

University of Vermont
Fall 2007

HONORS 195B: INCOME DISTRIBUTION AND POVERTY

TTH 11:00am-12: 15pm
Terrill 319

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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:

1. Ehrenreich, Barbara. 1999. *Nickel and Dimed*. New York: Metropolitan Books. (\$4.27 used at Amazon).
2. Sen, Amartya. 2000. *Development as Freedom*. New York: Random House. (\$7.95 used at Amazon).
3. Hahnel, Robin. 2005. *Economic Justice and Democracy: From Competition to Cooperation*. Paperback. Routledge. (About \$26 new).
4. Oliver, Melvin and Thomas Shapiro. 2006. *Black Wealth, White Wealth*. New York: Routledge. (Optional) (\$15.52 used at Amazon).
5. Bergmann, Barbara. 1996. *In Defense of Affirmative Action*. New York: Basic Books. (\$0.40 used at Amazon).

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, 9-11 am, 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

Nussbaum, M. 2006. "Poverty and Human Functionings: Capabilities as Fundamental Entitlements." In *Poverty and Inequality*, eds D. Grusky and R. Kanbur. Stanford University Press.

Sen, Amartya. 1999. *Development as Freedom*. Introduction, "The Ends and Means of Development" (Ch. 2).

Week 2: Ethnographic accounts of poverty and inequality

Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Nickel and Dimed*. Entire book.

Narayan, Deepa et al. 1999. *Voices of the Poor. Can Anyone Hear Us?* New York, N.Y.: Published for the World Bank, Oxford University Press. Read as much as you can, including Chs. 1, 2, and 5. (*downloadable or read online at:*
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/0..contentMDK:20619302~menuPK:336998~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:336992,00.html>)

Weeks 3. Measurement and Trends

<http://www.undp-povertycentre.org/pub/IPCPovertyInFocus9.pdf>
US Census Bureau. <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty.html>. (Read sections on how poverty is measured in the US, and familiarize yourself with poverty data for US).

World Bank. <http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/mission/up1.htm>. (Read section on “Measuring poverty”).

Thomas Pogge and B. Schiller on measuring poverty and inequality. Handouts.

PART II. THEORIES OF DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

Week 4. Moral and Political Philosophy

Singer, Peter. 1979. *Practical Ethics*, Chs 2 and 8.

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.

Darity, William, Jr. 2001. “The functionality of market-based discrimination.” *International Journal of Social Economics* 28 (10-12): 980 - 986

Part III. Intergroup Inequality: Race and Gender

Week 7-8. Ethnic Inequality

Darity, William. 2005. “Stratification Economics: The Role of Intergroup Inequality.” *Journal of Economics and Finance* 29 (2): 144-53.

Oliver, M. and Shapiro, T. *Black Wealth/White Wealth*. Introduction and Chs. 1-5.

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

Blumberg, Rae. 1984. "A General Theory of Gender Stratification." Pp. 23-101 in *Sociological Theory*, edited by Randall Collins. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Sen, Amartya. 1999. *Development as Freedom*. Ch. 8

Seguino, S. 2001. “Engendering Economics: Gender Matters at Home, at Work, and in Policy.” Mimeo. Department of Economics, University of Vermont.

Blackden, M., Canagarajah, S. Klasen, and D. Lawson. 2005. “Gender and Growth in Sub Saharan Africa: Evidence and Issues.”

<http://64.233.169.104/search?q=cache:acudGxKlXo0J:www.wider.unu.edu/conference/conference-2005-3/conference-2005-3-papers/Klasen.pdf+blackden+klasens+gender&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=4&gl=us>.

Week 11. Inequality and Economic Growth

Birdsall, N. 2005. The World is not flat: Inequality and justice. WIDER Lecture 9.
http://www.cgdev.org/doc/commentary/speeches/Birdsall_WIDERpaper.pdf

PART IV. POLICY SOLUTIONS?

Week 12. Education

Bowles, Samuel and Herb Gintis. 1976. *Schooling in Capitalist America*. Chapter 5.

Delbanco, Andrew. 2007. "Academic Business." *New York Times Magazine*, September 28, 2007.

Kozol, Jonathan. 1991. *Savage Inequalities*. Chapter 2.

Week 13. Labor Market Policies: Affirmative Action and Living Wage Campaigns

Bergmann, Barbara. 1996. *In Defense of Affirmative Action*. Chapters 3-8.

Bernstein, Jared. 1999. "The Living Wage Movement: Pointing the Way Toward the High Road." *Community Action Digest* (Spring 1999). Available online. See also
http://www.epinet.org/content.cfm/issueguides_livingwage_livingwage

Leonhardt, D. 2007. "The New Affirmative Action." *New York Times Magazine*, September 28, 2007.

Week 14. Redistributive Policies and Politics

Hahnel, R. Chs. 8 and 9.

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

Wisman, Jon. 2006. "State Lotteries: Using State Power to Fleece the Poor." *Journal of Economic Issues*. Vol. X., No. 4: 955-66.

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.

<http://www1.worldbank.org/prem/poverty/inequal/index.htm>

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

UNDP Human Development Report Office. <http://hdr.undp.org>

Policy websites:

Economic Policy Institute. <http://www.epinet.org/>

Emma Aisbett – overview of sources

<http://are.berkeley.edu/harrison/globalpoverty/index.html>

Action Aid: <http://www.actionaid.org> <http://www.cgdev.org/>
Center for Global Development

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

World Bank Globalization page

<http://www1.worldbank.org/economicpolicy/globalization/index.html>

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

UNRISD – UN Research Institute for Social Development, Geneva.

<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