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Spring 2016
TTh 9:30-10:50 AM
Center Hall 115

USP 133/SOCC 152 SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND PUBLIC POLICY

This is a course on the causes of inequality, with a particular focus on poverty in the contemporary United States. The U.S. is by any measure one of the most affluent societies in the history of the world. Why, then, are so many Americans poor? Why is poverty so concentrated in American cities? What can be done to reduce poverty? These are classic questions in sociology and urban studies. They are also among the most exhaustively researched questions in the contemporary social sciences. The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the applied social science of poverty and anti-poverty policy. The course is in three parts. We begin with a conceptual review of poverty and inequality, followed by an overview of American anti-poverty policy focused on the design of transfer programs, and then a review of the geography of poverty.

REQUIREMENTS

You are expected to come to every class prepared to discuss the assigned reading. The final assessment will be based on:

- 10% for attendance and participation
- 25% for a short, conceptual paper due in week 3
- 40% for a substantial research paper on a topic of your choosing, comprising four assignments:
 - A motivated research question due in week 4 (5%)
 - An annotated bibliography due in week 6 (10%)
 - A rough draft due in week 9 (10%)
 - A final paper due on the scheduled final exam date (15%)
- 25% for weekly quizzes on the reading in weeks 4 through 8 (5% each)

TURNING IN ASSIGNMENTS

The conceptual paper and all assignments for the research paper *must* be turned in electronically via www.turnitin.com, with no exceptions. Details will be provided in class.

It is to your advantage to turn your assignments in on time, but I will accept late work, with no excuses necessary. That said, I will only accept late work on the following conditions: (1) late work will lose one third of a grade point for every *calendar day* it is late (e.g., it might be demoted from a B+ to a B, or a B- to a C+); (2) late work goes to the bottom of my grading pile, and I will make no guarantees about how quickly I will get to grading it; (3) late work must be turned in before the *next* assignment is due, or before the end of the final exam period, whichever comes first.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

The most important thing we teach in college is the norm of academic integrity: take responsibility for your own ideas and do not take credit for anyone else's. If you are not comfortable with the idea that you have to write a paper describing your own conclusions in your own words, do not take this class.

I expect you to be familiar with UCSD's [policy on the integrity of scholarship](#), and to familiarize yourself with scholarly norms concerning proper attribution and citation. If you are unsure whether your work conforms to these norms, ask me for help *before* you turn it in. The bottom line for this course: it is *never*

acceptable to represent others' work as your own, even by mistake. If I find evidence of academic dishonesty, I will assign a failing grade on the assignment and report the incident to the Academic Integrity Coordinator.

COURSE MATERIALS

All of the following books are required, and have been ordered at the UCSD bookstore. They are listed at the bookstore under SOCC152.

- Campbell, Andrea Louise. 2014. *Trapped in America's Safety Net: One Family's Struggle*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Halpern-Meekin, Sarah, Kathryn Edin, Laura Tach, and Jennifer Sykes. 2015. *It's Not Like I'm Poor: How Working Families Make Ends Meet in a Post-Welfare World*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Schuck, Peter H. and Richard J. Zeckhauser. 2006. *Targeting in Social Programs: Avoiding Bad Bets, Removing Bad Apples*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Massey, Douglas, Len Albright, Rebecca Casciano, Elizabeth Derickson and David N. Kinsey. 2013. *Climbing Mount Laurel: The Struggle for Affordable Housing and Social Mobility in an American Suburb*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

In addition to these required books, there are several shorter required readings. They are either linked from this syllabus, or available on electronic reserve at the library, or both.

The readings listed as “required” on this syllabus are the readings that are required for everyone; but each if you is also required to find and read other sources that are relevant to your *particular* research paper throughout the quarter. The final paper requires you to cite at least twelve sources that are not listed as required readings on the syllabus. That is a *minimum*—and note that you will have to read many *more* than twelve sources in order to find twelve that are relevant.

I have also listed suggestions for recommended reading under each topic. These readings are not required. They are listed here for your reference in case you get interested in a topic and want to read further either during this quarter or afterwards. A recommended reading is sure to be a text that I think is either (i) especially good, (ii) especially important, or (iii) especially interesting to read alongside the material we have covered—but it is not necessarily all three.

SCHEDULE OF LECTURES AND REQUIRED READING

This schedule is subject to revision as we proceed. Any changes will be announced in class.

I. AN INTRODUCTION TO POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

Week 1. The problem with inequality and poverty

Poverty and inequality are central public issues of our times. We will begin by asking why they are such urgent public issues—and what we can hope to learn about these issues by using the tools of social science. That means jumping right into the deep end, with questions such as these: Is there such a thing as too much inequality? How much is too much? Why should you care about someone else's poverty?

Required:

Halpern-Meekin et al., Introduction and chapter 1.

Kenworthy, Lane. "[Rising Inequality, Public Policy, and America's Poor.](#)" *Challenge*, vol. 53, no. 6 (2010): 93-109.

Week 2. How much poverty is there?

In order to study poverty we have to know how to recognize it. This week will introduce the social science of poverty measurement. What is poverty, and how much of it is there in the United States today? As you read, pay careful attention to how the texts define poverty.

Required:

Iceland, John. "[Measuring Poverty: Theoretical and Empirical Considerations.](#)" *Measurement: Interdisciplinary Research and Perspectives*, vol. 3, no. 4 (2005): 199-235

Shaefer, H. Luke and Edin, Kathryn. "[Rising Extreme Poverty in the United States and the Response of Federal Means-Tested Transfers.](#)" *Social Service Review*, vol. 87, no. 2 (2013): 250–268.

Recommended:

Citron, Constance F. and Robert T. Michael, eds. 1995. *Measuring Poverty: A New Approach*, Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

O'Connor, Alice. 2001. *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Week 3. Some background on the dynamics of poverty

The conventional wisdom on poverty is filled with stereotypes, clichés, myths, and half-truths. Acting as myth-busters, we will spend some time checking the conventional wisdom against the social science evidence.

Halpern-Meekin et al., chapter 5 (pp. 152-181)

DeNavas-Walt, Carmen and Bernadette D. Proctor. 2015. [Income and Poverty in the United States: 2014](#). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

⇒ Conceptual paper due Thursday

II. THE WELFARE STATE AND POVERTY

Week 4. Transfers to the poor

It might seem that the most direct way to alleviate poverty is simply to take money from people who have it and give it to people who don't. We will consider whether, and under what conditions, means-tested transfer spending is likely to be effective at reducing poverty.

Required:

Schuck and Zeckhauser, chapters 1 to 5 (pp. 1-98)

⇒ Motivated research question due Thursday

Recommended:

Howard, Christopher. 2006. *The Welfare State Nobody Knows*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Week 5. Some paradoxes of means testing

Many criticisms of transfer programs concern the unintended consequences of means testing. We will discuss how means-tested transfers work in practice, and evaluate some of the critical claims that have been made about the effects of means testing on work, family formation, civic participation, and social stigma.

Required:

Campbell, prologue through chapter 5 (pp. ix-100)

Week 6. Paying for poor relief

Who pays for transfer spending? The answer, it turns out, can vary a lot from one program to the next or one place to the next—and the particular way that we pay for transfers can have very important consequences for poverty and inequality. We will consider some classic and contemporary arguments about the effects of progressive taxation. We will also discuss the social consequences of how we pay for poor relief.

Halpern-Meekin et al., chapters 2-4 (pp. 59-151)

⇒ Annotated bibliography due Thursday

Week 7. Some paradoxes of progressivity

Robin Hood, the story goes, took from the rich to give to the poor. But designing a conceptually consistent policy that takes from the rich is more complicated than it might sound. We will consider some design issues that may arise in the financing of social programs, with a focus on some surprising or paradoxical consequences of progressive taxation—including poverty traps, marriage penalties (or bonuses), and the so-called paradox of redistribution.

McCaffery, Edward J. 2009. "[Where's the Sex in Fiscal Sociology? Taxation and Gender in Comparative Perspective.](#)" Pp. 216-236 in *The New Fiscal Sociology*, edited by Isaac William Martin, Ajay K. Mehrotra, and Monica Prasad. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Korpi, Walter and Joakim Palme. 1998. "[The Paradox of Redistribution and Strategies of Equality: Welfare State Institutions, Inequality, and Poverty in the Western Countries.](#)" *American Sociological Review*, 63(5): 661-687.

Recommended:

Skocpol, Theda. 1995. "Targeting within Universalism: Politically Viable Policies to Combat Poverty in the United States." Pp. 250-74 in *Social Policy in the United States: Future Possibilities in Historical Perspective*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

III. URBAN POLICY AND URBAN POVERTY

Week 8. Neighborhood effects

It is one thing to be poor; it may be another thing entirely to live your life surrounded by other poor

people. How does the geographic concentration of poor people matter for poor people's survival strategies? How does it affect their opportunities escaping poverty? How might it matter for social life in other ways? Because the history of racial segregation in America has produced especially high concentrations of poverty in African American city neighborhoods, much of the research on these questions has focused on how concentrated poverty affects the lives of Black urban poor people. We will consider some of this research about so-called neighborhood effects on poverty.

Required:

Massey et al., chapters 1-4 (pp. 1-79)

Recommended:

MacLeod, Jay. 1995. *Ain't No Makin' It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Small, Mario L. and Katherine Newman. 2001. "Urban Poverty After *The Truly Disadvantaged*: The Rediscovery of the Family, the Neighborhood, and Culture." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27: 23-45.

Week 9. Neighborhood remedies?

Does geographically concentrated poverty demand a geographically concentrated anti-poverty strategy? Given limited resources, is it better to invest in improving poor neighborhoods, or in helping poor people move out of those neighborhoods? We will consider what the uneven geography of poverty might mean for how best to design effective anti-poverty strategies.

Required:

Massey et al., chapters 5-8 (pp. 80-183).

⇒ Rough draft due Tuesday

Week 10. What future for anti-poverty policy?

We will use our last week to consider possible future directions for anti-poverty policy in the United States.

Required:

Shuck and Zeckhauser, chapters 6 and 7 (pp. 99-136)

Campbell, Conclusion (pp. 101-131)

Final research paper due on Tuesday, June 7 between 8 AM and 10:59 AM, which is the scheduled final exam period for this class.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE CONCEPTUAL PAPER

We have considered some criticisms of the U.S. government's official poverty measure. Your assignment for this paper is to propose and argue for your own measure of poverty.

I do not expect your paper to specify an alternative poverty line in dollars (e.g., "the threshold will be set at \$18,000 for a family of four"). Instead, the point of the paper is to explain the *reasoning* that would underly a specific poverty measure. Like any measure of poverty, your measure must define a social *unit* of analysis, a *scale* of resources and a *threshold* below which people are considered poor.

For the purposes of this assignment, there is no single right answer. Your measure of poverty may be a head-count measure or a more distribution-sensitive measure; it may be subjective or objective; it may be relative or absolute; it may be based on income, consumption, wealth, or social exclusion; it may refer to families, households, individuals, or some other unit. The point, again, is not to pick the "right" measure of poverty. It is instead to explain and justify the choices you make about how to measure poverty.

Your argument should make reference to the assigned readings and to what you have learned in class, but your proposed poverty measure need not be the same as what you think (say) John Iceland's is, or what you think mine would be. You may also draw on other supplemental readings, although it is not necessary to do so. You are expected to cite all of your sources consistently with UCSD's policy on the integrity of scholarship.

The essay should be approximately 1,500 words long. That works out to about five pages double-spaced in 12 point Times New Roman with normal margins.

The essay will be graded according to the rubric attached to this syllabus.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR YOUR RESEARCH PAPER

You will be asked to commit yourself to a general research topic by week four. Weigh your choice of topic carefully: changes later in the quarter will be permitted only in truly extraordinary circumstances.

Your research will entail *a major time commitment*: you should plan to spend an average of five hours per week finding sources, reading them, taking notes, and writing. The payoff to all this effort should be a paper that you are proud of and one that you can use even after this course as a sample of your best work.

You will be expected to complete the following assignments.

- *Motivated research question*. This is a short paper (*max.* 750 words) describing the question you hope to answer, and explaining why research to answer this question is important. Why is this research potentially important for policy makers? Why is this research potentially important for theories of poverty and inequality?
- *Annotated bibliography*. Your annotated bibliography must include at least eight books and articles *that you have read*, not counting the “required readings” listed on this syllabus. It must include a short (one paragraph) description of each source, summarizing what that source contributes to *your* research. The description should briefly explain *in your own words* what the argument of the book or article is, what evidence supports the argument, and how this source will contribute to answering your research question. The bibliographic citation may be in any standard scholarly format (see the required and recommended reading lists on this syllabus for examples).
- *Rough draft* of at least 1,250 words. The rough draft must be written in complete sentences, though it may be organized in an outline fashion. This draft is your chance to sketch your argument in outline. We will read the rough draft; where appropriate, we will offer comments and suggestions on how to improve it for the final paper.
- *Final paper* of about 2,500 words. This is an integrative literature review that synthesizes the available scholarly research on your topic in order to advance an argument. It should draw on *at least* twelve scholarly sources, not counting the required readings listed on this syllabus, and quite possibly more. The final paper will be graded according to the rubric attached to this syllabus.

EVALUATION RUBRIC FOR PAPERS

A- through A+	<p>For an A, a paper must have all of the characteristics of a B paper listed below. In addition, it will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have an innovative thesis. • have a logically compelling argument. • consider and refute alternative arguments. • show evidence of originality or creativity. • have a clear and error-free prose style. • adduce particularly strong evidence. <p>For the conceptual paper assignment, an A paper will be free from conceptual errors.</p>
B- through B+	<p>For a B, a paper must have all of the characteristics of a C paper listed below. In addition, it will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a clear thesis statement. • have a logical structure that advances the argument. • adduce appropriate evidence to support its argument. • be free from digressions and extraneous material. • be mostly free from errors of usage and grammar. <p>For the conceptual paper assignment, a B paper will clearly communicate an understanding of the distinctions between different ways of measuring poverty, and it will be free from major conceptual errors. Where a C paper gets some things right, a B paper gets few things wrong.</p>
C- through C+	<p>For a C, a paper must have all of the characteristics of a D paper listed below. In addition, it will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have an identifiable thesis statement. • adduce evidence to support its argument. <p>For the conceptual paper assignment, a C paper will communicate an understanding of some core concepts relevant to the measurement of poverty.</p>
D- through D+	<p>A D paper will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • comply with UCSD's policy on the integrity of scholarship • comply with the instructions for the assignment (e.g. with respect to length, timeliness of submission, and the number and character of sources)