

The Politics of Poverty (POLI 4017)

Tues/Thurs 9:00-10:20; 241 Himes Hall
Dr. Belinda Creel Davis (davisbe@lsu.edu)
221 Stubbs Hall (578-2533)
Office Hrs: Thurs. 1-2:30 and by appt.

The purpose of this course is to introduce poverty as the key to understanding some of the most important problems facing our country. The class will start by defining public policy and its origins. We will then move to a discussion of how we define poverty, its causes, and our choice of solutions. Because poverty has been defined as a problem worthy of national government attention since the 1930s, any discourse on poverty is inherently a political one.

Course Requirements

You are expected to come to class prepared to participate in the discussion of the day's reading/video assignment. This means that you should read the day's assignment or watch the video prior to class. A three hour course is associated with 9 total hours of work per week.

There is no textbook for this course. All of the class readings can be downloaded from the Moodle website or found via a link on the Moodle website. I reserve the right to swap out readings/videos but will always give you two weeks advance notice before doing so. All students must abide by the Student Academic Honor Code. Cheating will not be tolerated.

Because it is anticipated that students will be periodically be quarantined, a zoom meeting will be posted and the lecture will be recorded for each class. If you are not quarantined, you are expected to attend class in person.

Exams

There are three exams in the course. Each exam is worth 140 points and will consist of fifty multiple choice questions (2 points each) and four short answer questions (10 points each). Exams are not cumulative. Make up exams may be taken in emergency situations (illness, death in the family, etc.). If an exam is missed, I should be notified within 24 hours of the exam's scheduled time in order to discuss the makeup exam. Exams will be administered online due to COVID.

Quizzes/Homeworks

Quizzes and homework assignments will be scattered throughout the course. Each will be worth between 5 and 10 points.

Legislative Group Project

Each of you will be placed in a group of 5 students. As a group, you will produce a position paper on a bill being considered by the Louisiana Legislature. The Legislature will be in session from April 12th to June 10th. In March, your group will be assigned its bill. Each group must produce a position paper that includes the following:

- 1) Description of the bill
- 2) Description of the policy problem the bill is addressing
- 3) Why does this legislator care about this problem?
- 4) Is this problem specific to Louisiana or are other states experiencing (have experienced) the problem? What actions have they taken? Is this the first time the legislature has considered action on this problem? If not, give a brief history of previous attempts to deal with the problem.
- 5) What is the “treatment” or mechanism by which the legislation will fix the problem?
- 6) Does your group think this is a good solution? If there is dissent among members, each side should present its argument.
- 7) Executive Summary (one page) that addresses each of the aforementioned topics
- 8) Power point presentation for the class
- 9) The position paper and presentation are worth 80 points. The paper should be typed, double spaced using 12 Times New Roman font and be between 10 and 15 pages in length with one inch margins. Graphs and charts should be used when possible to convey information.

Grading Scale

579-600 A+	519-536 B+	459-476 C+	399-416 D+	356 and below F
555-578 A	495-518 B	435-458 C	381-398 D	
537-554 A-	477-494 B-	417-434 C-	357-380 D-	

Honors Option

For honors students who would like to take the course for Honors Credit, please see me for a book assignment. You will produce a 7-10 page summary of the book’s major findings and do a video book presentation for the class that will be uploaded to the class Moodle page.

Section One: Understanding Poverty

- January 12: Syllabus; What is public policy?
- January 14: What is poverty? How do we measure it?
- January 19: What is income inequality? How is it different than economic mobility?
- January 21: What is income inequality? Economic mobility?
Berry and Sanders. Statistics Primer: Introduction
- January 26: Why are poor people poor? Does the answer matter?
- January 28: Is the playing field really level?

- January 31: Links between poverty and brain development and adverse childhood experiences
- February 2: Adverse childhood experiences continued; Review for Exam One
- February 4: Exam One

Section Two: The Social Safety Net

- February 9: Tax Policy
- February 11: Social Security
- February 18: Health Care: What does it look like in the US?
- February 23: Health Care: What are the current major issues?
- February 25: SNAP and WIC
- March 2: Minimum Wage
- March 4: Unemployment insurance and worker's compensation
- March 9: Education
- March 11: Cash Assistance
- March 16: Cash Assistance Continued; Review for Exam Two
- March 18: Exam Two

Section Three: The Intersection of Race and Poverty

- March 23: How the Poor Became Black
- March 30: Race/Ethnicity and Support for Welfare
- April 1: Race and Discipline in Welfare Policies
- April 2: Housing and Race
- April 6: Poverty, Race, and Crime
- April 8: Poverty, Race, and Incarceration
- April 13: Poverty, Race, and Education
- April 15: Poverty, Race, and Education
- April 20: Group Presentations
- April 22: Review for Exam Three
- April 29: Final Exam 12:30-2:30