SYLLABUS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Poverty—the lack of income and other material resources—remains a serious problem in the US and globally. This situation exists, even as incomes and wealth of some groups has increased substantially in recent years. This course will explore a variety of explanations for material deprivation in the midst of plenty, with students actively working to formulate their own reasoned views on numerous facets of this issue. For example, how do we meaningfully measure inequality and poverty? Should we measure aspects of well-being other than income? Are race and gender factors influencing the distribution of resources, and if so, how do these processes reproduce themselves so that gender and ethnic inequality persist over time? What are the causes behind the recent growth of inequality?

The degree of material inequality shapes the possibilities in societies for cooperation or conflict, identity or alienation, freedom or unfreedom. Can we therefore justify a redistribution of income and wealth to achieve a more equitable distribution of income and if so, on what grounds?

This course will explore these questions from an interdisciplinary perspective and will examine policy impacts on the alleviation of inequality and poverty.

READINGS

The following books will be used in this course:


I have ordered a few of each of these books for this class and you will find them at the bookstore. Those marked optional indicates we will be doing a limited amount of reading from these books, and you may therefore find that you prefer to photocopy the relevant pages than buy the book. You are also encouraged to seek out used versions from companies such as Amazon.
REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance and participation in the seminar are essential. Read the assignment for each week prior to class and think about how it relates to the themes of the course; formulate questions you would like to raise in the seminar. Be ready to discuss the material in class. Class participation will be a large part of your grade, and it is thus imperative to have read the assigned readings before class.

2. “Reflection” papers, 3-4 pages long typewritten, are due on Tuesday (with the first due on September 8). These short papers are to respond to the previous week’s readings and discussion.

2. Each student will be asked to make a brief (5-10) minute presentation on the appointed Thursday, summarizing the preceding week’s discussion and posing questions to the class for further discussion. Because there are more students than weeks, those who do not make a presentation will participate in a panel the last week of class in which an overview of the semester’s experience will be provided.

3. As an aid to students understanding the issues of income distribution and poverty, you are required to volunteer at a local food shelf or homeless shelter for at least two shifts. I am attaching to this syllabus a list of agencies at which students might volunteer. List of shifts due September 25, and 5-page papers reflecting on your experience as it relates to the readings and topic of this course are on November 8.

4. Final exam, Monday, December 10, 9-11am, 319 Terrill

EVALUATION METHOD

Grades are weighted as follows: class participation, (25%), class presentations (5%), paper on volunteer activity (15%), “reflection” papers (30%), and final exam (25%).

COURSE OUTLINE

PART I. Real World Inequality and Poverty

Week 1. Introduction and Course Overview


Week 2: Ethnographic accounts of poverty and inequality


Weeks 3. Measurement and Trends

http://www.undp-povertycentre.org/pub/IPCPovertyInFocus9.pdf


**PART II. THEORIES OF DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE**

**Week 4. Moral and Political Philosophy**


**Week 5. Contractarian approaches to distributive justice: Rawls and Nozick**

Hahnel, R., Ch. 1.

Mimeographed handouts on Rawls and Nozick.

**Week 6. Political Economy Approaches**

Hahnel, R. Chs. 1-3.


**Part III. Intergroup Inequality: Race and Gender**

**Week 7-8. Ethnic Inequality**


For those interested in delving further into this topic, I strongly encourage you to read Massey, D. and N. Denton. 1993. *American Apartheid.*

**Week 9-10. Gender Inequality**


**Week 11. Inequality and Economic Growth**
PART IV. POLICY SOLUTIONS?

Week 12. Education


Week 14. Redistributive Policies and Politics

Hahnel, R. Chs. 8 and 9.

Oliver, M. and T. Shapiro. Ch. 9.


STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY

I have tried to give you a good idea of what the course involves and the timetable on which we will work through the material. I reserve the right to change readings, times, and other aspects of the syllabus as needed, however. You are responsible for reading your syllabus to keep abreast of the schedule, and staying current on any other changes to the syllabus, which will be announced in class.
RESOURCES

World Bank “Inequality, Poverty and Socio-economic performance” website.

World Bank Inequality Around the World page
http://www.worldbank.org/research/inequality

WIDER (UN World Institute for Development Economics Research)
http://www.wider.unu.edu

UN Millennium Development Goals Indicators Data.
http://millenniumindicators.un.org/unsd/mi/mi_goals.asp


Policy websites:


Emma Aisbett – overview of sources
http://are.berkeley.edu/harrison/globalpoverty/index.html

Center for Global Development

Oxfam http://www.oxfam.org/eng

World Bank Globalization page

UNDP Poverty Center http://www.undp-povertycentre.org/

http://www.unrisd.org
AREA VOLUNTEER AGENCIES

The following is a suggested list of agencies for which you may volunteer. There are many others, of course, and if you choose some other, just clear it with me first.

1. **Committee on Temporary Shelter (COTS)**  
   Contact: Sally Ballin  
   Tel. 864-7402

   This agency provides temporary shelter for homeless families and individuals. Possible volunteer activities include:
   
   a. Assist in preparation of meals for daytime drop-in clients.  
   b. Help with intake at the Way Station, 6-9 pm. (This is the overnight emergency shelter).  
   c. Create and conduct activities with children.

2. **Chittenden County Emergency Food Shelf**  
   Contact: Wanda Hines  
   Tel. 658-7939

   This center distributes groceries and prepares meals for local families in need. Available positions include:
   
   a. Grocery distribution provider  
   b. Kitchen assistant  
   c. Warehouse maintenance aide.

   This project provides emergency food assistance.

3. **Salvation Army**  
   Contact: Theresa Benoit  
   Tel. 864-6991