

The Politics of Poverty (POLI 4017)

Tues/Thurs 10:30-11:50; E134 Howe Russell E
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, for a total of 60 points. You will turn these assignments in via Moodle using Turn It In or the quiz function.

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 that was considered by the Louisiana Legislature during the 2021 session.

- 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) A discussion of what happened to the bill. This section should focus on the various proponents and opponents of the bill. If your bill was not successful, you should give your thoughts on whether future attempts might be and what needs to change to ensure success. If your bill was successful and had been tried in the past, what changed this go round?
- 8) Executive Summary (one page) that addresses each of the aforementioned topics
- 9) The position paper and presentation are worth 100 points. The paper should be typed, double spaced using 12 Times New Roman font and be between 15 to 18 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

- August 24: Syllabus; What is public policy?
- August 26: What is poverty? How do we measure it?
- August 31: Why are poor people poor? Does the answer matter?
- September 2: What is income inequality? Economic mobility?
- September 7: Basics of Research Methods
- September 9: Is the playing field really level?

September 14: Poverty and Brain Development
September 16: Adverse Childhood Experiences
September 21: Review; Possible Guest Speaker on ACEs
September 23: Exam One

Section Two: The Social Safety Net

September 28: Tax Policy and the Minimum Wage
September 30: Social Security
October 5: Unemployment insurance and worker's compensation
October 7: Health Care
October 12: SNAP and WIC
October 14: Cash Assistance under AFDC
October 19: Cash Assistance under TANF
October 21: Fall Holiday
October 26: Education
October 28: TOPS and Review for Exam Two
November 2: Exam Two

Section Three: The Intersection of Race and Poverty

November 4: How the Poor Became Black
November 9: Race/Ethnicity and Support for Welfare
November 11: Race and Discipline in Welfare Policies
November 16: Housing and Race
November 18: Poverty, Race, and Crime
November 23: Poverty, Race, and Incarceration
November 25: Thanksgiving
November 30: Poverty, Race, and Education
December 2: Poverty, Race, and Education and Review for Exam 3
December 8: Final Exam 3:00 to 5:00