

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. The current global economic crisis has re-cast a spotlight on poverty and downward mobility as many are now falling into the ranks of the “new poor” or “near poor” as unemployment continues to rise. But what does this mean for those who were poor before the economy went bad? In this course we will look close up at the multi-faceted and diverse 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, income level or 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 stereotypes about the poor and views of low-income people as “other” or “less than” those 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.

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 will ask 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 give a strong focus to how poverty impacts family relations for various family members (parents, children, others) throughout the course and will focus more in depth on these issues in the second half of the course. Finally this course will hold 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 your instructor or 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 (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 credit can be earned outside class through coming to office hours, e-mailing questions or additional thoughts after the discussion or sharing current events related to the course 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
Argument Papers (20%) ~ (Four papers total worth 5%) – see handout for due dates
Group Project (25%) ~ More information to follow
Research Paper (25%) ~ More Information to Follow
Final Exam (10%) ~ Thursday December 17th 9am
Extra-Credit Opportunities ~ Due within 3 class periods from the date of the event.

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 1-2 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.*

All extra credit papers must be submitted by December 3rd to receive 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 **September 22nd**. 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 hard copy reserve at O’Neill Library.*

Course Calendar:

SECTION 1: THEORY

September 8th

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?

September 10th

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

September 15th

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

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

September 17th:

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

SECTION 2: WELFARE: AFDC, Welfare Reform, TANF & Other “Social Programs”

September 22nd:

What is “Welfare”?

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

THEORY SECTION ARGUMENT PAPERS DUE

September 24th:

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

Lynn Fujiwara “Mother’s Without Citizenship”*

SELECT GROUPS FOR PROJECT

September 29th:

Making Ends Meet Chapters 2 & 3

SECTION 3: THE WORKING-POOR

October 1st

Making Ends Meet Chapters 4 & 5

WELFARE SECTION ARGUMENT PAPERS DUE

October 6th

David Shipler “Work Doesn’t Work”*

Video: 30 Days “Minimum Wage”

October 8th

Making Ends Meet Chapters 6 & 8

October 13th

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.

October 15th:

Lisa Dodson “Wage Poor Mothers & Moral Economy”* AND
Ellen Bravo. “What if John Edwards Worked at Walmart?”*

SECTION 4: THE NEAR-POOR

October 20th

Kathryn Newman & Victor Chen, "The Missing Class"*

Center for American Progress, "Recession, Poverty and The Recovery Act"*

WORKING POOR SECTION ARGUMENT PAPERS DUE

October 22nd

Crittendon Women's Union "Fits & Starts"*

&

Colorado Women's Foundation "The Cliff Effect"*

RESEARCH PAPER PROJECT HANDED OUT

CHECK-IN TIME FOR GROUP PROJECTS

October 27th

GROUP PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

NEAR POOR SECTION ARGUMENT PAPERS DUE

Note: By this date you should have at least ONE argument paper completed.

October 29th

GROUP PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

SECTION 5: FAMILY ISSUES

November 3rd

Mark Greenberg, "Next Steps for Federal Child Care Policy"*

GROUP PROJECT WRITE-UPS DUE

November 5th

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

Lisa Dodson "Choice & Motherhood in Poor America"*

November 10th

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"*

ABSTRACTS FOR RESEARCH PAPER DUE

SECTION 6: EDUCATION

November 12th

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

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

FAMILY SECTION ARGUMENT PAPERS DUE

November 17th

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

SECTION 7: COMMUNITIES, NEIGHBORHOODS, HOUSING

November 19th

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

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

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

EDUCATION SECTION ARGUMENT PAPERS DUE

November 24th

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

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

November 26th

Thanksgiving Weekend. No Class Have a Good Break!

SECTION 8: HEALTHCARE ISSUES

December 1st

Karen Seccombe “Just Don’t Get Sick”

&

TBA, Second Article

COMMUNITIES, NEIGHBORHOODS & HOUSING SECTION ARGUMENT PAPERS DUE

December 3rd

Mental Health & Poverty

Guest Speaker ROAD

Reading Assignment: TBA by our speakers

RESEARCH PAPERS DUE

December 8th

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

HEALTHCARE SECTION ARGUMENT PAPERS DUE

December 10th

Barack Obama and Joe Biden “Fighting Poverty & Making a Bridge to the Middle-Class”

FINAL EXAM THURSDAY DECEMBER 17TH 9AM

INCOMPLETES OR EXTENSIONS WILL BE ALLOWED ONLY UNDER SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES.

STUDENTS SUBMITTING LATE WORK WILL RECEIVE AN INCOMPLETE GRADE FOR THE COURSE.