

The Politics of Poverty

Political Science 4017
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Tues, Thurs 9:00-10:20
244 Lockett
Office Hrs: by appointment
Monday 9-11
Thursday 1:00-2:30

The purpose of this course is to introduce poverty as the key to understanding some of the most important problems facing our county. The class will start by defining public policy and its origins. We will then move to a discussion of how we define poverty, its causes, and our choice of solutions. Because poverty has been defined as a problem worthy of national government attention since the 1930s, any discourse on poverty is inherently a political one.

Course Requirements

You are expected to come to class prepared to participate in the discussion of the day's reading assignment. This means that you should read the day's assignment prior to class. A three hour course is associated with 9 total hours of work per week.

There is no textbook for this course. All of the class readings can be downloaded from the Moodle website or found via a link on the Moodle website. An * next to a class date indicates a reading assignment. All students must abide by the Student Academic Honor Code. Cheating will not be tolerated. All electronic devices (cell phones, ipads, laptops, etc) must be placed inside a zipped backpack during exams. Failure to place electronic devices inside a zipped backpack will be considered cheating.

Exams

There are three exams in the course. Each exam is worth 120 points and will consist of forty multiple choice questions (2 points each) and four short answer questions (10 points each). You must bring a scantron to class for the exam. Exams are not cumulative. Make up exams may be taken in emergency situations (illness, death in the family, etc.). If an exam is missed, I should be notified within 24 hours (unless you are locked up or in a coma) of the exam's scheduled time in order to discuss the makeup exam.

Quizzes

There will be 8 pop quizzes or homework assignments scattered throughout the course. Each quiz or assignment is worth 20 points. Only 5 quizzes/assignments will count towards your grade so if you take all 8, I will count the best 5 of the 8 grades. Quizzes may consist of information from previous class lectures or the assigned reading. THERE ARE NO MAKEUPS ON QUIZZES/HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS without a doctor's note, an obituary, or a University excuse.

Group Legislative Project

You will be placed in a group of 4-5 students. As a group, you will produce a position paper on a bill being considered by the Louisiana Legislature. The Legislature will be in session from March 14th to June 6th. In early February, your group will be assigned its bill. Each group must produce a position paper that includes the following:

Description of the bill

Description of the policy problem the bill is addressing

Why does this legislator care about this problem?

Is this problem specific to Louisiana or are other states experiencing (have experienced) the problem? What actions have they taken? Is this the first time the legislature has considered action on this problem? If not, give a brief history of previous attempts to deal with the problem.

What is the "treatment" or mechanism by which the legislation will fix the problem?

Does your group think this is a good solution? If there is dissent among members, each side should present its argument.

Executive Summary (one page) that addresses each of the aforementioned topics

The position paper is worth 120 points. It should be typed, double spaced using 12 Times New Roman font and be between 15 and 20 pages in length with one inch margins. Graphs and charts should be used when possible to convey information. Ten bonus points will be given to the group if a member attends a committee hearing and offers testimony in support or opposition to the bill.

Honors Option

For honors students who would like to take the course for Honors Credit, please see me to be assigned one of the books listed on the syllabus. You will produce a 7-10 page summary of the book's major findings and do a book presentation for the class.

Bonus

Each of you starts out with 5 bonus points. These 5 points are yours to lose. You may lose some or all of these points for the following offenses.

- Emailing me and asking me questions that can be answered using the syllabus or that can be answered using LSU's website. Some examples are "Where is your office?" "When are your office hours?" "When is the final?"
- Emailing me some form of the following questions: "Can you give me a B? If you don't, I'll lose my TOPS," or "Can you give me a [insert grade]? I won't graduate without it."

Grading Scale

579-600	A+	519-536	B+	559-476	C+	399-416	D+	356 and below	F
555-578	A	495-518	B	435-458	C	381-398	D		
537-554	A-	477-494	B-	417-434	C-	357-380	D-		

Readings Schedule and Topic Outline

Section One: What is public policy? What is poverty?

January 14 th	Syllabus
January 19 st *	Why should you care about poverty? What is public policy?
January 21 st *	Behavioral Assumptions Ingram, Helen and Anne Schneider. 1990. Behavioral assumptions of policy tools. <i>Journal of Politics</i> , 52(2), 510-529.
January 26 th *	What is poverty? Rector, Robert. "How Poor Are America's Poor: Examining the 'Plague' of Poverty in America" http://www.economist.com/node/17961878 Homework Due: Fill out budget assignment and bring to class. Play the game at http://playspent.org/ At the bottom of the budget assignment page fill in the amount of money you had left or the day you ran out of money.
January 28 th *	Research Methods: DO NOT PANIC! Berry, William and Mitchell Sanders. 2000. Chapter One from <i>Understanding Multivariate Research: A Primer for Beginning Social Scientists</i> .
February 4 th *	Research Methods: DO NOT PANIC! Berry, William and Mitchell Sanders. 2000. Parts of Chapters Two and Three from <i>Understanding Multivariate Research: A Primer for Beginning Social Scientists</i> .
February 6 th	Income Inequality: Documentary <i>Inequality for All</i> by Robert Reich
February 11 th *	Income Inequality and Economic Mobility http://www.pewstates.org/uploadedFiles/PCS_Assets/2012/Pursuing_American_Dream.pdf Homework Due: Complete the understanding regression assignment.

- February 16th* Poverty and the Brain
Hansen, et al. 2013. "Family Poverty Affects the Rate of Human Infant Brain Growth." PLoS One 8(12).
- February 18th* Is the Playing Field Really Level?
Scarcity and the Brain, Chapters 7 and 8. Is the Playing Field Really Level?
***Honors Option: presentation on the book *Scarcity and the Brain* by Mullainathan and Shafir**
- February 23th Exam One

Section Two: Policy Solutions to the Problem of Poverty
- February 25th* The U.S. Tax Code: Who Really Pays Taxes
"Policy Basics: The Earned Income Tax Credit"
"Policy Basics: The Estate Tax"
- March 1st* Social Security and the Elderly
"Policy Basics: Top Ten Facts about Social Security"
"Can the Rich and Famous Save Social Security?"
http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2005-05-31-taxing-rich_x.htm
- March 3rd* Health Care in the United States
Bisgaier, Joanna and Karin Rhodes. "Auditing Access to Specialty Care for Children with Public Insurance." *New England Journal of Medicine* 2011; 364: 2324-2333.

<http://kff.org/health-reform/video/youtoons-obamacare-video/>
- March 8th* Food Stamps
"Policy Basics: Introduction to SNAP"
http://www.salon.com/2014/01/19/what_i_learned_from_a_week_on_food_stamps_paul_ryan_couldnt_be_any_more_wrong/
***Honors Option: presentation on the book *Snap Matters: How Food Stamps Affect Health and Well Being* by Bartfield, Gunderson, Smeeding and Ziliak**
- March 10th* AFDC and TANF
Rector, Robert and Sarah Youssef. 1999. "The Determinants of Caseload Decline."
- March 15th* Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
Cook et al. 2002. "Welfare Reform and the Health of Young Children." *Arch Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* Vol. 156:678-684.
Powers, Michelle et al. 2010. "Failing to Make Ends Meet: Dubious Financial Success Among Employed Former Welfare to Work Program Participants." *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*.
- March 17th* Poverty and Education: Finding the Way Forward.
http://www.ets.org/s/research/pdf/poverty_and_education_report.pdf
- March 29th* Economic Diversity and Education
Kahlenberg, Richard. "Turn Around Schools That Work"
- March 31st EXAM II

Section Three: How do race and poverty intersect in America?

- April 5th Race and Welfare: News Media and Race
Gilens, Martin. 1996. "Race and Poverty in America: Public Misperceptions and the News Media." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 60:515-527.
Honors Option: *The Mass Media and the Dynamics of American Racial Attitudes* by Paul Kellstedt
- April 7th* Banking Practices and Pay Day Loans Reading TBA
- April 12th* Immigration
Garand, James, Ping Xu, and Belinda Davis. "Immigrants and Eroding Support for the Welfare State."

Homework Due: Harvard Implicit Attitudes Tests (race)
- April 14th* Race and Welfare: Distributing Discipline
Schram et al. 2009. "Deciding to Discipline: Race, Choice, and Punishment at the Frontlines of Welfare Reform." *American Sociological Review* Vol. 74:398-422.
***Honors Option: presentation on the book *Race and the Politics of Welfare Reform* by Schram, Soss, and Fording**
- April 19th* Crime and Poverty
Lee, Matthew. 2000. "Concentrated Poverty, Race and Homicide." *Social Science Quarterly* 41:189-200.
- April 21st Lagniappe
- April 26th Presentations
- April 28th Presentations
- May 3rd Final Exam (Tuesday) 10-12