

## **SOC 481: Special Topics: Urban Poverty**

Tuesday and Thursday 9:30am–10:50am  
210 Natural Sciences

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*“Know that many personal troubles cannot be solved merely as troubles, but must be understood in terms of public issues—and in terms of the problems of history making. Know that the human meaning of public issues must be revealed by relating them to personal troubles—and to the problems of the individual life. Know that the problems of social science, when adequately formulated, must include both troubles and issues, both biography and history, and the range of their intricate relations.”*

*C Wright Mills, The Sociological Imagination (1959)*

### **Course Description and Objectives:**

America is a wealthy nation. With only 5% of the world's population, the U.S. produces more than 20% of the world's output. While half of the world's population makes less than \$2000 per year in per capital income (about \$6 a day), the average American has an annual income of approximately \$30,000. Nevertheless, the United States Census Bureau recently reported that 35.9 million men, women, and children fell below the federal poverty line and the percentage of the nation's population without health insurance coverage grew from 15.2 percent in 2002 to 15.6 percent in 2003.

In this course, students will systematically examine the nature of poverty in the United States --- its history, extent, causes, and consequences. Students will be asked to reflect on the major theories of poverty and the lived experience of populations most affected by it. Special emphasis is placed on urban poverty -- poverty's impact on cities with regard to education; quality of life; diversity; violence and crime; and housing, as well as the role of government in ameliorating poverty.

The goals of this course are:

- 1) to better understand the nature of poverty in the United States and the impact of political, cultural, and economic forces on the poor;
- 2) to comprehend how poverty experiences are shaped by race, ethnicity, gender, and age;
- 3) to become acquainted with the major social policies intended to address the problem of poverty in the U.S.; and
- 4) to develop skills students will employ throughout their post-undergraduate life.

### **Required Materials**

There is no textbook for this course. Instead, students will read classic and contemporary selections from the scholarly literature. While these readings are drawn primarily from a sociological perspective, we will also read some material from historians, anthropologists, political scientists, and policy analysts. Readings for each unit will be available in Adobe PDF format on Blackboard. Students are encouraged to visit the site on a regular basis.

**Course Requirements:**

- ✓ Readings - As with most upper-level, this class is fairly reading intensive. Unless otherwise directed, you are expected to read all of the assigned materials posted on Blackboard before attending class. Failure to read the assigned materials will hinder your ability to participate in class and learn the required subject matter.
- ✓ Class Participation - You are expected to regularly attend and actively participate in class sessions. In the event that you should be unable to attend a class session, you are still responsible for the material covered during that meeting. Students are strongly encouraged to engage in classroom discussions and debate. In total, your class participation will be worth 15% of your final course grade.
- ✓ Theory Reflection Paper – Following the completion of the first unit, students will be asked to write a short reflective essay (2-3 pages) on the various poverty theories and perspectives presented. In the essay, students will be asked to briefly summarize some of the key points of the theories, to highlight major strengths and weaknesses in the arguments presented, and to identify their own theoretical leanings based on personal observation, experience, and/or research. The theory reflection paper will be worth 15% of your final course grade.
- ✓ Experience of Poverty Paper – During the second unit of the course, students will learn about the different experiences of impoverished persons. For this second paper, students will examine the federal poverty thresholds and will be asked to determine whether they adequately capture the real costs of food, housing, and other non-food expenses for a family of four. The Experience of Poverty paper will be worth 20% of your final course grade.
- ✓ Case Studies – Working in a team, students will prepare a 40-50 minute presentation profiling a major U. S. city and major poverty-related issue within that location. Students will gather basic descriptive information on a specified U.S. city and on the experience of poverty in that city. The profile will include basic demographics, income and poverty, race, ethnicity, and foreign birth concentration, industrial and occupational structure and racial and economic segregation. With assistance from the instructor, students will also provide an overview of the poverty-related issue (e.g., residential segregation, gentrification, sprawl, de-industrialization) and its impact on the city under investigation. The Team Case Study project will be worth 30% of your final course grade.
- ✓ Policy Paper – Students will select a major poverty-related social policy and draft a 7-10 page paper detailing the key audience for the policy, its history, goals, and results over time. Students will also discuss needed changes to the policy and/or alternative strategies. The Policy Paper will be worth 30% of your final course grade.

**Grading Criteria:**

93-100 = A	87-89 = B+	77-79 = C+	67-69 = D+
90-92 = A-	83-86 = B	73-76 = C	63-66 = D
	80-82 = B-	70-72 = C-	62 or below = F

**There is no “curve” or other grade adjustment given in the course.**

### **Grading Standards**

“A” - demonstrates superior knowledge of basic concepts while establishing the ability to apply material to the social world, synthesize ideas, and provide useful examples.

“B” - demonstrates knowledge of the basic materials and makes some attempt at appropriate analysis, interpretation, or evaluation.

“C” - demonstrates general recall of information from class with little or no personal analysis.

“D” - demonstrates difficulty recalling or communicating information.

“F” - demonstrates little understanding of course material and makes factual errors.

### **Grading Policy:**

- ✓ There will be no incomplete grades given for this course except in the most extreme circumstances (e.g., death in family, medical/hospitalization). Written documentation will be required for any incomplete grade request.
- ✓ There are no individual extra credit options available for this course.
- ✓ While I am willing to help you in the event that you need to miss an occasional class, I am not able to re-teach whole sections of the course.

If you have a life issue or problem that may hinder your performance in this class, see me as soon as possible to discuss the situation. **Do not wait until the end of semester as I will not accommodate individuals at that time.**

### **Help and Special Needs:**

Accommodations for differently-abled students can be made. Please bring these needs to my attention as soon as possible. Likewise, if you feel that you are having trouble with course materials or with assignments, please do not wait until you get behind in class to talk to me about it. You are strongly encouraged to stop by for office hours at any time during the semester.

If you ever feel that you have been graded unfairly, you may appeal your grade to me in writing within one week of grade receipt. By providing me with a written appeal, you have the opportunity to present your case for a better grade fully, clearly, and concisely, and I have the opportunity to reflect on your arguments.

### **UB's Policy on Academic Integrity:**

**I follow University Guidelines with regard to student academic misconduct:**

“The University has a responsibility to promote academic honesty and integrity... Students are responsible for the honest completion and representation of their work, for the appropriate citation of sources, and for respect for others' academic endeavors. By placing their name on academic work, students certify the originality of all work not otherwise identified by appropriate acknowledgements.”

**SOC 481: Special Topics: Urban Poverty  
Course Outline**

<b>August 31<sup>st</sup></b>	<b>Administrivia</b> Reading Assignments: 📖 Course Syllabus
<b>September 2<sup>nd</sup></b>	<b>Unit One: Measuring and Understanding Poverty</b> <i>Defining Poverty</i> Reading Assignments: 📖 De-Navis Walt, C., Proctor, B. D., and R. J. Mills, <i>Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2003</i> . United States Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C. 2004 (Skim Only)
<b>September 7<sup>th</sup></b>	<i>Theories of Poverty: Personal/Cultural</i> Reading Assignments: 📖 Hernstein, R. and Murray, C. (1996). "Poverty." Pp. 127-142 in <i>The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life</i> . New York: Free Press. 📖 Bane, M. J. and D.T. Ellwood (1994). "Understanding Dependency." Pp. 67-123 in <i>Welfare Realities: From Rhetoric to Reform</i> . Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
<b>September 9<sup>th</sup></b>	<i>Theories of Poverty: Structural/Environmental</i> Reading Assignments: 📖 Blank, R. (1998). "A Changing Economy." Pp. 52-82 in <i>It Takes a Nation: A New Agenda for Fighting Poverty</i> . New York: Russell Sage Foundation. 📖 Wilson, W. J. (1996). "The Meaning and Significance of Race: Employers and Inner City Workers." Pp. in <i>When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor</i> . New York: Alfred A. Knopf Publishers.
<b>September 14<sup>th</sup> and September 16<sup>th</sup></b>	No Class (Chicago Conference/Rosh Hashanah)
<b>September 21<sup>st</sup></b>  <b>Theory Reflection Paper Due</b>	<b>Unit Two: Experiencing Poverty</b> <i>The Importance of Examining the Lived Experience</i> Reading Assignments: 📖 hooks, b. (2000). "Class Matters." Pp.1-9 in <i>Where We Stand: Class Matters</i> . New York: Routledge.
<b>September 23<sup>rd</sup></b>	<i>Homelessness</i> Reading Assignments: 📖 Rossi, P. (1989). "The New Homeless and the Old." Pp.17-42 in <i>Down and Out in America: The Origins of Homelessness</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

	<p>📖 Liebow. E. (1993). "Family." Pp.81-114 in <i>Tell Them Who I Am: The Lives of Homeless Women</i>. New York: Penguin Books.</p>
<b>September 28<sup>th</sup></b>	<p><i>Welfare Participants</i>  Reading Assignments:  📖 Hays, S. (2003) "Fear, Hope, and Resignation in the Welfare Office." Pp. 94-120. in <i>Flat Broke with Children; Women in the Age of Welfare Reform</i>. Oxford: Oxford University Press.  📖 Edin, K. and L. Lein (1997) "Why Don't Welfare Reliant Mothers Go to Work?" Pp. 60-97 in <i>Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low-Wage Work</i>. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.</p>
<b>September 30<sup>th</sup></b>	<p>No Lecture – Groups Meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☞ New York</li> <li>☞ Los Angeles</li> <li>☞ Washington, D.C.</li> <li>☞ Chicago</li> <li>☞ Detroit</li> <li>☞ San Francisco</li> <li>☞ Minneapolis-St. Paul</li> <li>☞ Atlanta</li> </ul>
<b>October 5<sup>th</sup></b>	<p><i>The Working Poor</i>  Reading Assignments:  📖 Newman, K. (1999). "No Shame in (This) Game." Pp. 86-121." In <i>No Shame in MY Game: The Working Poor in the Inner City</i>. New York: Vintage Books.  📖 Ehrenreich, B. (2001). "Scrubbing in Maine." Pp.52-119 in <i>Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America</i>. New York: Henry Holt and Company.</p>
<b>October 7<sup>th</sup></b>	<p><i>The Elderly and Disabled</i>  Reading Assignments:  📖 Newman, K. (2003). "A Different Shade of Gray." Pp.221-240 in <i>A Different Shade of Gray: Midlife and Beyond in the Inner City</i>." New York: The New Press.</p>
<b>October 12<sup>th</sup></b>	<p><i>Children and Youth</i>  Reading Assignments:  📖 Mayer, S. E. (1997). "How Rich and Poor Children Differ?" Pp.39-55 in <i>What Money Can't Buy: Family and Children's Life Chances</i>." Cambridge: Harvard University Press.  📖 Stack, C. (2001) "Coming of Age in Oakland." Pp. 179-198 in <i>The New Poverty Studies: The Ethnography of Power, Politics, and Improverished People in the United States</i>. Edited by J. Goode and J. Maskovsky. New York: New York University Press.</p>

<p><b>October 14<sup>th</sup></b></p>	<p>No Lecture – Groups Meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☞ New York</li> <li>☞ Los Angeles</li> <li>☞ Washington, D.C.</li> <li>☞ Chicago</li> <li>☞ Detroit</li> <li>☞ San Francisco</li> <li>☞ Minneapolis-St. Paul</li> <li>☞ Atlanta</li> </ul>
<p><b>October 19<sup>th</sup></b></p> <p><b>Experience of Poverty Paper Due</b></p>	<p><b>Unit Three: Poverty and the City</b>  <i>New York City and Public Education</i>  Reading Assignment:  📖 Kozol, J. (1991) “The Savage Inequalities of Public Education in New York.” Pp.83-132 in <i>Savage Inequalities: Children in America’s Schools</i>. Crown Publishers: New York.</p>
<p><b>October 21<sup>st</sup></b></p>	<p><i>Los Angeles and Gang Violence</i>  Reading Assignment:  📖 Rodriguez, L. (1993). “Chapter Two.” Pp. 35-54 in <i>Always Running: La Vida Loca Gang Days in LA.</i> Curbstone Press: Willmatic: CT.</p>
<p><b>October 26<sup>th</sup></b></p>	<p><i>Washington, DC and Crime</i>  Reading Assignment:  📖 Ross, M. (2004) “Neighborhood Economies.” The Brookings Institution Greater Washington Research Program. Located at: <a href="http://www.brookings.edu/URBAN/gwrp/publinks/2004_issuescan.pdf">http://www.brookings.edu/URBAN/gwrp/publinks/2004_issuescan.pdf</a></p>
<p><b>October 28<sup>th</sup></b></p>	<p><i>Chicago and Public Housing</i>  Reading Assignment:  📖 Venkatesh (2000) “Doing the Hustle.” Pp. 65-109 in <i>American Project: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Ghetto</i>. Harvard University Press: Boston, MA.</p>
<p><b>November 2<sup>nd</sup></b></p>	<p><i>Detroit and Residential Segregation</i>  Reading Assignment:  📖 Farley, R., Steeh, C., Jackson, T., Krystan, M. and Reeves, K. (1993). “Continued Racial Residential Segregation in Detroit: “Chocolate City: Vanilla Suburbs” Revisited.” <i>Journal of Housing Research</i> 4:1-38.</p>

<b>November 4<sup>th</sup></b>	<p><i>San Francisco and Gentrification</i>  Reading Assignments:  📖 Kennedy, M. and Leonard, P. (2001) “Dealing with Neighborhood Change: A Primer on Gentrification and Policy Choice.” A Discussion Paper Prepared for The Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy. Located at:  <a href="http://www.brookings.org/es/urban/gentrification/gentrificationexsum.htm">http://www.brookings.org/es/urban/gentrification/gentrificationexsum.htm</a></p>
<b>November 9<sup>th</sup></b>	<p><i>Minneapolis-St. Paul and Diversity</i>  Reading Assignments:  📖 Wilder Research Center (2000). “Speaking for Themselves: A Survey of Hispanic, Hmong, Russian and Somali Immigrants in Minneapolis-St. Paul.” Located at:  <a href="http://www.wilder.org/research/reports/pdf/immigrantsurvey11-2000.pdf">http://www.wilder.org/research/reports/pdf/immigrantsurvey11-2000.pdf</a></p>
<b>November 11<sup>th</sup></b>	<p><i>Atlanta – Sprawl</i>  Reading Assignment:  📖 The Brookings Institution Center for Urban and Metropolitan Policy. (2000) Moving Beyond Sprawl: The Challenge for Metropolitan Atlanta. Located at:  <a href="http://www.brookings.edu/es/urban/atlanta/toc.htm">http://www.brookings.edu/es/urban/atlanta/toc.htm</a></p>
<b>November 16<sup>th</sup></b>	<p><b>Unit Four: Antipoverty Policy and Protest</b>  <i>Poverty and Policy</i>  Reading Assignments:  📖 Iceland, J. (2003) “Poverty and Policy” Pp.118-141 in <i>Poverty in America: A Handbook</i>. University of California Press: Berkeley.</p>
<b>November 18<sup>th</sup></b>	<p><i>Welfare Reform</i>  Reading Assignments:  📖 Holcomb, P. A., and Martinson, K. (2002). “Putting Policy into Practice.” Pp. 1-15 in <i>Welfare Reform: The Next Act</i>. The Urban Institute Press: Washington, D.C.</p>
<b>November 23<sup>rd</sup></b>	<p><i>Social Insurance Policies</i>  Reading Assignments:  📖 Schiller, B. (2004). “Social Insurance Programs.” Pp237-253 in <i>The Economics of Poverty and Discrimination (9<sup>th</sup> Edition)</i>. Pearson Prentice Hall: Upper Saddle River, NJ.</p>
<b>November 30<sup>th</sup></b>	<p><i>Minimum Wage, Living Wage, Self-Sufficiency Standards</i>  Reading Assignments:  📖 Pollin, R. and Luce, S. (1998). “Living Wages and Urban Development Policies.” Pp.54-86 in <i>The Living Wage: Building a Fair Economy</i>. The New Press: New York.</p>

<p><b>December 2<sup>nd</sup></b></p>	<p><i>Housing Strategies</i>  Reading Assignments:  📖 Goetz, E. G. (2003) "Programs to Deconcentrate the Poor." Pp. 43-88 in <i>Clearing the Way: Deconcentrating the Poor in Urban America</i>. The Urban Institute Press: Washington, D.C.</p>
<p><b>December 7<sup>th</sup></b></p>	<p><i>Human Capital Strategies</i>  Reading Assignments:  📖 Karoly, L. A. (2001) "Investing in the Future: Reducing Poverty through Human Capital Investments." Pp. 314-356 in <i>Understanding Poverty</i>. Edited by S.H. Danziger and R. H. Havenman. Russell Sage Foundation: New York.</p>
<p><b>December 9<sup>th</sup></b>   <b>Policy Paper due on 16<sup>th</sup></b></p>	<p><i>Poverty Movements</i>  Reading Assignments:  📖 Piven, F. F. and Cloward, R. A. (1977). "The Welfare Rights Movement." Pp.264-361 in <i>Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail</i>. Vintage Books: New York.</p>