University of Wisconsin-Madison

Sociology 496: Poverty, Inequality and Social Policy
Fall 2020

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Section 1: Tuesday, Thursday 9:30-10:45am
Room: Pyle Center 213 and online
Office hours: By appointment (please email!)

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 four 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 four in-class, short-answer quizzes on the material. These quizzes will be given during the first 15 minutes of class. The quizzes will be held on September 29, October 13, November 10 and November 19 (4*5%=20%).

2. **Exams.** There will be two exams held during regular class sessions on Tuesday, October 20 and Thursday, December 10. The first exam will cover the course material (including readings, lectures and videos) through October 15th, and the second exam (non-cumulative) will cover the material from Exam 1 through December 8th. 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, November 24th (but you should feel free to submit it earlier); a brief topic description with references is due October 29th. The paper assignment will be 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 has been said, a big part 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:

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<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
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<td>D</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>59 or less</td>
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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.
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 Christine Schwartz, 4462 Social Science (eschwart@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](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](http://www.cbpp.org)
- Center for Law and Social Policy – [www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org)
- Century Foundation – [www.tcf.org](http://www.tcf.org)
- Child Trends – [www.childtrends.org](http://www.childtrends.org)
- Future of Children – [www.futureofchildren.org](http://www.futureofchildren.org)
- Institute for Research on Poverty (University of Wisconsin) – [www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp](http://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

Class in the Time of COVID-19

This is a very unusual semester…! At the start of 2020, I don’t think any of us could have ever imagined that we would soon be in the midst of a global pandemic which would persist over many months and change all of our lives in so many ways. This is not what we expected or would want for our world, and now we are starting a new semester at UW-Madison where many classes are online, and the classes that are in person (like ours) must follow very strict health and safety guidelines.

Please know that I am mindful of the context in which we will be learning together about poverty, inequality and social policy. I trust that we will all do our very best, and yet I realize that we may need to adapt to additional changes and contingencies. I hope that you will keep in touch with me and let me know if there are circumstances that are making your full course participation difficult, or if there is something that you might like me to know.
Sociology 496: Poverty, Inequality and Social Policy

Schedule and Required Readings

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

*Introduction to and Perspectives on Poverty*

Thurs., Sept. 3: Introduction (to the course and each other)

Introductions, discussion of course plans and material, feedback on course topics.

Tues., Sept. 8: Views and Values about Poverty

Iceland, “Introduction” (pp. 1-10) and chapter 1, “Early Views of Poverty in America” (pp. 11-21).


Thurs., Sept. 10: **CLASS CANCELLED (Chancellor’s directive)**

*Measuring and Understanding Poverty*

Tues., Sept. 15: How Do We Measure Poverty?

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


Thurs., Sept. 17: Who Is Poor, and What Does It Mean to Be Poor?

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

**Please watch on your own before Sept 29th:**


**Causes and Consequences of Poverty**

Tues., Sept. 22: What Are the Causes of Poverty?

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


Thurs., Sept. 24: What Are the Consequences of Poverty?


**Section II: Inequality, Mobility, Privilege, and Policies**

**Measuring and Monitoring Inequality**

Tuesday, Sept. 29: Measuring Inequality and Patterns/Trends **MEET IN PERSON**

**Quiz #1 in class**


**Thurs., Oct. 1: Transmission of Privilege and the ‘Top 1%’ **MEET ONLINE**


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

*We will watch together in class (online):* PBS documentary (Independent Lens) “Park Avenue: Money, Power & the American Dream,” 2012 (54 mins.): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6niWzomA_So

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

**Tuesday, Oct. 6th: Social and Economic Mobility **MEET IN PERSON**


Thursday, Oct. 8th: Differences in SES across the Globe and U.S. Regions **MEET ONLINE**

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


**Post 2 discussion Qs about Halpern-Meekin et al. book on Canvas by 5pm on Tuesday, Oct. 13th.**

**Policies to Reduce Poverty**

Tuesday, Oct. 13th: Welfare Reform, Anti-Poverty Policies and the Working Poor **MEET IN PERSON**

**Quiz #2 in class**

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


Thursday, Oct. 15th: One Perspective on Living in Poverty amidst Current Public Policies **MEET ONLINE**


Tuesday, Oct. 20th: **Exam 1 – IN PERSON**

Section III: Early Childhood through Higher Education

Thursday, Oct. 22nd: Children’s Early Years and Schooling **MEET ONLINE**


Tuesday, Oct. 27th: Higher Education **MEET IN PERSON**


Section IV: Families

Thursday, Oct. 29th: Families and Inequality **MEET ONLINE**

**Short paper title/topic due.


**Post 2 discussion Qs about Edin & Kefalas book on Canvas by 5pm on Monday, Nov. 2nd.

Tuesday, Nov. 3rd: Election Day **NO CLASS** (Please vote, and encourage others to vote!)

Thursday, Nov. 5th: Family Formation among Disadvantaged Women **MEET ONLINE**

Section V: Inequality across Key Sociodemographic Groups

Tuesday, Nov. 10th: Race/Ethnicity **MEET IN PERSON**

**Quiz #3 in class**


Thursday, Nov. 12th: Gender and Sexual Minorities **MEET ONLINE**


Tuesday, Nov. 17th: Immigration **MEET IN PERSON**


Section VI: Health and Inequality

Thursday, Nov. 19th: Health and Mortality **MEET ONLINE**

**Quiz #4 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

Tuesday, Nov. 24th: COVID-19 **MEET IN PERSON**

**Short paper due by 5pm on Canvas.**


Thurs., Nov. 26th: Thanksgiving! **NO CLASS**

Tuesday, Dec. 1st: Crime and Incarceration **MEET ONLINE**


**Post 2 discussion Qs about Western. book on Canvas by 5pm on Tuesday, Dec. 1st.**

**Thursday, Dec. 3rd: Life after Prison **MEET ONLINE**


**Tuesday, Dec. 8th: Bringing It All Together **MEET ONLINE**

Discussion and brief exam review.

**Thursday, Dec. 10th: **Exam 2 – ONLINE**

Revised: October 6, 2020