



POVERTY, CHILDREN, AND FAMILIES: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

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TARGET AUDIENCE, CLASS SCHEDULE AND CLASS STRUCTURE

- Freshmen and sophomores in social science
- No prerequisites
- One semester, twice a week
- During each class, a brief (≤ 30 minutes) lecture will occur at the start of the class to make sure that key concepts are understood. The remainder of the class will be spent on active learning projects.



COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- Explain the causes and impacts of poverty on families and children
- Identify the major policies and programs that target families and children living in poverty
- Engage in meaningful service learning and communicate how theory and research influence their real-world experiences; and
- Reflect on the moral and ethical implications of personal and policy decisions related to poverty



COURSE STRUCTURE

- Unit 1: Setting the Stage
- Unit 2: The Effects on Families
- Unit 3: The Effects on Children
- Unit 4: Policies and Programs to Support Families and Children in Poverty
- Unit 5: Poverty and Higher Education



SERVICE-LEARNING COMPONENT

- An example of a service learning project: Our undergraduates provide arts and crafts activities for the children at the local homeless shelter one afternoon a week for a semester. This helps parents by giving them two hours of free time and helps the children by giving them role models and positive adult attention. Most importantly, the undergraduates become engaged with children from low-income families in an enjoyable way and learn that poor children are not different from any other children. The experience diminishes stereotypes and “us” vs. “them” thinking about the poor. Students write reflections and integrate class material in discussions of their experiences.





UNIT 1: SETTING THE CONTEXT

What is Poverty? Who are the Poor?

- Definitions of poverty
- Images of Poor
 - Case studies from local community
 - Students guess the poverty rate in their home county and then look it up
- Inequality exercise

What are the causes of poverty?

- Individual, structural, cultural
 - Homelessness video
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UNIT 1: SETTING THE CONTEXT

Historical and Psychological Perspectives in Understanding Poverty

- What happened to the War on Poverty?
- Film clips of Lyndon Johnson, Ronald Reagan, Recent Politicians (“The Middle Class Express”)
- Why do we tolerate high rates of poverty in the U.S.?
 - Psychological theories
 - Blaming the Victim
 - Belief in a Just World

Poverty simulation

- Students are assigned roles in family groups; income and expenses; health insurance? Savings?
- A series of crises are described and each family group must make decisions about how to cope (e.g., child breaks his arm)



UNIT 2: THE EFFECTS OF POVERTY ON FAMILIES

Family Complexity and Poverty

- Discussion of who is the American Family and have this image of the American Family changed?; What do we know about family complexity and Poverty?; What do we know about parents in complex families?; and family system within a poverty context.
- Activity: Possibly at the beginning of class, show one of the videos located on YouTube that depicts families in poverty.
- YouTube video: The American family has changed:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CxnUIQgQOI>
- Webinar: Cancian, M. & Meyer, D.R. (2012). The Implications of Complex Families for Poverty and Child Support Policy.
<http://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/media/webinars/2012/MeyerCancian/StandardPlayer.html>
- Activity: Have students break into groups to discuss the official definition of family. Pros and cons of this definition and then discuss who they would include in their definition of family and how does this definition differs from the Census definition of poverty.



UNIT 2: THE EFFECTS OF POVERTY ON FAMILIES

Family Structure, Change, and Poverty

- Discussion single parents by gender and divorce parents.
- Activities: Watch a variety of videos on families and poverty.
- Jobless mother struggles in severe poverty
<http://www.today.com/video/today/38380069#38380069>
- Webinar: Berger, L. (2012). Disadvantaged Men as Fathers.
<http://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/media/webinars/2012/Berger/StandardPlayer.html>



UNIT 3: THE EFFECTS OF POVERTY ON CHILDREN

An Overview of the Effects of Poverty on Children

- Activity: Read and discuss the United Nations Declarations on the Rights of the Child.
http://www.unicef.org/lac/spbarbados/Legal/global/General/declaration_child1959.pdf

Focus question: Why has the United States refused to ratify this document?

Prenatal and Infant Development

- Activity: In groups, examine the stages of pregnancy and discuss how poverty could affect the developing fetus at each month. In doing so, be particularly mindful about how development at earlier months might affect development at later months.



UNIT 3: THE EFFECTS OF POVERTY ON CHILDREN

Health and Physical Development

- Activity: Watch and discuss this video on the effects of brain development at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6i105vkXVok>.

After doing this, work in groups of 4 to develop an ad campaign aimed at convincing people to devote resources to promoting physical development. In doing so, think about your target audience, the type of media you will use, and the type of physical development you want to promote. During the last 25 minutes of class, each group will have 3-5 minutes to present your ad campaign to the class.



UNIT 3: THE EFFECTS OF POVERTY ON CHILDREN

Cognitive Development

- Activity: Reflect on the articles we have read this far in the course and then, working in pairs, begin to develop a model of how the various factors related with poverty work with (or against) one another to affect child development. In doing so, be very cognizant of reciprocal interactions. We will revisit these models later in the course.

Social and Emotional Development

- Activity: Watch the “Still Face” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Btg9PiT0sZg>)
And the Harlow Monkey video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2M6XBJEEFQ>) and then discuss how poverty may affect the development of healthy attachment and emotional development. (Guided discussion questions will be provided.)



UNIT 3: THE EFFECTS OF POVERTY ON CHILDREN

Working with Children in Poverty

- Activity: Play on the Brainology website at <http://www.mindsetworks.com/default.aspx> and then write a one-page essay on why this might be a particularly useful tool for children living in poverty.

Resilient Children

- Activity: You will have 30 minutes to work in pairs to come up with 3 ideas for promoting resilience among children living in poverty. At the end of this time, you will need to present your best idea to the class. Each idea will be critiqued and at the end of class time we will vote on: 1) the best project, 2) the most practical project, and 3) the project most likely to actually get enacted in the U.S.



UNIT 4: POLICIES AND PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT FAMILIES AND CHILDREN IN POVERTY

Overview of U.S. safety net policies and programs

To support basic needs: Housing, food and energy assistance

NCCP Publication

- Rent Burden, Housing Subsidies and Well-being of Children and Youth. http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_1043.html
- Who are America's Poor Children? Examining food insecurity among Children in the United States. http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_956.html
- Basic Facts about Low-Income Children http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_1075.html



UNIT 4: POLICIES AND PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT FAMILIES AND CHILDREN IN POVERTY

To promote parental employment and child development

- Child care subsidies
- Early care education

Research connections teaching modules

<http://www.researchconnections.org/content/childcare/understand/teaching-modules.htm>

To support health and mental health: Home visiting programs and mental health screening for children and families

- Smith, Sheila. Forthcoming. Public Health Approaches to Child and Parent Screening: Implications for Child Protection. *Journal of Law and Policy*.



UNIT 4: POLICIES AND PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT FAMILIES AND CHILDREN IN POVERTY

Group Exercise:

Students will be divided into groups. Each group will: (i) compare policies and programs covered in each class and (ii) identify strengths and weaknesses of those policies and programs in assisting families and children living in poverty.



UNIT 5: POVERTY AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Education as a Pathway out of Poverty

Readings

- Deming, D., & Dynarski, S. (2009). *Into college, out of poverty? Policies to increase the postsecondary attainment of the poor* (No. w15387). National Bureau of Economic Research.
http://www.immagic.com/eLibrary/ARCHIVES/GENERAL/NBER_US/N090920D.pdf
- Adair, V. C. (2001). Poverty and the (broken) promise of higher education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 71(2), 217-240.
<http://www.history.ucsb.edu/projects/labor/documents/AdairHarvardEducationalReviewArticle.pdf>



UNIT 5: POVERTY AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Access to Higher Education for the Poor

Part 1

- Reading: Levine, A., & Nidiffer, J. (1996). *Beating the Odds: How the Poor Get to College. The Jossey Bass Higher and Adult Education Series*. Jossey-Bass, Inc., 350 Sansome St., San Francisco, CA 94104
- Activity: Review and discussion of themes of resilience in research literature on poverty and higher education.

Part 2

- Readings: 1) Hansen, W. L. (1983). Impact of student financial aid on access. *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*, 35(2), 84-96. 2) Karen, D. (1991). The politics of class, race, and gender: Access to higher education in the United States, 1960-1986. *American Journal of Education*, 208-237.
- Activity: Class discussion on the perceived impact of “Need Blind” scholarship policies on college success.



UNIT 5: POVERTY AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Issues of Poverty and Meritocracy in Higher Education

- Readings: 1) Sundquist, C. (2002). Equal Opportunity, Individual Liberty, and Meritocracy in Education: Reinforcing Structures of Privilege and Inequality. *Geo. J. on Poverty L. & Pol'y*, 9, 227. 2) Zamani, E. M., & Brown, M. C. (2003). Affirmative action in postsecondary educational settings: The historic nexus of meritocracy and access in US higher education. *Higher Education Policy*, 16(1), 27-38
- Video: A look at the new faces of American Poverty November 2011
http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-18563_162-57318205/a-look-at-the-new-faces-of-americanpoverty/

