



SOA/EXL 312 Perspectives on Poverty

First offered Fall 2011

Perspectives on Poverty is an interdisciplinary course that provides students with opportunities to understand the nature and effects of poverty while engaging in relevant and purposeful service in the community. Students have an opportunity to work with a non-profit partner organization that provides assistance to improve the quality of life for individuals and under-resourced neighborhoods in Springfield. This course is an innovative learning opportunity that integrates sociological and anthropological theory, civic engagement, and intellectual growth. Learning through experience merges theory and practice and fosters opportunities for students to acquire a deeper understanding of the world.

Course Description

This is a three credit hour course designed to insure that students gain an understanding of major sociological and anthropological theories and methodologies related to poverty as a social phenomenon. The course readings and films expose students to academic and popular genres that offer perspectives on poverty. **Students will participate in at least 60 hours of community service during the course of the semester with a non-profit organization that is approved by the professor.** This course is designed to promote experiential learning while advancing the University's mission of providing ways for students to grow as engaged and concerned citizens. This course meets an ECCE engagement experience requirement or an ECCE elective requirement.

Course Approach

"Why don't they just get a job?" – A sincere enough question in the land of the free and home of the brave! This is America. Immigrants come here because of the opportunities for a better life—the American Dream. Our children grow up believing they can do and be anything they want. So then, why do we have poor people in America? There is no excuse for poverty in the 21st century! If you are poor, it's your fault.

If you have ever had such thoughts about the poor in America, you are not alone. As a culture, we are wired to value individual achievement, self-efficacy, independence, and optimism. Unfortunately, what that often means is that when we fail to succeed, it is our own fault. This course on poverty begins with a survey of cultural values, beliefs, and stereotypes associated with poverty and affluence. The perspectives informed by mainstream American values about economically marginal neighborhoods permeate myths about poverty. The first module of the course explores stereotypes of the poor and definitions and causes of poverty. Defining and diagnosing poverty strongly influences our responses. For example, if we believe the poor lack knowledge, then we will try to educate them. If we believe the primary cause of poverty is oppression by powerful people, then we will work for social justice. If we believe the cause of poverty is lack of material resources, we will give stuff to the poor. In examining definitions of poverty from various disciplines and perspectives, we will also survey the sociological theories that focus on the impact of structural factors and why members of some groups are more likely to be poor than others. The objectives of the first module is for students to gain an awareness of the complexities and paradoxes of poverty, a working vocabulary for examining social structures, and an open posture toward contrasting perspectives.

The second module challenges students to move from an etic (outside view) to an emic (inside view) of poverty. Who are the poor? Where and how do they live? Do *they* think they are poor? By listening to the voices of the “poor” provided through literature in sociology, anthropology, economics, and international studies and primary source material from students’ fieldwork, we will become aware of new and diverse perspectives. This section teaches an overview of ethnographic methodologies and examines the value of ethnographic study in demonstrating ways in which the poor negotiate their everyday life to cultivate an emic perspective of the world. Through the emic/etic framework students will begin to recognize the long reaching effects of poverty, its slippery boundaries, and pervading existence.

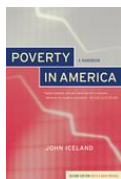
Building on the premise that (American) poverty affects all of us, the third module explores poverty alleviation and social change. Action toward poverty alleviation requires an understanding of the problem, the contextual situation, and most importantly, a respect for human dignity that shuns paternalism. A goal of this section is to guide students in creating a philosophy of service that integrates sociological principles, social action, and global citizenship. The spur toward global citizenship gives perspective to local issues of poverty because the values of equality, shared concerns for human well-being and quality of life, and membership in a world community suggest a citizenship that transcends cultural and structural boundaries. Viewing people in poverty as humans with dignity eliminates superiority and hierarchical thinking, yields compassion, grafts wounds, and reconciles damaged communities. Students are encouraged to have an open mind toward differences and a genuine respect for others where actions are rooted in knowledge about context and cultural relevancy.

Course Objectives

This course integrates and synthesizes multiple perspectives on the complex issues of poverty, and moves students toward a holistic application and appreciation of problem-solving. Students who successfully complete this course should be able to practice each of the following competencies:

- foster a reflexive posture toward community service
- balance knowledge and action while participating in community service
- identify foundational questions related to poverty
- discuss connections between social structures and poverty in America
- demonstrate awareness of culturally-influenced perspectives of poverty
- demonstrate an integrated, interdisciplinary awareness of the paradoxes of poverty in America
- demonstrate an awareness of the principles informing poverty alleviation and social change

Required Texts



Iceland, John. *Poverty in America*. 2nd edition. University of California Press, 2006.

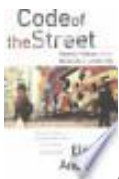


Rank, Mark Robert. *One Nation, Underprivileged: Why American Poverty Affects Us All*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

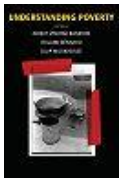


Walls, Jeannette. *The Glass Castle*. Simon and Schuster, 2007.

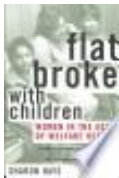
Recommended Reading



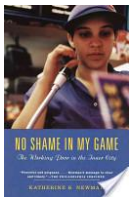
Anderson, Eli. *Code of the Street: decency, violence, and the moral life of the inner city*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2000.



Banerjee, Abhijit Vinayak, Bénabou and Dilip Mookherjee (eds). *Understanding Poverty*. Oxford University Press, 2006.



Hays, Sharon. *Flat Broke with Children: Women in the Age of Welfare Reform*. Oxford University Press, 2003.



Newman, Katherine. *No Shame in My Game: the Working Poor in the Inner City*. Random House, 2000.

Course Assignments and Grading

Service Site Participation (60 hours minimum)	25%
Service Action Plan	10%
Reflection and Fieldwork Journal	15%
Midterm Essay	15%

Final Portfolio/Presentation	25%
Readings and Seminar (Class) Participation	10%

Service Site Participation (25%)

A total of 60 hours of service is required for this course. During the first seminar you will be given a list of approved service sites and sample projects from which to choose and criteria for reporting your participation. The projects will be based in Springfield with local non-profit agencies that provide various kinds of assistance to under-resourced individuals or neighborhoods. Below is a list of approved service sites. Others may be posted before or during the first week of class.

Habitat for Humanity of Sangamon County
<http://www.habitatsangamon.com>

The Springfield Project
http://thespringfieldproject.org/Home_Page.php

Hazel Dell Elementary School
<http://www.springfield.k12.il.us/schools/hazeldell/>

Contact Ministries
<http://www.contactministries.net/>

Service Action Plan (10%)

After choosing a site, you will develop a plan of action that includes what you hope to learn from the service project, a rationale for choosing the site, and anticipated roadblocks. Separate and detailed instructions will be given during the first seminar.

Reflection and Fieldwork Journal (15%)

The purpose of the journal is to record and explore the sociological and cultural implications of issues that arise at your service sites. You are expected to incorporate the readings and site experiences/observations in these reflective entries. You will need a minimum of 20 entries to receive full credit for this assignment. I will give you more information about how write your journal entries and a criteria for grading during the first seminar.

Midterm Essay (15%)

The midterm essay will address thoughtful and critical analysis of a prompt that is based on assigned reading material. The prompt will require you to integrate the reading material, class discussions, and site experiences/observations. The midterm essay should be 4-6 double-spaced, typed pages using 12 point font.

Final ePortfolio and Presentation (25%)

The final project will be to compose an electronic portfolio using Google Sites which showcases what you have learned over the semester. Detailed instructions, technology training and assessment criteria will be given separately.

Active Participation in Seminar Sessions (15%)

The seminars are an opportunity to critically discuss the reading materials and reflect on site experiences through group discussions and activities. Your attendance and active participation in the seminars is vital to your success in the course.

Criteria for evaluating Active Seminar Participation

A / excellent Yahoo! Standing Ovation!	Teaching Assistant: consistently and actively takes initiative and demonstrates diligence during discussions and class activities; asks important questions; generates discussion; responds to colleagues' ideas; thoughtfully challenges ideas; understands and articulates multiple perspectives or positions on a topic; draws out others and genuinely and actively listens; prepares for class by bringing annotated readings, questions for discussions, and illustrations from site.
B / good Yay!	Discussion Generator: often takes initiative during discussions and activities; asks key questions and brings together both the readings and personal experience and observations from site; knows the readings well and comes in with extensive notes fully prepared to get the discussion going; draws others out and listens well.
C / adequate eh, okay.	Participant: speaks regularly through most discussions, but tends to offer just what was in the readings without her/his interpretation; did the readings but doesn't have a complex overview of the authors' arguments; tries to provide examples and observations from site, but may not show significant understanding.
D / poor Why bother?	Hmmmm —may tend to wander away from tasks; speaks regularly but only offers own opinions or experiences without tying them to the readings; seems not to know the readings much; does not offer experiences or observations from site; seems disinterested in the course and/or classmates' experiences.
F/ Ouch!	Not sure what to call you... Did you read?; speaks rarely or disrespects, dismisses or thinks it is funny to hassle others. Acts like s/he doesn't want to be here. Does not take the class seriously.

Criteria borrowed from Heather Dell

Grading Scale (Percentages)

93-100 A
90-92 A-
87-89 B+
83-86 B
80-82 B-
78-79 C+
73-77 C
70-72 C-
67-69 D+
63-66 D
60-62 D-
59 and below F

Incompletes will only be given if you are passing the course (C or above) at the time that the incomplete is requested and you have had an emergency during the last part of the semester that prevents you from completing one of the final assignments. Incompletes **will not be given** so that you may avoid a failing grade or repeat the course.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is required at all seminar sessions and is in each student's interest. Students who attend class regularly generally enjoy the course more, learn more, and earn higher grades. Through active participation in class activities you enrich the learning experience of others, fellow students and teachers alike. You can miss one seminar during the semester without penalty. After the one "free" absence, your grade will be lowered at the discretion of your professor. Missing more than two seminars could result in failure of the course.

I recognize that emergencies and extraordinary events can prevent you from coming to class, but please take note that I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences (that means that we will not take responsibility for deciding between your illness and your lack of motivation, for example). Be sure to save your absence for when and if you really need to use it. If you have any questions about this policy, feel free to contact me.

Tardiness policy: Consistently arriving late or leaving early is not acceptable and is disruptive to your colleagues. A habit of tardiness will affect your grade as the professor deems necessary. As students you are always responsible for your work. Just as employers expect deadlines to be met regardless of personal exigency, I do also. Please recognize the difference between "fault" and "responsibility." It may not be your fault that your car breaks down at home and you miss a class, but you are still responsible for the work done in class that day (and the absence policy still applies).

Notice for athletes and other students in university-sponsored activities (forensics, etc.): I will allow a modest number of absences without the penalties. You should have a notice from your coach with the dates of proposed absences. You remain responsible for any work that is due while you are away (either turn it in before you leave or take your computer with you).

Late Policy

No late assignments are accepted without prior permission from the professor. Please refer to the schedule for due dates.

Electronic Devices Policy

Please shut off all cell phones and noise making electronic devices **before** you enter the classroom. MP3 players, I-Pods, and other devices with earbuds are not allowed in class. Electronic gaming devices are not allowed in class.

UIS Academic Integrity Policy

I support the UIS policy on Academic Integrity, which states, in part: "Academic integrity is at the heart of the university's commitment to academic excellence. The UIS community strives to communicate and support clear standards of integrity, so that undergraduate and graduate students can internalize those standards and carry them forward in their personal and professional lives. Living a life with integrity prepares students to assume leadership roles in their communities as well as in their chosen profession. Alumni can be proud of their education and the larger society will benefit from the University's contribution to the development of ethical leaders. Violations of academic integrity demean the violator, degrade the learning process, deflate the meaning of grades, discredit the accomplishments of past and present students, and tarnish the reputation of the university for all its members."

Academic sanctions range from a warning to expulsion from the university, depending on the severity of your violation and your history of violations. Whatever the sanction, I will file a report of academic dishonesty to the Office of the Provost.

You are responsible for understanding and complying with the UIS Academic Integrity Policy available at <http://www.uis.edu/campussenate/academicintegrity.htm>

Students with Disabilities

Reasonable accommodations are available for students who have a documented disability. Please notify the Office of Disability Services (Student Life Building, Room 11; 206-6666) during the first week of class of any accommodations needed for the course. Late notification may cause the requested accommodations to be unavailable.

Course Calendar

Below is an outline of topics and assignments for the required seminars and weeks of service. The course is structured by modules which are described below. Additional readings will be added to most seminars and will be provided in advance through eDocs or BlackBoard.

Week	Topic	Assignment
1	<u>Seminar 1: Introduction to Course and Syllabus</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is service-learning? • What is poverty? • Site/Project selection criteria 	Read Syllabus Begin writing Proposal for Service Project

Module One: *Just Get a Job!*

2	<u>Seminar 2—Defining Poverty</u> Film: <i>Poverty in America: Born with a Wooden Spoon</i>	Read: Iceland, Chapters 1&2; Rank, Chapter 1 Service Project Proposal DUE
3	<u>Seminar 3—Causes of Poverty</u> Film: <i>Down...But not out! A Look at Situational Poverty</i>	Read: Iceland, Chapters 4&5; Rank, Chapters 2&3
4	Individual Conferences	Continue to write Reflective Journal
5	Individual Conferences	Continue to write Reflective Journal

Module Two: *Who are the poor?*

6	<u>Seminar 4—Voices of the Poor</u> Simulation: Who da Po?	Read: Walls, <i>The Glass Castle</i>
7	<u>Seminar 5—A Cause for Concern</u> Case Study and Panel Presentation on Mathare Valley, Kenya	Read: Rank, Chapters 4-6 Read: selected ethnographic writings (posted on eDocs)
8	Individual Conferences	Midterm Essay DUE Continue to write Reflective Journal
9	Individual Conferences	Continue to write Reflective Journal 30 hours of service DUE

Module Three: *What can I do?*

10	<u>Seminar 6—Ending Poverty</u> Film & Discussion: <i>The End of Poverty</i> http://www.theendofpoverty.com/synopsis.html	Read: TBA
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11	<u>Seminar 7—Ending Poverty: Micro-financing and Technology?</u>	Read: Rank, Chapters 7&8
12	Individual Conferences	Continue to write Reflective Journal
13	Individual Conferences	Continue to write Reflective Journal
14	<u>Workshop: ePortfolio Training</u>	Reflective Journal Due
15	<u>ePortfolio Presentations</u>	Total Service hours due (minimum 60 hours) Final Portfolio DUE

NOTE: The professor reserves the right to make any changes in the syllabus and schedule as deemed necessary.