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, inequality, and discrimination in the US, and how these fundamental elements of the social environment affect human behavior across the life course. 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 critically examine the complex interplay of processes and contexts that contribute to and are also consequences of poverty and inequality across the life course. These will include discrimination, segregation, family structure, employment, incarceration, health, exposure to violence, and child development. We will again compare these processes and consequences 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 serves as a foundation year general elective as well as a Human Behavior in the Social Environment (HBSE) distribution requirement for all MSW students. The pre-requisites for the course are HBSE I and Social Work Practice 1. The course is also open to doctoral
students and to graduate students from other schools and departments with the instructor’s permission.

III. **Course Objectives:**

At the conclusion of this course, students will:

1. Understand and critically evaluate the theoretical background and 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 and describe the fundamental role that these social problems play in human behavior across the life course.

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. **School-Wide Learning Goal**

The Rutgers School of Social Work, school-wide learning goal is to prepare students for practice and leadership roles in the fields of social work and social welfare. This goal is operationalized using **three** of the prescribed competencies from the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE):

1. Identify as a professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly;
2. Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment; and
3. Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgement.

V. **Course Expectations**

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.
All course materials are on the Sakai website for the course. Students are expected to access readings, lecture slides, and all other material and submit assignments through the website.

Students are expected to read emails and announcements sent by the professor through their Rutgers email account to stay informed of any last minute changes in the course schedule, readings, or assignments.

VI. Course Requirements

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

1. **Five (5) short papers responding to questions based on weekly class readings (40%)**
   Students will sign up for five weekly sessions for which they will prepare responses to the questions posed for that week. Short papers (2 DOUBLE-SPACED PAGES MAX) will be turned in BEFORE the class session for which they are due. Students will be prepared to help facilitate class discussion for that session.

2. **One take home final exam (25%)**
   The exam will evaluate students’ understanding of the concepts discussed in class and their ability to critically apply those concepts. Exam will be short-answer format and will be based on readings, videos, lectures, and class discussions. Students will be allowed to use class materials for the exam, but must work alone.

3. **Ethnography reading response (20%)**
   Students will prepare a short summary of their chosen ethnography, tying the work to the concepts covered in readings, lectures, and class discussions. Please see assignment sheet for specific instructions. Students will also discuss their chosen ethnography in class.

4. **Five current events articles (10%)**
   Students will find and summarize relevant articles from *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post* for five (5) class sessions. Each article will be accompanied by a one (1) paragraph summary of the article and explanation of how it is related to our course. Students should be prepared to briefly present their article to the class.

5. **Attendance and participation (5%)**
   Students are expected to attend each class, arrive on time, and stay for the entire session. Students are also expected to be prepared for class by having read the assigned material and to actively participate and engage in class discussions.

VII. Rutgers MSW Program-Wide Grading Scale

Grades for all MSW courses will be assigned based on the following percentage point cutoffs. Scores of .5 and above will be rounded up to the next whole number.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>92-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>82-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>70-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VIII. 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.

IX. Resource Information for Personal Safety, Dating Violence and Sexual Assault

For students who have concerns about personal safety, harassment, dating and/or domestic violence, Rutgers offers assistance and guidance through the Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance. Website: http://vpva.rutgers.edu/. Their services are available 24 hours/day, 7 days a week. For immediate assistance: 848-932-1181.

X. Required Texts


and ONE of these ethnographies:


OR

OR

OR

OR

OR
OR – VAWC Required Choice

XI. Semester at a Glance Course Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Part 1: Understanding Poverty &amp; Inequality</em>&lt;br&gt;Introduction &amp; Course Overview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Views and Values about Poverty &amp; Inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Defining &amp; Measuring Poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Extent of Poverty &amp; Characteristics of the Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Defining &amp; Measuring Inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Inequality &amp; Economic Mobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><em>Part 2: Processes, Causes, Contexts &amp; Consequences</em>&lt;br&gt;Employment &amp; Labor Market Conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Discrimination &amp; The Roots of Segregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Segregation, Neighborhoods, Housing &amp; Schools, <em>Start Reading Ethnography</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><strong>SPRING BREAK</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Incarceration &amp; The Criminal Justice System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Family Structure &amp; Family Formation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Health &amp; Child Well-Being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Ethnography Summaries Due: <em>Presentations and Discussion</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td><em>Part 3: Policies: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly</em>&lt;br&gt;Anti-Poverty Policies &amp; Tax Policies, <em>Final Exam Distributed</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promising Policies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
XII. Detailed Course Outline
Part I: Understanding Poverty & Inequality

Week 1:
Topic: Introduction & course overview
- Course overview
- Why study poverty and inequality?

Required Readings:
Iceland: Introduction (pages 1-10)


Week 2:
Topic: Views and values about poverty & inequality
Questions to Consider
- What are the different views of and perspectives on the potential causes of poverty?
- How have these views evolved historically?
- What roles do values and ideology play in thinking about poverty?
- Which views are more in line w/conservative political ideologies and which are more in line w/liberal or progressive ideologies?
- What are the inherent problems (conundrums) with designing anti-poverty programs?

Required Readings:
Iceland: Chapter 1: Early Views of Poverty in America. (p. 11 – 21).


Week 3:
Topic: Defining & measuring poverty
Questions to Consider
What are different ways to measure poverty?
What is the difference between consumption vs. resources measures of poverty?
How is poverty officially measured in the US?
How was this measure constructed? What is included? What is excluded? What are the thresholds?
What are the main problems with the Official Poverty Measure (OPM)?
What is the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM)? And how does it address some of the problems with the OPM?
What role does political ideology play in trying to measure poverty?

SUBMIT ETHNOGRAPHY CHOICE

Required Readings:

Iceland: Chapter 2: Methods of Measuring Poverty (p. 22-38)

How the Census Bureau Measures Poverty. 2016 (1 page)
https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/poverty/guidance/poverty-measures.html

Short, K. 2012. The Supplemental Poverty Measure: Examining the Incidence and Depth of Poverty in the US Taking Account of Taxes and Transfers in 2011. (ONLY Intro and Table 1, p 1-4)


Botheac, Melissa & Cooper, Donna. 2011. What You Need When You’re Poor: Heritage Foundation Hasn’t a Clue. Center for American Progress. (1 page)


Week 4:

Topic: How much and who? Extent of poverty and characteristics of the poor

Questions to Consider

- What is the extent of poverty in the US?
- Which groups are at greatest risk of being poor?
- How have these things changed over time?
- How do we compare to other rich countries?

**Required Readings:**

Iceland: Chapter 3: Characteristics of the Poor (p. 39-60)


**Useful Resources:**


Experimental Poverty Measures https://www.census.gov/hhes/povmeas/

---

**Week 5:**

**Topic: What is inequality? defining & measuring**

**Questions to Consider**

- What is inequality and how does it differ from poverty?
- How is inequality measured?
- What is the extent of inequality in the US?
- How does wealth inequality compare to income inequality? Which one is higher?
- How do we compare to other rich countries?

**VIDEO**

Wealth Inequality in America. Video. (6 mins) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPKKQnijnsM

**Required Readings:**


  Chapter 1: “Race, Wealth, and Inequality.” (p. 11-33).
  Chapter 2: “A Sociology of Race and Inequality.” (p. 35-54).


---

**Week 6:**

**Topic: Inequality & economic mobility**

**Questions to Consider:**

- What are the arguments about the positive and negative consequences of inequality?
- What is economic mobility and how is it related to income and wealth inequality?
- What is the difference between absolute and relative mobility?
- How does the US compare to other developed countries on these measures?

**VIDEO**

Inequality Debate – NPR – Youtube video (1 hour) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GHKp6tPsEY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GHKp6tPsEY)


**ACTIVITIES**

Interactive Mobility Map

**Required Readings:**

Birdsong, Nicholas. 2014. The Consequences of Economic Inequality. The Seven Pillars Institute. (p. 1-6).
http://sevenpillarsinstitute.org/case-studies/consequences-economic-inequality


http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2012/pursuingamerica ndreampdf.pdf


---

**Part II: Processes, Causes, Contexts & Consequences**

**Week 7:**

**Topic:** Employment & labor market conditions

**Questions to Consider**

- What are some characteristics of our economic and political system that contribute to poverty and inequality?
- What has happened to median wages? Median income? Why?
- If everyone had a job would poverty be eradicated? Why or why not?
- What role does immigration play?
- What are the debates about raising the minimum wage?

**RADIO CLIP**

WNYC series on living on the median income

Median income in every census tract in the country
http://project.wnyc.org/median-income-nabes/

**FILM:**

Waging a Living – Low-Wage Work in the US
Required Readings:

Iceland, Chapter 5: Causes of Poverty, Part 1 (ONLY p. 79-88)

http://economics.mit.edu/files/5554


Week 8:
Topic: Discrimination
Questions to consider
• How can discrimination be defined and measured?
• What are the different types of discrimination?
• How does discrimination in education, employment, housing, credit, and consumer markets lead to poverty and inequality?
• Which groups are at risk?
• How does gender fit into this?

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YyL5EcAwB9c
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOS3BBmUxvs

Readings:

Iceland, Chapter 5: Causes of Poverty, Part 2 (ONLY p. 89-113)


Implicit Discrimination Test: **Register and Take the Test** (this will take 10-15 minutes). Make note of your results for yourself. You will NOT need to reveal your results in class. [https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/index.jsp](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/index.jsp)

**NO CLASS, SPRING BREAK**

**Week 9:**

**Topic: Segregation, neighborhoods, housing & education**

**Questions to Consider**
- What is the relationship between discrimination and segregation?
- What role did housing policies play? And what role do they continue to play?
- What role do neighborhoods play in poverty, inequality, and social mobility?
- How are housing policies related to education and children’s life chances?
- What role do schools play?

**RADIO CLIP.**

**Required Readings**


Week 10:
Topic: Incarceration
Questions to Consider
- How can incarceration be both a cause and a consequence of poverty and inequality?
- How have policies contributed to incarceration rates in the US?
- How do incarceration/corrections rates in the US compare with other countries?
- Which groups are most at risk of involvement with the corrections system? Why?
- What is disenfranchisement? Who is most affected?
- How can disenfranchisement be both a cause and a consequence of poverty and inequality?

FILM & AUDIO:
Video about inevitability of incarceration, Bruce Western (from Atlantic Article; 2 mins)
http://www.theatlantic.com/video/embed/?brightcove_id=4477973230001

NPR: Incarceration and families (2 Parts: 19 minutes)

NPR Special Report: Economics of Prisons (2 parts: 18 minutes)

Who benefits when a prison comes to town (2011; 11 minutes)

Private Prisons Cashing in on Prison Labor (2008; 12 minutes)

Required Readings:


---

**Week 1: Topic: Families, family Structure & family formation**

Questions to Consider

- How has poverty and inequality contributed to changes in families, family structure, and family formation?
- How can family structure contribute to poverty and inequality?
- What is the role of incarceration?

**VIDEO**


**Required Readings:**


---

**Week 12: Topic: Health & child well-being**

Questions to consider

- How and why does poverty impact children’s health, development, and life chances?
- How does duration, timing, and severity of poverty matter for children?
- How are neighborhoods related to child development?
• How is poverty and inequality related to health?
• What is the socioeconomic gradient in health?
• How else can SES and social conditions “get under the skin” to make us sick? Evidence?
• What do we know about differences in health by race/ethnicity in the US?
• What role might discrimination play?

**FILM:** *Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick? Part I: In Sickness and In Wealth. (50 mins.) Part II: When the Bough Breaks. (30 minutes)*

**Required Readings:**

http://www.macles.ucsf.edu/downloads/Reaching_for_a_Healthier_Life.pdf


http://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/focus/pdfs/foc262f.pdf


**VAWC – Reading**


**Week 13:**

**Topic:** ETHNOGRAPHY ASSIGNMENT PRESENTATIONS & DISCUSSION

Week 14:
Topic: Current US anti-poverty policies & tax policies

Questions to consider

- What do we mean by progressive and regressive taxes? What are examples of each?
- What is the tax burden on different segments of the population?
- How has the tax burden changed?
- What is the difference between taxes, tax expenditures, and government programs?
- What role do all these policy instruments play in redistributing wealth?
- Who benefits most from the government? Who benefits the least?
- What are the largest and most important anti-poverty programs?

FINAL EXAM DISTRIBUTED

ACTIVITY
Interactive Map: State by State Distributional Analysis of Who Pays Taxes
http://www.itep.org/whopays/#map

Required Readings:

Iceland, Chapter 7: Poverty & Policy (ONLY p. 139-155)


The 12 Largest Individual Tax Exemptions:
http://taxfoundation.org/blog/12-largest-individual-tax-expenditures

Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. 2015. Average and Marginal Tax rates:

VAWC Reading

Week 15:
Topic: What are the most promising policies?
Questions to consider

- What are some of the most promising social policies that have been enacted or proposed that could reduce poverty and inequality?
• How are these policies (or why would these policies be if not yet enacted) particularly helpful at reducing poverty and inequality?
• What are the arguments for and against these policies?

**PODCAST**

New Yorker – Politics of Income Inequality

**Required Readings:**

Iceland, Conclusion (p. 157-163).

http://www.epi.org/pay-agenda/

http://www.cbpp.org/research/federal-tax/policy-basics-the-earned-income-tax-credit


http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/10/opinion/sunday/payback-time-for-women.html

**VAWC - Reading**


**XIII. Academic Integrity**

All work submitted in a graduate course must be your own.

It is unethical and a violation of the University’s Academic Integrity Policy to present the ideas or words of another without clearly and fully identifying the source. Inadequate citations will be construed as an attempt to misrepresent the cited material as your own. Use the APA citation style which is described in the Publication manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th edition.
Plagiarism is the representation of the words or ideas of another as one’s own in any academic exercise. To avoid plagiarism, every direct quotation must be identified by quotation marks or by appropriate indentation and must be properly cited in the text or footnote. Acknowledgement is required when material from another source is stored in print, electronic, or other medium and is paraphrased or summarized in whole or in part in one’s own words. To acknowledge a paraphrase properly, one might state: “to paraphrase Plato’s comment…” and conclude with a footnote identifying the exact reference. A footnote acknowledging only a directly quoted statement does not suffice to notify the reader of any preceding or succeeding paraphrased material. Information which is common knowledge, such as names of leaders of prominent nations, basic scientific laws, etc., need not be footnoted; however, all facts or information obtained in reading or research that are not common knowledge among students in the course must be acknowledged. In addition to materials specifically cited in the text, only materials that contribute to one’s general understanding of the subject may be acknowledged in the bibliography. Plagiarism can, in some cases, be a subtle issue. Any question about what constitutes plagiarism should be discussed with the faculty member.

Plagiarism as described in the University’s Academic Integrity Policy is as follows:

*Plagiarism:* Plagiarism is the use of another person’s words, ideas, or results without giving that person appropriate credit. To avoid plagiarism, every direct quotation must be identified by quotation marks or appropriate indentation and both direct quotation and paraphrasing must be cited properly according to the accepted format for the particular discipline or as required by the instructor in a course. Some common examples of plagiarism are:

- Copying word for word (i.e. quoting directly) from an oral, printed, or electronic source without proper attribution.
- Paraphrasing without proper attribution, i.e., presenting in one’s own words another person’s written words or ideas as if they were one’s own.
- Submitting a purchased or downloaded term paper or other materials to satisfy a course requirement.
- Incorporating into one’s work graphs, drawings, photographs, diagrams, tables, spreadsheets, computer programs, or other non-textual material from other sources without proper attribution”.

Plagiarism along with any and all other violations of academic integrity by graduate and professional students will normally be penalized more severely than violations by undergraduate students. Since all violations of academic integrity by a graduate or professional student are potentially separable under the Academic Integrity Policy, faculty members should not adjudicate alleged academic integrity violations by graduate and professional students, but should refer such allegations to the appropriate Academic Integrity Facilitator (AIF) or to the Office of Student Conduct. The AIF that you should contact is Antoinette Y. Farmer, 848.932.5358. The student shall be notified in writing, by email or hand delivery, of the alleged violation and of the fact that the matter has been referred to the AIF for adjudication. This notification shall be done within 10 days of identifying the alleged violation. Once the student has been notified of the allegation, the student may not drop the course or withdraw from the school until the adjudication
process is complete. A TZ or incomplete grade shall be assigned until the case is resolved. For more information regarding the Rutgers Academic Integrity Policies and Procedures, see: http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-at-rutgers.

It has been recommended by the Office of Student Conduct that the honor pledge below be written on all examinations and major course assignments.

To promote a strong culture of academic integrity, Rutgers has adopted the following honor pledge to be written and signed on examinations and major course assignments submitted for grading: *On my honor, I have neither received nor given any unauthorized assistance on this examination.*

### XIV. Disability Accommodation

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus’ disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form.

Please Note: Any student who believes that s/he may need an accommodation in this class due to a disability should contact the University Office of Disability Services, Lucy Stone Hall, Livingston Campus 54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Suite A145, Piscataway, NJ 08854-8045, email address: dsoffice@rci.rutgers. Phone: (848) 445-6800, fax: (732) 445-3388, for a letter of accommodation. (Undergraduate New Brunswick students should contact the Coordinator for Students with Disabilities for their College.) Students who are taken courses in Camden should contact Mr. Tim S. Pure, Assistant Director/Disability Services Coordinator, Rutgers-Camden Learning Center, Armitage, Hall, Room 231, 311 N. 5th Street, Camden, NJ 08102, email address: tpure@camden.rutgers.edu. Students who are taken courses in Newark should contact Ms. Genevieve Sumski, Disability Services Coordinator, Robeson Campus Center-Newark, 350 ML King, Jr. Boulevard, Newark, NJ 07102-1898. Any student, who has already received a letter of accommodation, should contact the instructor privately to discuss implementation of his/her accommodations immediately. Failure to discuss implementation of accommodations with the instructor promptly may result in denial of your accommodations.