Course Description and Objectives

This course examines the nature and extent of poverty, primarily in the U.S. We will study the contending ideological theories about the causes of poverty and the theoretical approaches to and development of public assistance and anti-poverty programs. 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 within particular groups? How do labor markets, family structure, and social organizations come into play in shaping anti-poverty policy? How successful have the array of anti poverty efforts been and which look most promising going forward?

Objectives:

The goal of this course is to provide students with:

1) An understanding of the broad area of poverty including its measures and U.S. social policies addressing the issue;
2) An understanding of 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.
3) An opportunity to further develop critical analytical skills (e.g., reading thoughtfully – assessing the arguments and evidence provided by authors; thinking carefully about one’s own beliefs and evidence; and supporting articulated arguments with statistical evidence).

Course Requirements/Assignments/Expectations:

Class preparation and participation are essential for this course. Students are expected to read required texts in advance and be prepared to participate in class discussions. There is both a speaking and listening component to participation: sharing your ideas and reflecting on/responding to the ideas of others. The first half 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 empirical ‘facts’ on levels, trends, poverty demographics, and poverty mobility. In the second half of this course, we consider specific policy areas prominent in anti-poverty efforts, including income and family support policies, education, workforce development, and issues in the U.S. criminal justice system.
Students will be expected to speak insightfully and analytically during case study class components. In addition to class participation, students will be evaluated with a mid-course examination and a final data-supported policy analysis paper. More detailed instructions for all assignments will be posted on NYU Classes. Please refer to Wagner School Academic Code for information about academic honesty (https://wagner.nyu.edu/students/policies/academic-code) and to the following link for information on Grading Guidelines (https://wagner.nyu.edu/files/admissions/GradingGuidelines.pdf).

Late assignments will lose one letter grade for each day they are late (which begins immediately after the posting deadline). If you are facing some kind of serious and urgent situation that could delay turning in the assignment, contact me as soon as possible to discuss other arrangements.

Prerequisites: Intro to statistics (P11.1011) and Intro to policy (P11.1022 or the equivalent, P11.2660) are recommended.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

There are four course requirements. Each accounts for a percentage of your grade:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case Study Responses</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-term evaluation</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Analysis Paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10 points</td>
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Total: 100 points

All papers should be double-spaced, have 1-inch margins, and use Times New Roman, 12 pt. font.

**Case Study Responses**

Throughout this course, we will use case studies to examine anti-poverty/development programs across the U.S. Sessions where we, as a class, explore case studies are listed in the syllabus. In addition, case study responses will be due on September 16th, September 30th, and October 21st. Additional information will be provided before each case study response is due.

**Mid-term evaluation: (30%)**

This mid-course evaluation assesses students’ course knowledge using a timed examination (multiple choice, short answer, and essay format).

**Poverty topic policy analysis paper: (15-20 pages) (40%)**

The final paper is meant to be cumulative in that it builds on the skills demonstrated in the mid-course evaluation and course. By **Wednesday, October 28th**, students should
submit a one-page proposed outline for their paper that includes the following: 1) Paper topic (i.e. poverty policy topic of interest); 2) Data to be examined (e.g., U.S. Census Bureau, Department of Health and Human Services statistics, etc.); 3) Description of literature to be reviewed (e.g., review of non-discriminatory housing policy at the federal and state legislation for a final paper on “redlining” in the U.S); and 4) Basis for interest in topic. Changes to the topic require my prior approval. Each final paper must be comprised of two broad sections:

- Papers must include a literature review of a poverty policy topic, highlighting what is known and not, determining the most promising policy/program areas and providing some data to support your view;
- Papers must also include a specific policy proposal assessment, including an assessment of the existing proposal/program (including data to support your view), recommendations for this policy/program, along with a call for new policy reforms, if applicable.
- Drafts of papers (including extended outlines) can be submitted for feedback, if submitted by Monday, November 23rd.

Class participation (10%).

“A” Level Participation
- Absent no more than once during the semester. Sends email ahead of time to tell me you will miss class.
- Regularly participates in class discussion.
- Comments are clear, succinct, and relevant to the current conversation.
- Takes risks in answering difficult questions, or offering unpopular ideas.
- Is prepared for class, as evidenced by:
  - Applying ideas from the readings to the discussion
  - Challenging or extending ideas in the readings
  - Integrating or contrasting ideas from current readings with previous readings

“B” Level Participation
- Absent no more than once. May not send email to me ahead of time.
- Participates occasionally.
- Comments are sometimes unclear, long-winded, or not relevant to discussion.
- Answers questions but rarely takes risks.
- Is less prepared for class (see above).

“C” Level Participation
- Absent more than once. Doesn’t email professor ahead of time.
- Offers input rarely.
- Is unprepared for class.

Required Reading: Required readings are listed for each session (See text and readings after each session heading). You are expected to read all required readings prior to
attending class. Finally, this syllabus is a “living” document, which means that reading assignments may change due to classroom discussion, so be sure to check NYU Classes regularly for announcements, reminders, readings, assignments, etc.

**Required Texts:**


Other required readings are either available for free (and are downloadable from NYU BobCat) or are uploaded onto NYU Classes (in each Class Session folder).

**Session Readings (**Readings to be done before each class session.**)**

**Session 1. What is poverty?**

**Readings for Session 1 (September 2, 2015):**


**Session 2. How do we measure poverty?**

**Readings for Session 2 (September 9, 2015):**

Case study: Fresno, CA (West Fresno neighborhood) (NYU Classes)


Session 3. Who is poor, and for how long are they poor?
Readings for Session 3 (September 16, 2015): [Case Study Response Due – Fresno, CA]


Session 4. What is the safety net and is there disparity?
Readings for Session 4 (September 23, 2015):


Case study: Cleveland, OH (NYU Classes)

Session 5. What is the safety net and is there disparity?
Readings for Session 5 (September 30, 2015) [Case Study Response Due – Cleveland, OH]:


Session 6. Who is impacted by poverty?: Families and children.
Readings for Session 6 (October 7, 2015):


Session 7. Poverty, Policy, Labor, and Employment
Readings for Session 5 (October 14, 2015):


Case study: McDowell County, WV (NYU Classes)

**Session 8. Poverty, Policy, and Crime**  
Readings for Session 8 (October 21, 2015) [Case study response due: McDowell County, WV]:

Case study: McDowell County, WV (NYU Classes)


**Session 9. Poverty, Policy, and Education**  
Readings for Session 8 (October 28, 2015):


**Session 10. Midterm Exam**  
(November 4, 2015)

**Session 11. Poverty and Immigration Policy**  
Readings for Session 11 (November 11, 2015):

Session 12. How does poverty impact communities and neighborhoods?
Readings for Session 12 (November 18, 2015)

Case study: East Austin, TX (NYU Classes)


Session 13. How does poverty impact communities and neighborhoods?
Readings for Session 13 (December 2, 2015)


Case study: Yonkers, NY (NYU Classes)


Session 14. What are the future directions for poverty policy?
Readings for Session 14 (December 9, 2015):