Course Description

This course examines aspects of poverty and inequality from a sociological perspective, while incorporating insights from other fields, including demography, psychology, and economics. The course also considers social policies that are designed to support low-income individuals and families. The focus is primarily on the U.S., although cross-national data are presented at several points. Contemporary debates and issues are explored, with emphasis on research evidence and considering potential implications for public policy. A major goal of the course is to encourage students to critically evaluate their own assumptions about poverty, inequality and social policy as we together consider the research evidence and discuss the larger issues and implications. This is a general education course with face-to-face instructional mode for 3 credits, determined via the traditional Carnegie definition (2 ½ hours of instruction per week plus out-of-class student work).

Prerequisites

This course is open to upper-level undergraduates; students must have at least junior status or permission of the instructor.

Readings

Students are expected to read the assigned readings for each week before coming to class. Books are listed below. Other readings are either found at the web addresses listed or are posted on the course website. All books are required (and are listed in the order in which we will read them).


Course Requirements

Students will be evaluated on five short in-class quizzes (20%), two non-cumulative in-class exams (20+20%=40%), a short paper (20%), discussion Qs (5%), and attendance, participation and discussion (15%).

1. Quizzes. There will be five in-class, short-answer quizzes on the material. These quizzes will be given during the first 15 minutes of class (and include the readings assigned for that day). The quizzes will be held on January 31, February 14, February 28, March 28 and April 23. I will drop your lowest grade and count your four highest quiz grades toward your final grade (4*5%=20%).

2. Exams. There will be two in-class exams held during regular class sessions on Thursday, March 7th and Thursday, May 2nd. The first exam will cover the course material (including readings, lectures and videos) through March 5th, and the second exam (non-cumulative) will cover the material from Exam 1 through April 30th. These will consist of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. Each exam is worth 20% of your grade (20% + 20%=40%). (Note that there will be NO exam during the scheduled final exam time.)

3. Paper. A short paper is due on Tuesday, April 18th in hard copy in class (but you should feel free to submit it earlier); a brief topic description with references is due April 4th. The paper assignment will be distributed in class (and posted on the course website). The paper should be no more than 8 pages in length (double-spaced, 12-point font). I will give you guidance about how to cite relevant references. The short paper will count for 20% of your final grade. Late papers will not be accepted (and will receive a grade of zero).

4. Attendance, Participation and Discussion. As Woody Allen says, “Eighty percent of success is just showing up!” I believe it’s important for you to show up and contribute to our class environment. I will take attendance each class, and more than two unexcused absences will count against your participation grade. Students should come to class prepared to demonstrate an understanding of the assigned readings. This entails reading all of the assigned material before each class and actively participating in class discussion. Class attendance, participation and discussion counts for 15% of your final grade. An additional 5% of your grade comes from submitting thoughtful discussion questions by the assigned dates about each of the 3 books we will discuss in class (details about Qs will follow).

Grading

The course is graded according to the following scale:

A  94-100
AB 88-93
B  84-87
BC 78-83
C  70-77
D  60-69
F  59 or less
Expectations and Information

Course Policies. The professor adheres to all Department, College, and University policies regarding accommodations for students with disabilities, religious holidays, incompletes, plagiarism, and student evaluation of the course and its instruction.

Accommodations. Please send me an email by the end of the second week of the course if you are eligible for special arrangements or accommodations for testing, assignments, or other aspects of the course. This may be the case if English is your second language or you experience a physical or psychological condition that makes it difficult for you to complete assignments and/or exams without some modification of those tasks. Accommodations are provided for students who qualify for disability services through the McBurney Center. Their website has detailed instructions about how to qualify: http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu. Provide a copy of your accommodations request (VISA) to the instructor by the end of the second week of class. We try to reserve rooms and proctors by the third week in class, so we must know of all accommodations by then.

If you wish to request a scheduling accommodation for religious observances, send an email by the end of the second week of the course stating the specific date(s) for which you request accommodation; campus policy requires that religious observances be accommodated if you make a timely request early in the term. See the university’s web page for details: https://kb.wisc.edu/page.php?id=21698.

Writing Center. Students are encouraged to take advantage of the resources and classes offered by the Writing Center (located at 6171 Helen C. White Hall) to help with organization, thesis statements, grammar, sentence structure, and appropriate citations. See: www.writing.wisc.edu. Before submitting your short paper, you are expected to be familiar with the guidelines on the Writing Center website about “Quoting and Paraphrasing Sources” (see: http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QuotingSources.html). See next section regarding ‘Academic Integrity.’

Academic integrity. As with all courses at the University of Wisconsin, you are expected to follow the University’s rules and regulations pertaining to academic honesty and integrity. The standards are outlined by the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards: https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-integrity. According to UWS 14, academic misconduct is defined as, an individual:

- Seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation;
- Uses unauthorized materials or fabricated data in any academic exercise;
- Forges or falsifies academic documents or records;
- Intentionally impedes or damages the academic work of others;
- Engages in conduct aimed at making false representation of a student's academic performance;
- Assists other students in any of these acts.

For a complete description of behaviors that violate the University’s standards as well the disciplinary penalties and procedures, please see the Dean of Students’ website (above). If you have questions about plagiarism specifically, you should consult the information on the Writing Center
website regarding “Quoting and Paraphrasing Sources” (http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QuotingSources.html). Knowledge of these rules is your responsibility, and lack of familiarity with these rules in no way constitutes an excuse for acts of misconduct. If you have questions about the rules for any of the assignments or exams, please do not hesitate to ask.

Departmental notice of grievance and appeal rights. The Department of Sociology regularly conducts student evaluations of all professors and teaching assistants near the end of the semester. Students who have more immediate concerns about this course should report them to the instructor or to the Chair, Professor James Raymo, 8128 Social Science (jraymo@ssc.wisc.edu).

Departmental learning objectives. Beyond the specific substantive and methodological content I will cover in this course, I have designed this course to achieve the following instructional objectives designated as priorities by the Department of Sociology:

- **Critically Evaluate Published Research:** Sociology graduates will be able to read and evaluate published research as it appears in academic journals and popular or policy publications.
- **Communicate Skillfully:** Sociology majors write papers and make oral presentations that build arguments and assess evidence in a clear and effective manner.
- **Critical Thinking about Society and Social Processes:** Sociology graduates can look beyond the surface of issues to discover the “why” and “how” of social order and structure and consider the underlying social mechanisms that may be creating a situation, identify evidence that may adjudicate between alternate explanations for phenomena, and develop proposed policies or action plans in light of theory and data.
- **See Things from a Global Perspective:** Sociologists learn about different cultures, groups, and societies across both time and place. They are aware of the diversity of backgrounds and experiences among residents of the United States. They understand the ways events and processes in one country are linked to those in other countries.
- **Prepare for Graduate School and the Job Market:** Students use their social research skills to identify opportunities for employment or further study, assess their qualifications for these opportunities, and identify strategies for gaining the necessary knowledge and experience to improve their qualifications. Students are encouraged to develop and maintain portfolios of their written work and educational experiences to aid them in preparing applications. (Also, I would encourage you to visit the L&S SuccessWorks’ website for information about careers and professional development: https://careers.ls.wisc.edu.)

**Useful Websites**

I encourage you to become familiar with various on-line resources related to the course material:

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities – www.cbpp.org
Center for Law and Social Policy – www.clasp.org
Century Foundation – www.tcf.org
Child Trends – www.childtrends.org
Future of Children – www.futureofchildren.org
Institute for Research on Poverty (University of Wisconsin) – www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp
Luxembourg Income Study (cross-national research) – http://www.lisdatacenter.org
MDRC (experiments and evaluations) – www.mdrc.org
National Center for Children in Poverty – www.nccp.org
Poverty Solutions (University of Michigan) – http://poverty.umich.edu
Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality -- https://inequality.stanford.edu
UNICEF (children) – https://www.unicef.org
Urban Institute – www.urban.org
U.S. Census Bureau (population info and poverty statistics) – www.census.gov
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:
   Administration for Children and Families – www.acf.hhs.gov
   Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation – www.aspe.hhs.gov
Sociology 496: Poverty, Inequality and Social Policy

Schedule and Required Readings

Section I: Poverty – Measurement, Causes, Consequences, and Public Policies

*Introduction to and Perspectives on Poverty*

**Tues., Jan. 22: Introduction (to the course and each other)**

Iceland, “Introduction” (pp. 1-10).

**Thurs., Jan. 24: Views and Values about Poverty**

Iceland, chapter 1, “Early Views of Poverty in America” (pp. 11-21).


*Measuring and Understanding Poverty*

**Tues., Jan. 29: How Do We Measure Poverty?**

Iceland, chapter 2, “Methods of Measuring Poverty” (pp. 22-38).


**Thurs., Jan. 31: Who Is Poor, and What Does It Mean to Be Poor?**

**Quiz #1 in class.**

Iceland, chapter 3, “Characteristics of the Poverty Population” (pp. 39-60).


Tues., Feb. 5: Child Poverty


In class: Watch PBS Frontline Documentary “Poor Kids: Poverty through the Eyes of Children,” 2012 (53 mins.) plus discussion

[Start reading Halpern-Meekin et al. book for discussion Feb 26th.]

Causes and Consequences of Poverty

Thurs., Feb. 7: What Are the Causes of Poverty?

Iceland, chapter 5, “Causes of Poverty” (pp. 79-113).


Tues., Feb. 12: What Are the Consequences of Poverty?


Differences in Socioeconomic Status by Race/Ethnicity and across Places

Thurs., Feb. 14: Differences in SES by Race/Ethnicity

**Quiz #2 in class.


Tues., Feb. 19: Differences in SES across the Globe and U.S. Regions

Iceland, chapter 4, “Global Poverty” (pp. 61-78).


Policies to Reduce Poverty


Iceland, chapter 7, “Poverty and Policy” (pp. 130-155), and chapter 8, “Conclusion” (pp. 157-163).

Matthews, Dylan. 2016. “If the goal was to get rid of poverty, we failed: the legacy of the 1996 welfare reform.” Vox. http://www.vox.com/2016/6/20/11789988/clintons-welfare-reform

**Please post 2 discussion questions about the Halpern-Meekin et al. book by Friday, Feb. 22nd

Tues., Feb. 26: One Perspective on Living in Poverty amidst Current Public Policies

Section II: Measuring and Understanding Inequality

Thurs., Feb. 28: Measuring Inequality and Patterns/Trends

**Quiz #3 in class.

Pew Research. 2015. The Many Ways to Measure Inequality. (3 pages)  


Go to NYT website and find YOUR social class:  

Tues., Mar. 5: Transmission of Privilege and the ‘Top 1%’


Stiglitz, Joseph E. 2011. “Of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%.” Vanity Fair. (2 pages)  
http://www.vanityfair.com/society/features/2011/05/top-one-percent-201105

In class: Watch PBS documentary “Park Avenue: Money, Power & the American Dream.” 2012 (54 mins.) plus discussion

Thurs., Mar. 7: ** In-class Exam 1 **

Section III: Socioeconomic Mobility, Children’s Early Years, Higher Education

Understanding Social and Economic Mobility – Who Gets Ahead in the U.S.?

Tues., Mar. 12: Social and Economic Mobility


[Start reading Edin & Kefalas book for discussion April 2nd.]

**Thurs., Mar. 14: Children’s Early Years and Schooling**


**SPRING BREAK – March 18-22**

**Tues., Mar. 26: Higher Education**

*Guest lecturer: Ariane Ophir, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Sociology*


Section IV: Families

Families

Thurs., Mar. 28: Families and Inequality

**Quiz #4 in class.


**Please post two questions about the Edin & Kefalas book by Friday, March 29th

Tues., Apr. 2: Family Formation among Disadvantaged Women


Thurs., Apr. 4: Policies to Prevent Fragile Families and Encourage Strong Families

**Paper topic due in class.


[Start reading Western book for discussion April 25th.]
Section V: Other Key Topics – Immigration, Housing, Health and Incarceration

Tues., Apr. 9: Immigration


Thurs., Apr. 11: Immigration (cont.)

**NO CLASS MEETING** But, please spend your class time watching this documentary on your own:


And read:


Tues., Apr. 16: Housing and Housing Policy


Thurs., Apr. 18: Health and Inequality

**Paper due in class.**


In class: Watch PBS Documentary “Unnatural Causes... Is Inequality Making Us Sick?,” (Part 1, ‘In Sickness and In Wealth’), 2008 (56 mins.) plus discussion

**Please post 2 questions about the Western book by Tuesday, April 23rd

Tues., Apr. 23: Crime and Incarceration

**Quiz #5 in class.


Thurs., Apr. 25: What happens after getting out of prison?


**Wrap-Up and Exam

Tues., Apr. 30: Bringing It All Together

Discussion and brief exam review.

Thurs., May 2: **In-class Exam 2**

(Note: There will be NO exam in the scheduled final exam time.)

Revised: January 22, 2019