NEW YORK UNIVERSITY  
Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service  

PADM-GP 2445  Poverty, Inequality and Policy  

Instructor:  Dr. Anne Marie E. Brady   Email: amb228@nyu.edu  
Thursday  6:45 – 8:25 WAVE 566A  

Office Hours:  TBD. I will be available to meet after class.  

INTRODUCTION  

Course Description:  
This course examines the nature and extent of poverty primarily in the U.S. but with a comparative perspective (developed countries in Europe). To start, this course will focus on how poverty is 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; and show how people can experience poverty at different points in their life course—some groups experiencing 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 actually influenced by the conceptions of poverty adopted by policymakers in the first place.  

Learning Objectives:  
The goal of this course is to provide students with:  

1) An understanding of the broad area of poverty including its measures and 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 communicating well-articulated arguments with evidence).  

GRADES  

There is no curve in this course. Everyone may receive an A or everyone may receive an F. This course will abide by the Wagner School’s general policy guidelines on incomplete grades, academic honesty, and plagiarism. It is the student’s responsibility to become familiar with these policies. All students are expected to pursue and meet the highest standards of academic excellence and integrity.  

Incomplete Grades:  http://wagner.nyu.edu/students/policies/incompletes  
Academic Honesty:  http://wagner.nyu.edu/students/policies  
Course Requirements:

Class preparation and participation are essential for this course. Students are expected to read required reading 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 some empirical ‘facts’ on levels, trends, who are the poor, and how much mobility is there in and out of poverty. In the second half of this course, we consider specific policy areas prominent in anti-poverty efforts, including income and family support policies, education and workforce development.

In addition to class participation, students will submit two papers and do one oral presentation in class. Please refer to Wagner information on Grading Guidelines.

**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.**

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper I</td>
<td>March 23, 2016</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper II</td>
<td>May 11, 2016</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Presentation</td>
<td>Throughout Semester</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>Throughout Semester</td>
<td>25%</td>
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All papers must be 7-8 papers in length, double-spaced, have 1-inch margins, Times New Roman, 12 pt. fount.

1. **Paper I and Paper II (25% respectively):** Each paper will respond to a question on the syllabus. Essential here is to draw on the academic literature in order to answer the question—to ground your argument in the academic literature and research and to demonstrate that you understand the various arguments/debates/concepts/evidence used by academics on any given topic.

2. **Oral Presentation (25%):** Each class will start with an oral presentation by a student (or two students). This presentation will be no longer than 10 minutes in length. The presentation will provide an insightful perspective on the topic for the week, drawing on the required and additional readings.

3. **Class Participation (25%):** Class participation includes active participation in class.

   **“A” Level Participation**
   - Absent no more than twice during the semester.
   - Regularly participates in class discussion.
   - 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 twice.
- Participates occasionally.
- Is less prepared for class (see above).

“C” Level Participation
- Absent more than twice.
- Offers input rarely.
- Is unprepared for class.

Required Books (available at the Professional Bookstore):


## OVERVIEW OF SEMESTER

| WEEK 1 | January 26 | INTRODUCTION: ARE YOU POOR? |
| WEEK 2 | February 2 | WHAT IS POVERTY AND HOW DO WE MEASURE IT? |
| WEEK 3 | February 9 | INEQUALITY AND REDISTRIBUTION |
| WEEK 4 | February 16 | NO CLASS |
| WEEK 5 | February 23 | THE UNDERCLASS DEBATE |
| WEEK 6 | March 2 | THE REVISED CULTURE OF POVERTY: AGENCY VERSUS STRUCTURE |
| WEEK 7 | March 9 | SHORT-TERM POVERTY DYNAMICS |
| | March 16 | NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK |
| WEEK 8 | March 23 | LIFECYCLE AND INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY DYNAMICS |
| | | **PAPER I DUE** |
| WEEK 9 | March 30 | SOCIAL STRATIFICATION, RACE AND ETHNICITY |
| WEEK 10 | April 6 | GENDER AND POVERTY/SOCIAL DISADVANTAGE |
| WEEK 11 | April 13 | HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT EARLY ON—EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTIONS |
| WEEK 12 | April 20 | POVERTY AND SOCIAL DISADVANTAGE WITH A FOCUS ON EMPLOYMENT |
| WEEK 13 | April 27 | INCOME SUPPORT POLICIES: WELFARE AND WORK ACTIVATION POLICIES |
| WEEK 14 | May 4 | CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL DISADVANTAGE IN OLD AGE AND SOCIAL SECURITY AS A POLICY SOLUTION |
| | May 11 | **PAPER II DUE** |
WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION: ARE YOU POOR?

WEEK 2: WHAT IS POVERTY AND HOW DO WE MEASURE IT?

Required Reading:


Additional Readings:


Class Discussion Questions:

1. What are the main strengths and weakness of the current US poverty measure? What concept is it attempting to capture? Is the new supplemental measurement an improvement?

2. What type of measure do you think the US should use, for which purposes?

3. Are absolute or relative measure of poverty more useful? Why?
WEEK 3: INEQUALITY AND REDISTRIBUTION

Required Readings:


Additional Readings:


Class Discussion Questions:

1. What do we know about the underlying mechanisms of inequality? What does this suggest for policy directions?

2. How is inequality assessed? What are the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches?

3. Can poverty be reduced if inequality is rising?

WEEK 4: NO CLASS

WEEK 5: THE UNDERCLASS DEBATE

Required Readings:


Additional readings


Class discussion questions

1. What is the underclass? How can we measure the size of the underclass?

2. What are the key similarities and differences between people considered ‘poor’ and members of the ‘underclass’?

WEEK 6: THE REVISED CULTURE OF POVERTY-AGENCY VERSUS STRUCTURE

Required Readings:


Additional readings


Class discussion questions

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

2. How can researchers incorporate both individual- and structural based explanations of poverty and social disadvantage into their work without “victim blaming?”

WEEK 7: SHORT TERM POVERTY DYNAMICS

Required Reading:


Jenkins, S. P. (2011) Changing Fortunes: Income Mobility and Poverty Dynamics in Britain, Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Read Chapter 5: Income mobility and how it has changed over time)

Additional Readings:

http://www.usfinancialdiaries.org/paper-1

(Focus on Sections 2 and 3)

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?

WEEK 8: LIFECYLCE AND INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY DYNAMICS

Required Reading:


**Additional Reading:**


**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 during 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?

**WEEK 9: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION, RACE AND ETHNICITY**

**Required Reading:**


**Additional Reading:**


Class Discussion Questions:

1. What is the impact of ‘race’ on social disadvantage?

WEEK 10: GENDER AND POVERTY/SOCIAL DISADVANTAGE

Required Reading:


Additional readings:


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?

WEEK 11: HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT EARLY ON—EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTIONS

Required Reading:


http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/it_may_not_take_a_village_increasing_achievement_among_these_poor.pdf

Additional Reading:


https://www.princeton.edu/~jcurrie/publications/Longer_Term_Effects_HeadSt.pdf


Class Discussion Questions:

1. Can early intervention programs improve outcomes among children? If so, which outcomes? How?

WEEK 12: POVERTY AND SOCIAL DISADVANTAGE WITH A FOCUS ON EMPLOYMENT

Required Reading:


Additional Reading:


Class Discussion Questions:

1. What groups are most likely to experience problems with employment? Why?
2. Is unemployment a cause or consequence of social disadvantage?

WEEK 13: INCOME SUPPORT POLICIES: WELFARE AND WORK ACTIVATION POLICIES

Required Reading:


Additional Reading:


Class discussion questions

1. What assumptions do work activation policies make about the reasons that people are unemployed?
2. Evaluate the potential effectiveness of sanctions on reducing worklessness. What does the evidence suggest?

WEEK 14: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL DISADVANTAGE IN OLD AGE AND SOCIAL SECURITY AS A POLICY SOLUTION

Required Readings:


Additional Reading


Class discussion questions

1. In what ways is poverty and social disadvantage in old age a reflection of poverty earlier in life?
2. How does the social security system help and exacerbate poverty among the elderly?