Instructor Information

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

Course Information

- **Class Meeting Times:** Monday 4:55-6:35pm
- **Class Location:** GCASL Room 369

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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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper I</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper II</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<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 their argument in the academic literature and research in order for the student to demonstrate their 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 (double spaced, 12 pt font, standard margins).** Bibliography must be included at the end of the paper.

**Oral Presentation (25%):** Each class will start with an oral presentation by a student (or two students). The presentation should be 10 minutes in length and the student(s) can use whatever
format they feel most comfortable using. The presentation will provide an insightful perspective on a specific policy related to the reading for the week. Discussion about the policy will be grounded in the required and additional readings for the week. The student(s) should not report on the class discussion question(s). Rather, the student(s) should draw from the additional readings and present a policy perspective as it relates to the reading for the week. In other words, select a relevant policy to illuminate the key concepts and themes from the week’s reading.

Class Participation (15%): Class participation includes active participation in class. Active participation in class means demonstrating that you have read the required material through your reflections in class and your ability to engage thoughtfully in debate with your fellow students. Students with more than two unexcused absences will affect their class participation grade.

Overview of the Semester

- **Week 1**
  - Date: January 22
  - Topic: Introduction
- **Week 2**
  - Date: January 29
  - Topic: Defining Poverty
- **Week 3**
  - Date: February 5
  - Topic: Measuring Poverty
- **Week 4**
  - Date: February 12
  - Topic: Inequality and Redistribution
- **Week**
  - Date: February 19
  - NO CLASS Federal Holiday
- **Week 5**
  - Date: February 26
  - Topic: The Underclass Debate
- **Week 6**
  - Date: March 4
  - Deliverable: Paper I Due
- **Week 7**
  - Date: March 11
  - Topic: Short-Term Poverty Dynamics
- **Week**
  - Date: March 18
  - Mid-Term Break, NO CLASS
• Week 8
  o Date: March 25
  o Topic: Lifecycle and Intergenerational Poverty Dynamics

• Week 9
  o Date: April 1
  o Topic: Race, Ethnicity and Poverty and Social Disadvantage

• Week 10
  o Date: April 8
  o Topic: Gender and Poverty and Social Disadvantage

• Week 11
  o Date: April 15
  o Topic: Causes and Consequences of Poverty and Social Disadvantage in Childhood. Policy Response: Early Intervention

• Week 12
  o Date: April 22
  o Topic: Causes and Consequences of Poverty and Social Disadvantage in Childhood. Policy Response: Education

• Week 13
  o Date: April 29
  o Topic: Causes and Consequences of Poverty and Social Disadvantage in Adulthood with a focus on employment. Policy Response: Work Activation

• Week 14
  o Date: May 6
  o Topic: Universal Basic Income: The Future of Social Protection?
  o **Deliverable: Paper II Due**

**Letter Grades**

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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A (94-100)</td>
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<tr>
<td>A- (90-93)</td>
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<td>B+ (87-89)</td>
<td>3.3 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>B (84-86)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letter Grade</td>
<td>Points</td>
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<tr>
<td>B- (80-83)</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+ (77-79)</td>
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<tr>
<td>C (74-76)</td>
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<tr>
<td>C- (70-73)</td>
<td>1.7 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>F (69 and below)</td>
<td>0.0 points</td>
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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/-/+ 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: January 22
Introduction

WEEK 2, DATE: January 29
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 5
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 12
Inequality and Redistribution

Readings Due (found on NYU Classes)
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: February 26

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 4

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 11
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 25

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: April 1

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 8

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 15

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 22

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: April 29

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 6

Universal Basic Income: The Future of Social Protection?

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:

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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.