COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Description  This course examines the nature and extent of poverty primarily in the U.S. but with a comparative perspective (developed countries in Europe). It considers possible causes and consequences, and the antipoverty effects of existing and proposed policies.

In this course, we consider what is poverty – how do we measure it, what does it mean to be poor? Why is it so persistent, and so concentrated on particular groups? Is poverty passed on from one generation to the next? How do labor markets, family structure, and social organization come into play in shaping poverty? How successful have the array of anti-poverty efforts been and which look most promising going forward?

Objectives  There are two primary goals of this course. First, on a content basis, this is a course about current issues in poverty and inequality, what we know, what we don’t, and potential anti-poverty policy interventions. The topics selected are heavily influenced by the pressing issues in U.S. poverty, although comparative readings are included for close to half the weeks. As such, the issue of race and ethnicity is fairly prominent in this course and the readings. By the end of the course students should be familiar with the major contemporary theories about the underlying mechanisms that may contribute to poverty, and the state of the evidence on theories, conjectured consequences, and selected policy interventions.

The second goal is to build on previous course work, and further develop critical analytical skills. This includes reading thoughtfully – assessing the arguments and evidence provided by authors; thinking carefully about one’s own beliefs and evidence, and communicating well-articulated arguments (with evidence).

As such, the classroom needs to be interactive, seminar in ‘feel’ if not in size.

Overview  Section I of this course begins by framing the issues, what we mean by poverty and how we measure it, and why we care. This section also sets out some empirical ‘facts’ on levels, trends, who are the poor, and how much mobility is there in and out of poverty, in a comparative
setting. In Section II, we focus on a set of social science theories about the underlying causes of poverty, and possible consequences. The final section of the course considers six specific policy areas prominent in anti-poverty efforts. These include income and family support policies, education, workforce development, and issues in the U.S. criminal justice system.

**PREQUISITES:** microeconomics (P11.1018), intro statistics (P11.1011), and intro to policy (P11.1022 or the equivalent, P11.2660). Multiple regression (P11.2902) is recommended but not required.

**COURSE MATERIALS**

**Required Texts:** There are two books for this course. *Aint no Makin’it* by Jay MacLeod is an ethnographic study that examines the social structure and aspirations of two sets of male youth, and re-connects with them every eight years until these men are in their forties. (Note: *3rd edition required*, earlier editions do not include the most recent interviews.) *Poverty in America* (2nd edition) by John Iceland provides an overview on current issues in the poverty field. MacLeod is available at NYU’s professional bookstore, and in various formats from Amazon.com. While available from Amazon.com, the Iceland text is also available electronically via ‘ebrary’ at Bobst library. It is your choice whether you want to purchase a copy or simply access it electronically. These books are supplemented with additional readings each week.

**Readings** are coded by location:

- B: Blackboard
- T: Text
- I: Internet, link provided in syllabus (most also are located on Blackboard)
- E: E-brary (available through Bobst website via NYU Home.)

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Students are responsible for all material and announcements covered in class; if you miss a class you should contact a fellow student for notes from that day. Any handouts for class will be posted on blackboard, if feasible.

**Class participation (and preparation)**

Students must complete the required readings in advance of class for the classroom experience to work. And you must actively engage, both with the material prior to class and in the classroom. To aid in this process, I have kept the required reading to a minimum, and in many cases have provided some direction on what to mull over when doing the reading. Class will be taught with the expectation that students have done – and thought about – the reading. **Pay particular attention to the guiding questions included in the syllabus, and on blackboard, they will frame our discussion.**
Participation in class:
Participating in class requires both preparing in advance, and engaging with the material and discussion during class. There is both a speaking, and listening component to participation; sharing your ideas and reflecting on/responding to the ideas of others. High quality participation is valued, rather than high quantity. Specifically, when speaking, consider the:

- Relevancy of comments to the current discussion,
- Analysis in your point, whether the argument is thought out and well articulated,
- Its contribution, whether it adds something new and moves the discussion forward.

Students should periodically assess whether they are participating too much or too little in class. In order to help keep some balance and diversity in our discussion, I may be selective in who I call on, including calling on students who have not volunteered.

Email Responses to Readings

Five weeks during the semester, students must email responses to the readings/class (approximately 2 paragraphs). Three responses must be emailed in advance of class (at least 24 hours in advance, due Mondays 6:00 pm), two after class has met (within 24 hours).

- Ex ante responses are meant to raise a key theme or insight from the readings that is relevant for the class or interests you, and to raise questions either you have about the readings or left unanswered by the reading.
- Ex post responses provide an opportunity to makes thematic connections between the reading and class discussion, or raise points from the reading not covered in class.
- Both types of emails are a chance to reflect on and analyze the readings.

Email responses are required as part of participation, but will not be individually graded. Collectively they are included in the course grade on a modified Pass/Fail system, where particularly strong or inadequate responses matter at the margin.

**The subject heading should be “Reading Response.”

_Students can only receive one credit per week (either before or after class)._**

In addition to class participation, students will write two analytical memos, one final research paper, and participate in a team-based policy debate on the final day.

**Analytical Memos**

Assignment #1 Measurement Memo (4-5 pages)

The goal of this assignment is to apply data (and data analysis skills) to an area of poverty policy. The specific data is related to measuring poverty. The census has created an interactive data site that permits one to alter how poverty is measured using data from the Current Population Survey.
(CPS). Students will use this site to write a memo recommending and assessing the use of a particular definition (and measurement) of poverty, as applied to a particular policy realm.

**Assignment #2 Readings Synthesis Memo** (3-4 pages)

The objective of this assignment is to go a bit deeper into a particular topic/day, by reading literature beyond the required reading, critically assessing it, and relating this back to concepts covered in that particular class. Students will select a class from the second section of the course (weeks 4-7), read two of the optional readings, and write a memo that summarizes this work and connects it to the broader set of readings for the day. *The day selected cannot also serve as an email response day.*

**Final paper:** (12-15 pages)

The final paper is meant to be cumulative in that it builds on the skills demonstrated in the memos and course, applied to any of the six broad policy areas covered in the course, and directly building from the course. By the middle of the semester, students need to have declared a policy area in which they would like to write a research paper. Changes to the topic require my prior approval. There are two paper options:

- Literature review with broad policy recommendations. Conduct a literature review of a broad policy area, highlighting what is known and not, determining the most promising policy/program areas and providing some data to support your view, or
- Policy proposal assessment. Propose a new policy intervention or assess an existing proposal/program, including a review of the existing literature, providing a critical assessment and recommendations (including data to support your view).

**Final Class policy debate**

Our final class will be structured as a policy debate (class 14** but we might collectively choose to hold this during exam week, May 10th). Based on the topic areas selected for final papers, I will assign students to teams of 5-6 people. Each team will have 5 minutes to present the overarching biggest issues in the *broad* policy area, and its importance for anti-poverty efforts. They will then field questions for 5 minutes before we move to the next team.

**Relative Weights of Requirements**

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<th>Requirement</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation (including 5 Responses)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Memos (Measurement, 15%, Synthesis, 10%)</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Debate</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>50%</td>
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BLACKBOARD
You must have access to the class Blackboard site at http://classes.nyu.edu/
All announcements and class related documents (required and optional readings, class handouts, assignments etc.) will be posted here. If you have not activated your NYU net account or have forgotten your password, you can activate or change your password at http://start.nyu.edu. Your account must be activated to access Blackboard.

STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
As members of the NYU Wagner community, we are all expected to adhere to high standards of intellectual and academic integrity. An example of how NYU describes academic integrity is available at http://www.nyu.edu/cas/map/integrity.pdf This is a good resource for issues of academic honesty.

The email responses, memo assignments, and final paper are all meant to be individual products. No collaborative work is permitted. Specifically:

Email Responses: This is a mechanism for my understanding your reaction to and understanding of the readings and class, so they must be written individually.

Memo Assignments: These are individual products – both the written work and the analysis behind it must be done individually.

Paper: The paper must be the sole work of the individual student, using appropriate documentation for materials relied on for research. It is completely appropriate to talk with others about your paper, including getting advice from other faculty. But the content of the paper needs to be solely authored by the student.

Violations of these standards will automatically result in all participating students failing the course and being remanded to the discipline committee for further action.
Section I. Laying the groundwork. What do we mean by poverty or inequality, and why do we care? How do we define and measure these concepts? What do they look like now—compared to historically, and comparative to other developed countries? How transitory are experiences with poverty, and what lasting effects does it have?

Week 1. Course Overview. What is poverty, how do we measure it?**

Unlike most developed countries, the U.S. relies on an absolute measure of poverty based on a methodology developed in the early 1960s. This absolute measure is the basis for eligibility for many means-tested programs aimed to alleviate hardship. The focus of this day is to understand how the current measure is calculated, what that means for what it can and can’t tell us about poverty in the U.S. today, and consider alternatives and what they would accomplish (such as those employed in Europe).

Required reading:


There is some overlap between the first two readings. Iceland provides a broader assessment of approaches, Blank provides more details on the NAS approach, the U.K’s social exclusion measure, and the political economy of changing the existing measure. What are the main strengths and weaknesses of the current U.S. poverty measure? What concept is it attempting to capture? Contrast this with OECD relative measures. What type of measure do you think the U.S. should use, for which purposes?

Optional:


B: Commentaries (rejoinders) 2005. *Measurement* vol 3(4) This is a series of responses to Iceland’s recommendation, a bit of a debate on a wide range of issues.

**Week 2. Who is poor?**

Which demographic groups are more likely to be poor? How has that changed over time? How does the U.S. compare to other countries?

**Required reading:**


B: U.S. Census Report, pages 5-12 provide a quick overview of social welfare/insurance programs in the U.S. [https://www.census.gov/sipp/workpapr/wp246.pdf](https://www.census.gov/sipp/workpapr/wp246.pdf)

*Ch 4 of Iceland provides an overview of trends in poverty and which groups are most affected, using multiple measures. Connect this to last week’s discussion as you read, and assess what is added with his broader measures. When reading Smeeding, specifically consider what the analysis on 78-82 tells us about U.S. policies.*

**Optional**


**Week 3 Economic Mobility and Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty**

Concerns about inequality and poverty frequently are connected to whether it is a transient state, whether it has lasting effects specifically, whether disadvantages are handed down to the next generation. This week focuses on economic mobility --what does it look like in the U.S. and how does this compare to other developed countries? What might drive correlations over time, and specifically in the U.S?

**Required reading:**

T: MacLeod, Jay (2009). Ain’t No Makin It, Chapter 1 and Chapter 3.


B: Roemer, J. Equal Opportunity and Intergenerational Mobility: Going Beyond Intergenerational Transition Matrices, in *Generational Income Mobility in North America. This is a pretty conceptual piece, try to focus on the intuition of possible mechanisms of*
income correlation across generations, which raise the biggest concerns in terms of equal opportunity?


Optional:


B: Emily Beller and Michael Hout, 2006. “Intergenerational Social Mobility: the US in a comparative Perspective” The Future of Children 16:19-36. This article focuses on occupational mobility (rather than income), which is more commonly examined by sociologists.

Section II. Poverty Theories
This section reviews beliefs and research about what is behind these levels and trends. Understanding what we know—and don’t know—about underlying mechanisms and causes is critical to designing and implementing effective anti-poverty policies.

Week 4 Social Stratification, Race and Ethnicity
In the U.S. social stratification is intricately related to race and ethnicity. This day lays out some current thinking in sociology on how stratification occurs, and how races and ethnicity overlay this process.

Required reading:
B: Doug Massey Categorically Unequal (2007) Ch 1 “How Stratification Works” This chapter is conceptually dense, and might require two reads.

I: Implicit Association Test: https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/ Prior to class, log on to this website and participate in two on line ‘tests,’ race and a category of your choice.

B: Barnhardt, Sharon (2009) Near and Dear? Evaluating the impact of Neighbor Diversity on Inter-Religious Attitudes. Working paper. This is a very preliminary paper, do not worry about the bulk of the tables. Focus on understanding the general design and intuition of the study, and tables 4-5 and figure 2. Primarily focus on pages 1-24.

Iceland, Chapter 5. This provides some additional background.

Optional:


Week 5 The Role of Social and Cultural Capital

The role of social and cultural capital in shaping life outcomes. There is a particular focus here on how these potentially intersect with educational systems and lay the foundation for labor market outcomes.

Required reading:

T: MacLeod, Jay (2009). Ain’t No Makin It. Chapter 2 (p 11-23) This chapter covers much theoretical work. Focus particularly on cultural capital, aspirations, and student resistance. And Chapter 6.

B: Coleman, James 1988. Social Capital in the creation of Human Capital. American Journal of Sociology, S95-S120. This is a classic. Introduces the concept of social capital, although at points it is not crystal clear.

B: Unsolved Mysteries: The Tocqueville Files II: The Downside of Social Capital. Portes and Landolt. The American Prospect, 1996. This provides a clearer summary of social capital (a la Coleman) and some critical assessment of its potential for alleviating poverty. Found at: http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?articleId=4943


Optional:

E: Larue, Annette (2003). Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race and Family Life. University of CA press. This book is an enthographic study of a set of families (middle-class, working class, and poor) and how they differ in child development patterns that affect social and
Week 6  Economic processes: the low wage labor market and poverty

The distribution of earnings from the labor market is a key factor in inequality and poverty. This day considers structural element of low wage market, so central to poverty.

Required reading:

B: Cancian and Danzinger. Changing Poverty, Changing Policies. (2009). Chapter 3: “Economic Change and the Structure of Opportunity for Less Skilled Workers” by Rebecca Blank. P. 63 -80. Focus on the main contributing forces for poverty: who participates in the labor market, what employment levels looks like for various groups, and what has happened to wages. *We will postpone detailed discussion of the income inequality (bottom of p 75 through 80) until next week, but for this section consider which of these arguments might actually come into play for the differences we see in gender patterns over this time.


Optional:


Week 7 Economic processes (cont’d): Earnings inequality, growth models and wage inequality**

Over the past several decades, earnings inequality has increased. This has occurred during times of expansion, which historically has resulted in declines in inequality (and a belief that all benefit from growth). What is behind this increase? What has it meant for those who are poor and near poor?

Required reading:


After reviewing the basic patterns of inequality over the past 30 years, and the possible causes, we are going to debate why (and whether) inequality matters. From the Neckerman and Torche piece, pick one of the five domains raised with respect to consequences of inequality (p340-345, health through politics). For your domain, (1) consider the evidence/arguments that inequality matters for this outcome (both directly and through ‘externalities’), (2) Using your domain as an example, is the issue inequality, poverty, or particular aspects of inequality?

Optional


**This reading considers inequality across nations, and the potential role of globalization. It is long, but for students interested in the developing world, this provides a great overview of the issue and attempts to add data.
Section III: Specific policy arenas (some readings are tentative)
This section of the course now moves to anti-poverty policies, in six policy arenas that are particularly relevant for anti-poverty efforts in the U.S.

Week 8 Income Support Policies: Welfare and its Reform**
All developed countries have some safety net system to support the poor. One primary mechanisms in the U.S. and Europe are means-tested income-support programs (‘welfare’). This week considers how these have changed over the past 15 years, and with what consequences.

Required reading:


Recommended: rent the movie “Precious” to get a sense of the U.S. Welfare system in the 1980s, prior to welfare reform.

Optional: add’l readings will be posted

Week 9: Income support policies: the minimum wage and the Earned Income Tax Credit*
Frequently posed as an alternative to income supports are policies to support income earning through work. Many developed countries have minimum wages, and an increasing number of countries are adopting tax credits such as the earned income tax credit.


Additional readings will be posted

Week 10 Human capital development early on –education and early childhood interventions

Required reading:


B: Obama Administration proposal to address concentration poverty, William Julius Wilson, March 2010.

Optional:
B: Are High Quality Schools enough to close the Achievement Gap?. Dobbie and Fryer, April 2009. *Read the first 7 pages to get details of the program. Rest is optional, we will not go through the technical evaluation in class.


Week 11 Human Capital development (cont’d): Post secondary Training and Workforce Development
The large (and increasing) role of human capital in determining labor market outcomes and poverty makes it the natural starting place for anti-poverty policies. Yet a large segment of such policies – those aimed at workers post high-school, are playing a decreasing role in federal anti-poverty efforts. Is this wise or are we missing an important opportunity?

Required reading:
B: Job Training Policy in the U.S. Chapter 3, Christopher Hill. The Effectiveness of Publicly Financed Training. Nice overview piece on the trends and what we know. Focus particularly on which approaches appear to hold promise. Where should we go from here.

B: Workforce Development Act Reauthorization, Gordon Berlin. 2009. This is a brief piece proposing what is working and what needs to be fixed in our Workforce Investment Act

B: Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration Fiscal 2010 Budget. Read pages 1-16, and then focus on the budget on page 4. If you had $1B more to spend, what would you spend it on and why? If you need to eliminate $1B from the budget, what would you cut and why? Come to class prepared to support your positions in break out groups.

B: Kane, T. and C. Rouse (1999) The Community College: Education Students at the Margin between College and Work, The Journal of Economic Perspectives 13(1) pp. 63-84. This can be read on the quicker side, but please think about the cost/benefit on page 78.

B: Op Ed pieces on Obama's American Graduation Initiative.

Optional:
Week 12  The criminal justice system.
This week considers the impact of the U.S. criminal justice system on affected populations. We begin by looking at the large increase in incarceration in the U.S. over the past few decades, and its disparate impact by race and class, then link this to possible implications for labor markets. We end with a quick assessment of some policy options.

Required reading:


B: MacLeod, Chapter 12, Steve (p 311-316), Stoney (p 317-327), Chris (328-324).

Optional TBD:
B: Bloom, D. 2006 Employment focused programs for ex-prisoners: What have we learned, what are we learning, and where should we go from here? MDRC.

Week 13 The role of assets and wealth, and policy levers.
While much of the discussion on inequality focuses on income, wealth disparities are larger, and may play a particularly important role in intra and inter-generational transmission of advantage. What drives differences in wealth in the U.S? How might those differences matter for economic and social mobility? This day focuses on what those mechanisms might be, and existing policy attempts at increasing assets among low income households. Our primary policy focus will be housing. To what degree is homeownership a promising strategy, and what concerns does it raise?
Required reading:


B: Weathering the Storm. IDAs and foreclosure. CFED, April, 2009.

Optional:
E: Inclusion in the American Dream: Assets, Poverty and Public Policy. Michael Sherraden. Chapters 5 Family Matters, Kin networks and asset accumulation. (Tentative as optional)


B: Bostic and Lee “Homeownership: America’s Dream?” in Insufficient Funds (TENTATIVE)


B: Helfin and Pattillo, Kin Effects on Black–White Account and Home Ownership


### Class Schedule

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<th>Week</th>
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<th>Assignments</th>
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<td>3</td>
<td>8 Feb</td>
<td>*11 Feb Friday (tentative) Optional regression review, Tentatively 5-6 pm</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>22 Feb</td>
<td>Assignment #1 due</td>
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<td>15 Mar</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>22 Mar</td>
<td>Assignment #2 due Friday March 25</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>29 Mar</td>
<td>Paper topic and description due-email is fine</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>5 April</td>
<td>Debate groups assigned</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>3 May</td>
<td>Wrap-up Debate</td>
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<td>9 May</td>
<td>Papers due</td>
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RESEARCH RESOURCES
*Google Scholar is an extremely good starting point for finding literature. It also permits you to find articles that reference the original piece.

**Relevant Websites:**

Institutes & Policy Centers
- Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison - [http://www.irp.wisc.edu/](http://www.irp.wisc.edu/)
- National Poverty Center at the University of Michigan - [http://npc.umich.edu/](http://npc.umich.edu/)
- MRDC (Manpower Demonstration Research Corp) - [http://www.mdrc.org/](http://www.mdrc.org/)
- Center on Budget and Policy Priorities - [http://www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org)
- Heritage Foundation - [http://www.heritage.org](http://www.heritage.org)

Families & Children
- Fragile Families Study – [http://www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu](http://www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu)
- Future of Children - [http://www.futureofchildren.com](http://www.futureofchildren.com)

Law
- Center for Law and Social Policy - [http://www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org)
- Welfare Law Center - [http://www.welfarelaw.org](http://www.welfarelaw.org)

Welfare
- Welfare Information Network - [http://www.welfareinfo.org](http://www.welfareinfo.org)
- Welfare Law Center - [http://www.welfarelaw.org](http://www.welfarelaw.org)
GRADING CRITERIA

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.
Student Information Sheet

Student Name: _______________________________________________

Circle appropriate categories:

Program:  MUP            MPA-Health             MPA

Specialization (if PNP):   Policy           Management       Finance      International
Part-time       Full time

Course work:

Stats II:  completed   concurrent    no

Particular interest in field/course: