

Poverty in the U.S.

First-Year Seminar, Sociology

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Approximately one in eight Americans live in poverty and more than one in six children are poor. This reality seems very distant, though, from within the Dartmouth bubble. This course will explore poverty in the United States from a variety of perspectives. We will discuss such questions as: How do we measure poverty? How has the poverty rate changed over time? What are the possible causes of poverty in the US? How does the experience of poverty vary under different circumstances? How is poverty portrayed in the media? What are the major anti-poverty policy programs? The course will explore poverty both nationally and in the local context..

Assignments

Graded Papers

The course will involve two graded short papers and a final research project (see description of the research project below). Both short papers will be 1700-2500 words long (approx 5-8 pages). Both of these papers will require an initial draft and a revision.

You may revise the papers an additional time if you are not satisfied with the grade. If you wish to revise a paper, you should meet with me first to discuss your revision plans. I also strongly recommend that you visit RWIT for help in revising the paper. The final grade will be 2/3 of the difference between the original grade and the grade on the revised paper (e.g. if you get an 85 on the first paper and a 91 on the revised version, the final grade will be an 89).

Research Project

This assignment is your opportunity to conduct your own social research project (on a small scale). The key aspect of this assignment is that you are required to collect your own data. This data collection may take many forms, including observations, interviews, or content analysis (analysis of written materials or other media).

You may choose any topic you want as long as it relates to some aspect of poverty. We will discuss a variety of possible topics in the first week of class.

This project will be broken up into several steps:

- Initial discussion of ideas
- Annotated bibliography
- Project proposal
- In-class 10 minute presentation of results
- Final report

Service Learning

A large number of students at Dartmouth work with low income residents of the Upper Valley area through community service programs. If you are involved in such a program, or would like to be, there are a number of options for incorporating these experiences into the class assignments (either in a paper or as part of the final project). Please contact me if you would like to discuss these possibilities.

Group Feedback

Throughout the class you'll work in small groups to get feedback and support in your research and writing. For each assignment, you'll first meet in a group to discuss your ideas and outlines for the paper. For the two short papers, you will then submit a draft of the paper. You will read the drafts of your group members and discuss

them during class, then revise the papers for final submission the following week. All of the group meetings will occur in class.

I will rotate the group membership for each assignment so that you have an opportunity to work with several different peers during the course. At the end of the term, I will ask you to evaluate the contributions of the various people in your groups. The results of these evaluations will be incorporated into the class participation grade.

Class Participation and Reading Questions

This class is a seminar, so completing the readings and class participation are very important. For each class I will provide some questions to think about as you do the readings. In class I will expect you to be ready to discuss your thoughts on these questions. You may be called upon randomly to start discussion on any of these topics.

In addition to class participation, attendance is also important. I allow three absences without an automatic penalty (missing the first class counts as half an absence). *Note that this allowance includes classes missed due to illness, recruiting, athletics, switching into the class late, etc., they are **not** “free” absences that you get in addition to absences for legitimate reasons.* The whole point is that I do not want to be in charge of deciding which absences are legitimate and which are not. Each absence beyond these three will reduce your class participation grade by 20 points each time (out of a maximum of 100), so missing eight classes (3 plus another 5, almost half of our 18 sessions) will result in an automatic zero for class participation (which means it will be impossible to get better than a B- in the class).

Grading

You get to decide how the different components of the course will contribute to the final grade. I will ask you to decide by January 24th how you want to weight each assignment. The ranges of possible weights for the assignments are below. The numbers in parentheses are the default values that I will assign if you don't submit a choice by the deadline.

| | |
|-------------|---------------------------------------|
| 15-25% (20) | Class participation & group work |
| 15-25% (20) | First paper |
| 15-25% (20) | Second paper |
| 10-20% (15) | Bibliography, proposal & presentation |
| 20-35% (25) | Final Paper |

Policies

Academic integrity: I expect students in the class to conduct themselves in accordance with Dartmouth's honor code and with academic and personal integrity. Explanations of Dartmouth's integrity rules and principles can be found at <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~uja>. Students are expected to take responsibility for doing their own work, providing proper citations whenever using words or ideas borrowed from others. Details on citing sources are available at <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~sources>.

I also expect you to be considerate to other students while in class. This does not mean that you should censor your opinions, but you should present your ideas in a respectful manner.

Late work: The various assignments due over the course of the term will lose one point (out of 100) for every 6 hours they are late. The final report has the latest possible deadline so I cannot accept late papers.

Electronic devices

Laptops

I have found that laptops are a distraction in small seminars, so I'd strongly prefer that you don't use one in class. If you really rely on your laptop, may make an appointment with me to get permission to bring it to class.

Cell phones

Please turn off your cell phones while in class. I reserve the right to answer any phone that rings in class.

Disabilities & religious observances: Students with learning, physical, or psychiatric disabilities enrolled in this course that may need disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to make an office appointment to see me before the end of the second week of the term. All discussions will remain confidential, although the Student Accessibility Services office may be consulted to discuss appropriate implementation of any accommodation requested.

Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that fall during this academic term. Should you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please come speak with me before the end of the second week of the term to discuss appropriate accommodations.

Course Schedule

| Class | Date | Subject | Assignment |
|----------------------------|--------|----------------------------|--|
| 1 | 6-Jan | Intro | |
| 2 | 8-Jan | Measuring poverty & trends | |
| <i>Theories of Poverty</i> | | | |
| 3 | 13-Jan | The culture of poverty | Writing analysis I due |
| 4 | 15-Jan | Discrimination | Writing analysis II due |
| 5 | 20-Jan | Family structure | Group discussions of ideas for 1st paper |
| 6 | 22-Jan | Networks | Draft of 1st paper due |
| 7 | 27-Jan | The education system | Peer discussions of drafts |
| 8 | 29-Jan | Social class I | 1st paper due 10am |
| 9 | 3-Feb | Social class II | Bring ideas for research project |
| <i>Accounts of Poverty</i> | | | |
| 10 | 5-Feb | Urban poverty I | Library presentation |
| 11 | 10-Feb | Urban poverty II | Library assignment due |
| 12 | 12-Feb | Rural poverty I | Annotated bibliography due |
| 13 | 17-Feb | Rural poverty II | Project proposal due 5pm Firday |
| 14 | 19-Feb | The Working Poor I | Group discussions of ideas for 2nd paper |
| 15 | 24-Feb | The Working Poor II | Draft of 2nd paper due |
| <i>Policy</i> | | | |
| 16 | 26-Feb | History of poverty policy | Peer discussions of drafts |
| 17 | 3-Mar | Current poverty policy | 2nd paper due |
| <i>Presentations</i> | | | |
| 18 | 5-Mar | Presentations I | Presentations start |
| 19 | 10-Mar | Presentations II | Finish presentations |
| | 15-Mar | | Final paper due |

Texts

Any versions of the texts are except the Iceland book should be the second edition. All books are available in paperback and used versions are available online.

- *Poverty in America: A Handbook*. John Iceland. 2nd edition, 2006.
- *There Are No Children Here*. Alex Kotlowitz.
- *Worlds Apart: Why Poverty Persists in Rural America*. Cynthia Duncan.
- *The Working Poor*. David Shipler.
- *Approaches to Class Analysis*. Erik Olin Wright.

Readings

Class#1- Introduction

Class#2- Measuring poverty & trends

- John Iceland. *Poverty in America: A Handbook*. Ch. 2-4
- “Social Exclusion: The European Approach to Social Disadvantage,” by Hilary Silver and S.M. Miller, Poverty and Race Research Action Council (www.prrac.org), 2002.
- Read Wikipedia on the Capabilities Approach http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capability_approach
- Heritage Foundation report. <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Welfare/bg2064.cfm> Read the introduction (up to but not including “What is Poverty”), glance over the rest.

Class#3- The culture of poverty

- Lewis, O. (1969). “The Culture of Poverty.” in *On Understanding Poverty*, Patrick Moynihan editor.
- William J. Wilson. *When Work Disappears*. Ch. 3 “Ghetto Related Behavior”
- Orlando Patterson. “A Poverty of the Mind”, op-ed in *The New York Times*. March 26, 2006.

Class#4- Discrimination

- Shiller, *The Economics of Poverty and Discrimination*. pages 142-177.
- John Yinger, “Housing Discrimination and Residential Segregation as Causes of Poverty,” in Sheldon H. Danziger and Robert H. Haveman, editors, *Understanding Poverty* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001)

Class#5- Family structure

- David T. Ellwood and Christopher Jencks, “The Spread of Single Parent Families in the United States since 1960,” John F. Kennedy School of Government, Working Paper RWP04-008 selected pages
- William J. Wilson. *When Work Disappears*, Ch. 4 “The Fading Inner City Family”
- Kathryn Edin, “Few Good Men,” *The American Prospect* vol.11(4), January 3, 2000, pages 1-8

Class#6- Networks

- Mark Granovetter. *Getting a Job*. Selected pages.
- Katherine Newman. *No Shame in My Game*. Chapter 6.

Class#7- The education system

- Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities*. Selected pages.
- Anyon, J. (1980) “Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work” pp 424-437 (adaptation) in *Education and Society* Dougherty K, and Hammack, F. (Eds.), 1990

Class#8- Social class I

- Erik Olin Wright. *Approaches to Class Analysis*. Selected pages.

Class#9- Social class II

- Erik Olin Wright. *Approaches to Class Analysis*. Selected pages.
- Ruby Payne. *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. Selected pages.
- Paul Tough “The Class-Consciousness Raiser” *New York Times*. June 10, 2007

Class#10- Urban poverty I

- Kotlowitz. *There Are No Children Here*. selected pages.

Class#11-Urban poverty II

- Kotlowitz. *There Are No Children Here*. selected pages.
- A selection of newspaper articles about poverty in urban areas.

Class#12- Rural poverty I

- Duncan. *Worlds Apart*. Chapter 1.
- Katherine Boo. "Swamp Nurse." *New Yorker*. Feb 6, 2006, 81(46): 54-65.

Class#13-Rural poverty II

- Duncan. *Worlds Apart*. Chapter 2.
- Katherine Boo. "The Churn: Creative destruction in a border town". *New Yorker*. March 29, 2004.

Class#14-Working poor I

- David Shipler. *The Working Poor*. selected pages.

Class#15-Working poor II

- David Shipler. *The Working Poor*. selected pages
- A selection of newspaper articles about the working poor.

Class#16-History of poverty policy

- John Iceland. *Poverty in America: A Handbook*. Ch. 7
- "Public Assistance & Social Welfare" Lower East Side Tenement Museum online encyclopedia (Mostly a summary of Katz's *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*). ([TenementSummary.pdf](#) on Blackboard)

Class#17-Current poverty policy

- Jason DeParle *American Dream: Three Women, Ten Kids, and a Nation's Drive to End Welfare* Penguin Books, selected pages

Class#18-Class presentations I

Class#19-Class presentations II