I. **Course Description**

Confronting issues of poverty and inequality is a core value of the social work profession. This course will provide students with a theoretical, empirical, and analytical understanding of poverty and inequality in the US. Throughout the course comparisons will be made with other developed nations. The course will address the following four broad areas:

First, we will explore a number of competing theoretical perspectives on the causes of poverty and inequality and examine the roles of ideology and values in the response to poverty and inequality in the US and other wealthy nations.

Second, we will examine the extent and characteristics of poverty and inequality in the US. This will include an understanding of how these concepts are measured, as well as their patterns and dynamics over recent decades. The course will explore how the risk of poverty varies with respect to differences in race, ethnicity, gender, age, family background, and geographical residence. Comparisons will be made with other developed countries.

Third, the course will examine the effects and consequences of poverty on individuals, families, and communities. These will include the detrimental effects of poverty and inequality upon health, education, and life chances. We will again compare these effects with those in other wealthy nations.

Finally, the course will review social policies in the US which directly or indirectly impact poverty and inequality and will compare them to those in other developed countries. We will also examine the role of social work in addressing and confronting issues of poverty, inequality and social justice more broadly.

II. **Place of Course in Program**

This course is a foundation year elective and is open to all interested students who have completed Social Welfare Policy and Services I (SWPS I). The course is also open to doctoral students and to graduate students from other schools and departments.
III. **Course Objectives:**

At the conclusion of this course, students will:

1. Understand and critically evaluate the roles of ideology and values in society’s views of and response to poverty and inequality.

2. Understand the different measures of poverty and inequality, and their consequences for the social construction of the problem, policy response, and political debate.

3. Be familiar with the extent, patterns, and trends of poverty and inequality in the US and how they are distributed across demographic groups and geographic areas in the US.

4. Understand how poverty and inequality impact all aspects of individual, family, and community well-being in the US.

5. Understand the role of public policy and its implementation in producing, maintaining and alleviating poverty and inequality in the US and how this compares with other developed countries.

6. Understand and appreciate the role that social workers can play in addressing and confronting issues related to poverty and inequality through clinical practice, policy practice, research, advocacy and all other forms of social work practice.

IV. **Course Requirements**

Students are expected to attend class, arrive on time, and be present for the entire session. Students are also expected to complete all assigned readings so that they can fully participate in class discussions.

Students are expected to read The New York Times regularly to be fully informed of current events that are related to issues of poverty and inequality in the US and globally.

Students will write several short papers related to required readings, have two take home exams, and will present several current events articles to the class.

V. **Grading**

Grades for the course will be based on the following criteria:

1. Three short reaction papers to readings (30%)

   Students will sign up to prepare short papers (3-5 pages) for three class sessions. Students will very briefly summarize the readings for that session and come up with 3 or 4 discussion questions. Students will be prepared to help facilitate class
discussion for that session.

2. Two take home exams (50%)
   Each exam will be worth 25% of the grade and will evaluate students’ understanding of the concepts discussed in class and their ability to critically apply those concepts. Exams will be based on readings, lectures and class discussions.

3. Current events (10%)
   Students will sign up for two class sessions to briefly present a relevant article from the newspaper to the class. A one-page description of the article and explanation of how it relates to our course will be turned in.

4. Attendance (10%)
   Students are expected to attend each class, arrive on time, and stay for the entire session.

VI. Course Evaluation

Rutgers University issues a survey that evaluates both the course and the instructor. This survey is completed by students toward the end of the semester, and all answers are confidential and anonymous. The instructor may also choose to conduct a mid-semester evaluation.

VII. Required Texts


AND ONE of these ethnographies


OR


OR


OR


VIII. Course Outline

Week 1: Views of poverty
Introduction Course overview Why are people poor? Why are there poor people?

Readings:
Schiller, Chapter 1: Views of Poverty and Inequality.


Week 2: Views of poverty - continued
The role of values and ideology
Brief historical background on evolution of public responsibility for poor

Readings:


Week 3: Measuring poverty
Relative vs. absolute measures
Alternative measures
Federal poverty guidelines
Income vs. assets
Comparative perspective – developed and developing nations

Readings:


**Week 4: Counting the Poor**
How many people are poor?
Who is poor?
Comparative perspective – developed and developing nations

**FILM:** Take it From Me [http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2001/takeitfromme/thefilm.html](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2001/takeitfromme/thefilm.html)

**Readings:**
Schiller, Chapter 3: Counting the Poor.


**Week 5: Inequality**
What is inequality?
Types of inequality
Arguments for and against inequality
Measuring inequality

**Readings:**
Schiller, Chapter 2: Inequality


Week 6: Inequality - continued
Who is unequal?
Comparative perspective – developed and developing nations

FILM: Life and Debt (Understanding Globalization)
http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2001/lifeanddebt/

Readings:
Schiller, Chapter 4: Global Poverty and Inequality


Week 7: Discrimination
What is discrimination? Measuring discrimination Types of discrimination

FILM: True Colors
**Readings:**
Schiller, Bradley. Chapter 11: Discrimination in Education.


**Week 8: Discrimination - continued**
Discrimination and criminal justice Incarceration

**FILM:** The Two Nations of Black America
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/race/etc/synopsis.html

**Readings**


**Weeks 9, 10, and 11: Effects of Poverty, Inequality and Discrimination**
Intergenerational transmission of poverty Timing, duration, and intensity of poverty Effects on child well-being Effects on health across the life course Comparative perspective – developed countries


**Readings:**
Week 12: Policy Response
Brief overview of current US anti-poverty policies

Comparative perspective – developed countries

**FILM:** Ending Welfare as We Know It

**Readings:**

Schiller, Bradley. Chapter 13: The Welfare Programs

Schiller, Bradley. Chapter 14: Social Insurance Programs

Schiller, Bradley. Chapter 15: Equal Opportunity Programs


**Week 13: Policy response – continued**

Most promising policies in the US Where do we go from here?

**FILM:** Critical Condition: Sick and Uninsured in the US

**Readings:**


**Weeks 14 and 15: Role of social work**

Public’s view of the poor

Education

Advocacy

Commitment to addressing social injustice

**Guest Speaker?**

**Readings:**

Martin Gilens. 1996. “Race and Poverty in America - Public Misperceptions and the


