

Social Work 6303
Summer 2004
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Class hours: Wed. 6-9:30 p.m.
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Poverty, Inequality and Social Policy (revised 10-06-04)

Introduction

This seminar will examine the nature and extent of poverty and inequality in the United States, their causes and consequences, and the debate concerning the role of government in providing anti-poverty programs. Many points of view will be presented, from radical left to radical right. This class will deal with many controversial issues. Some of the readings may offend you; some of what your classmates or I say may offend you. If this happens, you should react with a counter-argument based on information and logic, not with an attack based on emotion. I will expect civility in classroom discussion. We are here to talk about ideas, not to disparage each other.

This course builds on the Foundations of Social Policy course (SOCW 5303) course or its equivalent that you may have taken. It assumes that you are familiar with general concepts of policy and policy making.

An ultimate aim of the course is that, having been exposed to the ideas and information, you will be willing and able to understand and shape proposals that will enhance the well-being of those who are poor and are suffering from inequality of such proportions that it becomes injustice.

Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Describe the following major theories and concepts:
 - Poverty
 - Underclass theories of poverty
 - Distributive justice
 - Genetic and biological bases of inequality
 - Welfare dependency
 - Dual and segmented labor markets
 - Cultural theories of poverty
 - Discrimination in labor markets
- Understand how American cultural values affect poverty programs.
- Understand how to collect data on existing conditions and be able to pinpoint where there are current information gaps.
- Apply social work values to analyzing poverty issues.

Student Requirements and Assignments

The concept of “seminar” includes the idea that all persons involved participate in discussion and debate. You are expected to do all of the readings. Some weeks the load is heavy, but no matter. Your participation is worth a great deal of your grade; and, as in some contests, you must be present to “win”.

Students will learn as part of a group process as well as individually. Assignments may require interaction with decision-makers and other actors in the real world. Assignments **will** require thoughtful application of information from the readings and lectures. Because discussion of the course material will consume a large part of every class, *students are expected to complete the readings for the day before coming to class.* **Participation is more than attendance,** however: perfect attendance alone will result in a 75% for the participation grade. If students are absent for any reason, it is their responsibility to find out from other students what they have missed. The professor is not responsible for keeping absent students abreast of any information that was presented while the student is absent, including changes to assignments that were announced in class.

Short Papers

To help focus discussion and debate, each student will be required to write **five (5)** short (1-2 page) papers answering one of the questions listed after that week's readings. You must use the questions in the syllabus. Unlike other assignments in other courses, APA style is not encouraged. Write these papers single-spaced, with one-inch margins and 12-point Times Roman font. Remember, **the point of these papers is to answer the question asked.** These are due at the beginning of class for that week's readings. *You may write one extra of these papers—only the top five grades will be used in calculating your grade—but they may not be turned in late.*

You will probably be frustrated by having to keep these papers brief. But that is an important skill in policy work. So, learn to write lean. An important part of writing lean is to know what you want to say. Often, this will take more than a single draft to figure out. From experience, starting the night before the paper is due is not sufficient time to write an excellent paper, though you will be tempted to try.

Final Project

The final project for this class is to compile an updated and expanded Tarrant County version of the status report on children in Dallas County (see your coursepack for a copy).

You will be asked to work with class members to provide the information for a Growing Up in Tarrant County Fact book. (The version from 2003 is in your coursepack) The selection of data to be collected should be based on practical and theoretical issues.

Students in the class will divide into groups to examine information collected by last summer's students (see coursepack for this, as well). It is also at http://www2.uta.edu/ssw/Documents/Growingup_in_TC.pdf. Tasks for the class include updating current information, as well as deciding on and collecting additional information. Use the readings to pinpoint additional information that would be helpful in understanding where people in Tarrant County stand on topics related to poverty and inequality. In addition, some students will work out a publicity plan, which may include organizing a press conference to announce the report on the last day of class and finding a way to post the information on the web and have it indexed by the major web search engines.

Time will be allotted in class for students to organize and coordinate their work on this project.

Grades are weighted this way:

Participation	10%
Short papers	60% (12% each)
Final project	30%

Note: The process of grading involves the application of both subjective and objective components. Quality is an issue that involves the professor's professional judgment regarding how well the assignment has been completed. It is not a matter that can, in and of itself, be appealed.

The final project grade will be determined partially by being rated by the other students in your group, using a standard format I will provide. Part of your participation grade will be determined by the thoroughness of you completing these forms on your colleagues.

Readings

The following book is required:

- Schiller, B. (2004). *The economics of poverty and discrimination*, 9th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

There is also a set of readings to be purchased at Zap Copy Center

Week, Date, Topic and Readings

(Readings marked with a bullet are in the coursepack.)

Week 1. June 2: Introduction: Studying Poverty and Inequality: Why and How

No reading assigned.

Week 2. June 9: Understanding Poverty and Inequality: Definitions and History

Schiller, Chapters 1 and 2.

- Rodgers, H. (1996). The social welfare response. Chapter 4 in *Poor Women, Poor Children*, 3rd ed. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, pp. 69-107

Paper Questions

1. What is the best way to measure poverty? Explain and defend your answer as the one poverty measure the federal government should use.
2. How do or how could different definitions of poverty have different effects on policy? Be specific.

Week 3. June 16: Theoretical Underpinnings of Poverty and Inequality Policy: Ethics, Ideology and Social Justice

- Review NASW Code of Ethics (<http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/default.htm>)
- Iatridis, D., (1994): Ideology and social justice. *Social Policy: Institutional Context of Social Development and Human Services*. Pacific Grove, CA, Brooks/Cole, pp. 55-85.

Paper Questions

1. Choose one model of Social Justice covered by Iatridis. Discuss the following statement from the perspective of that model: “Assuming no laws were broken, people deserve whatever they have, no matter how they got it.”
2. Which model presented by Iatridis do you believe is the one that most closely approximates the ideal model, according to the NASW code of ethics?

Week 4. June 23: Correlates of Living Poor and Living Wealthy

Schiller, Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9

- Berrick, J. (1995). Darlene: Complex people, complex problems. Chapter 5 in *Faces of Poverty*. New York: Oxford, pp. 87-111.
- Stanley, T. & Danko, W. (1996). Chapters 1 and 2 in *The Millionaire Next Door*. New York: Pocket Books, pp. 7-69.

Paper Questions

1. What are the most important differences in the individual characteristics between poor people and millionaires, other than their incomes and net worth? What two policy recommendations can you make to improve the situation for poor Americans, based on these differences?
2. Schiller discusses many different correlates of poverty in these 4 chapters. Compare these correlates with the correlates of being a millionaire. How would Schiller address the implicit assumption of Stanley and Danko that “anyone can become a millionaire”? If you like, use the example of Darlene to illustrate your ideas.

Week 5. June 30: Labor Force Participation and the Working Poor

Schiller, Chapters 3, 4 and 10.

- Boushey, H., Brocht, C., Gundersen, B. & Bernstein, J. (2001). *Hardships in America: The Real Story of Working Families*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, pp. 1-51.
- Regenstein, M., Meyer, J., & Hicks, J. (1998, August). *Job Prospects for Welfare Recipients: Employers Speak Out*. New Federalism: Issues and Options for States. Series A., No. A-25. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

Paper Questions

1. If you were designing a Workforce Initiative Program to improve the employment prospects of people on welfare, what would be the key goals and objectives of the program? Why? (Be sure to use information from more than one reading to answer this question.)
2. What are the differences between the working poor and the stereotypical images of poor people that you may encounter every day? What might be done to educate the public about these differences in order to build support for different types of policy aimed at the working poor?

Week 6: July 7: Group work day

Week 7. July 14: Policy Responses at the National Level

Schiller, Chapters 11-14.

- Coe, N., Acs, G., Lerman, R., & Watson, K. (1998, December). *Does Work Pay? A Summary of the Work Incentives under TANF*. New Federalism: Issues and Options for States, Series A., No. A-28. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

Paper Questions

1. In your opinion, what has been the most effective single policy response at the national level in terms of combating poverty? What evidence supports your position? (Yes, I know it all depends—but, all things considered, what is the one most effective response so far?)
2. Write a policy memo to the President of the United States to tell him what the one next step to combat poverty and/or inequality should be, based on the research about causes of poverty and what is currently being done.

Week 8: July 21: Policy Responses at the State (Particularly Texas) Level

- Pindus, N., Capps, R., Gallagher, J., Giannarelli, L., Saunders, M., & Smith, R. (1998). *Income Support and Social Services for Low-Income People in Texas*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- Capps, R., Pindus, N., Snyder, K. & Leos-Urbel, J. (2001, June). *Recent Changes in Texas Welfare and Work, Child Care and Child Welfare Systems*. Assessing the New Federalism, State Update 1. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- Finegold, K., Schardin, S., & Steinbach, R. (2003, March). *How Are States Responding to Fiscal Stress?* New Federalism: Issues and Options for States, Series A., No. A-58. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

Paper Questions

1. In what ways is the situation in Texas similar to other states and the national level? In what ways is it unique? Does this make things better or worse for low-income people in our state?
2. Given the huge fiscal stress in Texas that will become only worse in the next two-three years, what should Texas do in order to meet constitutional requirements for a balanced budget?

Week 9. July 28:

Looking to the Future

Schiller, Chapter 15.

- Jansson, B. Dodd, S-J, & Smith, S. (2002). Empowering domestic discretionary spending in Federal budget deliberations. *The Social Policy Journal*, 1(1), 5-18.
- Roff, L., Klemmack, D., McCallum, D., Conaway, M. (2002). Assessing public support for state government social welfare expenditures. *The Social Policy Journal*, 1(2), 55-71.

Paper Questions

1. In your opinion, what is the likely direction of policy aimed to reduce poverty and/or inequality, given the information in this week's readings and before? Why?
2. Now, at the end of this course, your understanding of poverty, inequality and the policies about them are considerably more developed than at the start of the course. In your opinion, what should be the direction of future policy decisions? Why?

Week 10. August 4: Release of Report: Possible Press Conference/Presentation of Information to Invited Audience, unveiling of website, etc.

Structure of Paper

- Hourglass structure (broad ideas, narrow to topic, broaden out)

First Paragraph

- Opening sentence (should grab attention)
- Thesis sentence (What is the position I am taking? In most cases is a restatement of the question asked, with your answer included.)
- *Overview statement* (provides a brief outline of the paper)

Example

Question: Which of the two authors, Smith or Jones, has the more persuasive argument relating to affirmative action?

Answer: Few topics generate as much controversy as affirmative action. Proponents, such as Smith, and opponents, such as Jones, can both marshal impressive amounts of data, research and theory to support their views. Of the readings for class this week, however, Smith has the more persuasive argument. *This paper will define affirmative action and then discuss the three areas where Smith has the upper hand: data from the United States, comparative research from other countries and a more nuanced understanding of economic theory.*

Later Paragraphs

- Use of transitions
- Topic sentence
- Support of topic sentence
- Paragraph conclusion

Example

Information gathered in the United States indicates that affirmative action reduces inequality over time. The latest studies provide firm evidence that inequality has been reduced most in the states with the most aggressive enforcement of affirmative action policies (Mincer, 1999; Hilton, 1998). This is true for both sexual and racial pay discrimination cases. By presenting such recent and compelling data, Smith supports his case very well.

Concluding Paragraph

- Restate thesis (use different words)
- Broaden from just this paper to more general conclusion

Other Issues in Writing

- Correct use of quotations and documentation
- Correct use of headings and subheadings
- When available, follow the outline provided
- Grammar and Punctuation
- Third person (don't use "I")
- Spelling
- Run-on sentences (Don't you just hate it when this happens I sure do!)
- Sentence fragments (Usually a verb or a subject left out.)
- Incorrect word usage (We could not effect his mood.)
- Subject-verb agreement (A student should proofread their work very carefully.)
- Verb tense change

Academic Dishonesty

It is the philosophy of the University of Texas at Arlington that academic dishonesty is a completely unacceptable mode of conduct and will not be tolerated in any form. All persons involved in academic dishonesty will be disciplined in accordance with University regulations and procedures. Discipline may include suspension or expulsion from the University.

“Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts.” (Regents’ Rules and Regulations, Part One, Chapter VI, Section 3, Subsection 3.2, Subdivision 3.22.)

Americans with Disabilities Act Accommodation Policy

The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of federal equal opportunity legislation; reference Public Law 93112-The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. With the passage of the federal legislation entitled Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), pursuant to section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act, there is renewed focus on providing this population with the same opportunities enjoyed by all citizens..

As a faculty member, I am required by law to provide “*reasonable accommodation*” to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Student responsibility primarily rests with **informing faculty at the beginning of the semester and in providing authorized documentation through designated administrative channels.**

Dropping the Class

If you chose to drop the class, it is your responsibility to complete the paperwork according to the University’s schedule. Not doing so may result in a failing grade.

Incompletes

Incompletes are given only in exceptional and very rare situations that involve Acts of God and/or other things beyond the ability of the student to anticipate or overcome. Computer problems, for example, do not constitute grounds for an incomplete, nor does misreading the syllabus.

Student Support Services and Student Retention

The University of Texas at Arlington supports a variety of student success programs to help you connect with the University and achieve academic success. They include learning assistance, developmental education, advising and mentoring, admission and transition, and federally funded programs. Students requiring assistance academically, personally, or socially should contact the Office of Student Success Programs at 817-272-6107 for more information and appropriate referrals.

Bomb Threats

If anyone is tempted to call in a bomb threat, be aware that UTA will attempt to trace the phone call and prosecute all responsible parties. Every effort will be made to avoid cancellation of presentations/tests caused by bomb threats. Unannounced alternate sites will be available for these classes. Your instructor will make you aware of alternate class sites in the event that your classroom is not available.