David Shipler, “Work Doesn’t Work” *
Edin and Lein, “Making Ends Meet at a Low Wage Job”*

February 25th:
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.

*Essay #1 Due*

**SPRING BREAK March 1st – 5th HAVE FUN!**

**March 9th:**
Lisa Dodson, “Wage Poor Mothers & Moral Economy”*
Ellen Bravo, “What if John Edwards Worked at Walmart?” *

**Section 4: The Near-Poor**

**March 11th:**
Kathryn Newman & Victor Chen, “The Missing Class”*

**March 16th:**
Crittenton Women’s Union, “Fits & Starts”*
Crittenton Women’s Union, “The Cliff Effect”*

*Research Paper Project Handed Out
Check-in Time For Group Projects*

**March 18th:**

Guest Speaker, CWU

**March 23rd:**

**GROUP PROJECT PRESENTATIONS**

**March 25th:**

**GROUP PROJECT PRESENTATIONS**

**Section 5: Family Issues**

**March 30th:**

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

*Group Project Write-Ups Due*

**April 1st:**
No class due to holiday

April 6th:
Christopher Jencks and Kathryn Edin, “Do Poor Women Have the Right to Bear Children?”*
Lisa Dodson, “Choice & Motherhood in Poor America”*

April 8th:

Abstracts for Research Papers Due

Section 6: Education

April 13th:
Annette Lareau, “Katie Brindle” from Unequal Childhoods *
Optional: Jay MacCleod, “Ain’t No Makin It” ch 6 & 7*

April 15th:
Lizzy Ratner, “Failing Low-Income Students: Education and Training in the Age of Welfare Reform”*

Essay # 2 Due

Section 7: Communities, Neighborhoods, and Housing

April 20th:
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

April 22nd:
Kathryn Newman & Victor Chen, “Whose Neighborhood is This Anyway?”*  
Video: Holding Ground: The Re-Birth of Dudley Street  
April 27th:  
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*  

**Section 8: Healthcare**  
April 29th:  
Karen Seccombe “Just Don’t Get Sick”  
May 4th:  
Katherine Newman “When the Working Poor are Poor No More” *  
May 6th:  
Barack Obama and Joe Biden “Fighting Poverty & Making a Bridge to the Middle-Class”  

*Research Paper Due*  

*Essay #3 Due May 13th*