Instructor Information

- **Instructor:** Dr. Anne Marie E. Brady
- **Email:** amb228@nyu.edu
- **Office Hours:** Anytime by appointment over zoom or by phone

Course Information

- **Class Meeting Times:** Monday 4:55-6:35pm
- **Class Location:** On-line

Course Description

This course examines the nature and extent of poverty and economic inequality primarily in the U.S. but with a comparative perspective (high income countries in Europe). To start, this course will examine on how poverty and inequality are defined and measured. It will proceed to explore how conceptions of poverty are socially constructed and historically bounded; examine what the causes and consequences of poverty are and discuss how these are complex and interwoven. This course will then explore how people can experience poverty at different points in the life course—and why some groups experience poverty more so than others. This course will discuss the role of labor markets, family structure and social organization in shaping poverty. And finally, it will explore how social policies seek to ameliorate poverty and other forms of social disadvantage throughout the life course. But when thinking about how ‘successful’ social policies are at alleviating poverty, this course will demonstrate that ‘success’ is influenced by the conceptions of poverty adopted by policymakers in the first place.

Course and Learning Objectives

The goal of this course is to provide students with:
1. An understanding of the broad area of poverty focusing on poverty as a concept and how this informs how poverty is defined and thus measured.

2. An understanding of the major contemporary theories about the underlying mechanisms that may contribute to poverty; understand the state of the evidence on theories, conjectured consequences and selected policy interventions.

3. An opportunity to develop critical analytical skills (e.g., reading thoughtfully – assessing the arguments and evidence provided by authors; thinking carefully about one’s own beliefs in relation to the extant evidence on a given topic; and communicating well-articulated arguments grounded in academic arguments and evidence).

Learning Assessment Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graded Assignment</th>
<th>Course Objective Covered</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper I</td>
<td>All</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper II</td>
<td>All</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Presentation</td>
<td>All</td>
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Refer to the URPL-GP 1603 Urban Planning and Practice Methods course syllabus for format example.

Suggested Books


Assessment Assignments and Evaluation

Paper I and Paper II (30% respectively): For each paper, the student will select one question from the ‘class discussion questions’ itemized at the end of each week on this syllabus. The question must be answered. In doing so, it is essential for the student to ground his/her argument in the academic literature and research in order for the student to demonstrate his/her understanding of the various arguments/debates/concepts/evidence used by academics on any given topic. Papers must be 8-10 pages in length, excluding cover page and bibliography.

Oral Presentation (25%): Each class will start with an oral presentation by a student (or two students). The presentation should be 10 to 15 minutes in length and the student(s) can use whatever format he/she feels most comfortable using. The presentation will provide an insightful perspective on the topic for the week, drawing on the required and additional readings. The student(s) should not report on the class discussion question(s). Rather, the student(s) should
draw from the additional readings and present on a perspective that is not immediately raised in the required reading. In short, use the time to present something new and different.

Class Participation (15%): Class participation includes active participation in class plus participating in written forum discussions. Active participation in class and via the forum means demonstrating that you have read the required material through your reflections in class and your posts on the forum and your ability to engage thoughtfully in debate with your fellow students.

Overview of the Semester

- Week 1
  - Date: February 1
  - Topic: Introduction
- Week 2
  - Date: February 8
  - Defining Poverty
- Week 3
  - Date: THURSDAY FEB. 18 (Legislative Week)
  - Measuring Poverty
- Week 4
  - Date: February 22
  - Topic: Inequality and Redistribution
- Week 5
  - Date: March 1
  - Topic: The Underclass Debate
- Week 6
  - Date: March 8
- Week 7
  - Date: March 15
  - Topic: Short-Term Poverty Dynamics
  - Deliverable: Paper I Due
- Week 8
  - Date: March 22
  - Topic: Lifecycle and Intergenerational Poverty Dynamics
- Week 9
  - Date: March 29
  - Topic: Race, Ethnicity and Poverty and Social Disadvantage
- Week 10
  - Date: April 5
  - Topic: Gender and Poverty and Social Disadvantage
Letter Grades

Letter grades for the entire course will be assigned as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A (94-100)</td>
<td>4.0 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A- (90-93)</td>
<td>3.7 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+ (87-89)</td>
<td>3.3 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B (84-86)</td>
<td>3.0 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B- (80-83)</td>
<td>2.7 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+ (77-79)</td>
<td>2.3 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C (74-76)</td>
<td>2.0 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C- (70-73)</td>
<td>1.7 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F (69 and below)</td>
<td>0.0 points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Student grades will be assigned according to the following criteria:

- **(A) Excellent**: Exceptional work for a graduate student. Work at this level is unusually thorough, well-reasoned, creative, methodologically sophisticated, and well written. Work is of exceptional, professional quality.
- **(A-) Very good**: Very strong work for a graduate student. Work at this level shows signs of creativity, is thorough and well-reasoned, indicates strong understanding of appropriate methodological or analytical approaches, and meets professional standards.
- **(B+) Good**: Sound work for a graduate student; well-reasoned and thorough, methodologically sound. This is the graduate student grade that indicates the student has fully accomplished the basic objectives of the course.
- **(B) Adequate**: Competent work for a graduate student even though some weaknesses are evident. Demonstrates competency in the key course objectives but shows some indication that understanding of some important issues is less than complete. Methodological or analytical approaches used are adequate but student has not been thorough or has shown other weaknesses or limitations.
- **(B-) Borderline**: Weak work for a graduate student; meets the minimal expectations for a graduate student in the course. Understanding of salient issues is somewhat incomplete. Methodological or analytical work performed in the course is minimally adequate. Overall performance, if consistent in graduate courses, would not suffice to sustain graduate status in "good standing."
- **(C/-/+ Deficient**: Inadequate work for a graduate student; does not meet the minimal expectations for a graduate student in the course. Work is inadequately developed or flawed by numerous errors and misunderstanding of important issues. Methodological or analytical work performed is weak and fails to demonstrate knowledge or technical competence expected of graduate students.
- **(F) Fail**: Work fails to meet even minimal expectations for course credit for a graduate student. Performance has been consistently weak in methodology and understanding, with serious limits in many areas. Weaknesses or limits are pervasive.

**Detailed Course Overview**

**WEEK 1, DATE: February 1**
Introduction

**WEEK 2, DATE: February 8**
Defining Poverty

Readings Due (found on NYU Classes)


Discussion Questions
1. Are absolute or relative definitions of poverty more useful in helping to understand ‘who is poor’? What type of definition of poverty do you think the US should use?
2. Why do we seem continually to be rediscovering who is poor?

Additional Readings

WEEK 3, DATE: February 18

Measuring Poverty

Readings Due (found on NYU Classes)

Discussion Questions
1. To what extent is it possible objectively to quantify poverty and which kind of measurement is most useful?
2. What are the strengths and weakness of the current US poverty measure? What concept is it attempting to capture? Is the new supplemental measurement an improvement?
Additional Readings


WEEK 4, DATE: February 22

Inequality and Redistribution

Readings Due (found on NYU Classes)

1. Atkinson, A.B (2015). Inequality: What Can be Done? Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Chapter 1 and 2 for sure, 3 if you have the time)

Class Discussion Questions:

1. What do we know about the underlying mechanisms of inequality? What does this suggest for policies to address inequality?
2. How is inequality assessed? What are the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches?
3. Why is it important to consider wealth along with income when seeking to understand disadvantage?
4. Hills and Cunliffe (reading #7 below) assert that wealth “represents the solidification of economic advantage across the lifecycle.” Please explain/discuss.

Additional Readings:


WEEK 5, DATE: March 1
The Underclass Debate

Readings Due (found on NYU Classes)

Class discussion questions
1. Will we always have an ‘underclass’? If so, how should we define it? If not, why does this concept survive or recur?
2. What are the key similarities and differences between people considered ‘poor’ and members of the ‘underclass’?

Additional readings

WEEK 6, DATE: March 8
The Revised Culture of Poverty Thesis: Agency Versus Structure
Readings Due (found on NYU Classes)


Class discussion questions

1. Should researchers incorporate both individual- and structural-based explanations of poverty and social disadvantage into their work? And if so, how can they do this without “victim blaming?”

2. Why is there a renewed interest in the role of culture as a cause of poverty?

Additional readings


7. Tirado, L. (22 November 2013). “This is why poor people’s bad decisions make perfect sense”, Huffington Post.

WEEK 7, DATE: March 15

Short-Term Poverty Dynamics

Readings Due (found on NYU Classes)


Class Discussion Questions:
1. What is income mobility and how is it assessed?
2. Why is it important to examine short-term income mobility as well as current income when seeking to understand social disadvantage?

Additional Readings:

WEEK 8, DATE: March 22
Lifecycle and Intergenerational Poverty Dynamics

Readings Due (found on NYU Classes)

Class Discussion Questions:
1. How does looking at lifecycle and intergenerational poverty dynamics change our understanding of those in poverty, compared to looking at people at one point in time?
2. Do the data on lifecycle and intergenerational poverty dynamics support the ideas presented by Murray and others when discussing the underclass?

Additional Readings:

WEEK 9, DATE: March 29
Race, Ethnicity and Poverty and Social Disadvantage

Readings Due (found on NYU Classes)

Class Discussion Questions:
1. What is the impact of ‘race’ (or ‘race’ and ‘gender’) on social disadvantage?
2. What are some of the explanations for the different levels of poverty and social disadvantage among different ethnic and racial groups?

Additional Readings:
WEEK 10, DATE: April 5

Gender and Poverty and Social Disadvantage

Readings Due (found on NYU Classes)


Class Discussion Questions:

1. Do women experience poverty differently than men? If so, how?
2. How does using ‘gender’ change the way that poverty and social disadvantage are defined?

Additional Readings:

WEEK 11, DATE: April 12
Causes and Consequences of Poverty and Social Disadvantage in Childhood and Policy Response: Early Intervention

Readings Due (found on NYU Classes)

Class Discussion Questions
1. What is the best way to understand social disadvantage among children?
2. Can early intervention programs improve outcomes among children? If so, which outcomes? How?

Additional readings:
WEEK 12, DATE: April 26

Causes and Consequences of Poverty and Social Disadvantage in Childhood and Policy Response: Education

Readings Due (found on NYU Classes)

Class Discussion Questions
1. To what extent can K-12 education systems exacerbate, rather than ameliorate social inequalities, and why?
2. Is it possible for the K-12 educational system to provide equality of opportunity? If so, how?

Additional readings:

WEEK 13, DATE: May 3

Causes and Consequences of Poverty and Social Disadvantage in Adulthood with a focus on employment and Policy Response: Work Activation
Readings Due (found on NYU Classes)

Class Discussion Questions
1. Is participation in the labor market the best way to avoid poverty and the best guarantee of social inclusion? If not, what not?
2. Is unemployment a cause or consequence of social disadvantage?
3. What assumptions do work activation policies make about the reasons that people are unemployed?
4. Evaluate the potential effectiveness of sanctions on reducing worklessness. What does the evidence suggest?
5. Must the poor, as Larry Meade (1989) argues, become workers before they can stake larger claims to equality?

Additional Readings:

WEEK 14, DATE: May 10

Universal Basic Income: The Future of Social Protection for Adults?

Readings Due (found on NYU Classes)

Class Discussion Questions
1. Would a basic income solve many of the problems inherent in the labor market today or is it an unrealistic goal and a distraction from the real challenges in the labor market?

Additional Readings:
   http://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2Fs10272-017-0652-0.pdf.
   Available online.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a vital component of Wagner and NYU. All students enrolled in this class are required to read and abide by Wagner’s Academic Code. All Wagner students have already read and signed the Wagner Academic Oath. Plagiarism of any form will not be tolerated and students in this class are expected to report violations to me. If any student in this class is unsure about what is expected of you and how to abide by the academic code, you should consult with me.

Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at NYU

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please visit the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) website and click on the Reasonable Accommodations and How to Register tab or call or email CSD at (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are strongly advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

NYU’s Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays

NYU’s Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays states that members of any religious group may, without penalty, absent themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. Please notify me in advance of religious holidays that might coincide with exams to schedule mutually acceptable alternatives.