SPP 836
SEMINAR ON POVERTY AND PUBLIC POLICY
Winter 2004

T/Th 8:30-10:00
Location: School of Education, Room 2310

Professor Rebecca M. Blank
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I. Course Description

This course analyzes the conditions and causes of poverty within the United States, relying on a multidisciplinary literature from economics, sociology, political science, and psychology that has attempted to analyze U.S. poverty. The bewildering number of anti-poverty programs that have been tried in the last 20 years underscores the extent of disagreement about the causes of poverty, the situation of the poor, and the role of the government in encouraging income redistribution and social change. We will discuss the relationship between various intellectual/research approaches and various policy approaches. The first part of the course explores the problem of poverty, including a discussion of various causal theories about poverty and the underlying implications of these theories. The second part of the course analyzes specific research issues, many of them tied to particular policy debates, such as the effect of the economy on the poor, the role of welfare on family formation, the impact of neighborhood characteristics on residents’ behavior, or the impact of recent welfare reforms on labor market behavior and family well-being.

II. Course Requirements

1. Timely completion of required readings.
2. Participation in class meetings.
3. One major paper, which reviews the literature and lays out a research proposal relating to a key issue in poverty. Students considering thesis work in this area should use this paper to explore a possible topic.
4. Participation in leading one class discussion on a specific set of research papers
5. Final exam.

Grades will be calculated as follows:

Major Paper (due Tuesday, April 20)……………….. 40%
Class Discussion leadership………………………… 15%
Final Exam (Tuesday, April 22, 10:30-12:30)…….. 25%
General Class participation………………………. 20%
The paper, the final exam, and the leadership of class discussion will be discussed further in class. During the first month, this class will meet concurrently with the master’s level class, SPP 736, Poverty, Inequality, and Public Policy. Starting in mid-February, the Ph.D. students in SPP 836 will meet on Tuesdays with the master’s level class and on Thursdays by themselves with Professor Blank to discuss research papers in key areas of poverty. These discussions will focus broadly on the methodologies as well as the conclusions of the papers.

III. Readings

All required readings are marked with a “**” on the attached reading list. The following books are available at Ulrich’s, Michigan Book and Supply, or the Union Bookstore and are required reading. They are also on reserve in Foster Library.


All other required readings (except those marked otherwise) are available in two coursepacks that are for sale at Ulrich’s and also on reserve in Foster Library. One coursepack is available under SPP736 (Poverty, Inequality and Public Policy) and contains readings that will be used for those days when class is held jointly with the master’s students. The other coursepack is for Ph.D. students only (for those days when we meet separately) and is available under SPP836. In this syllabus, the readings marked with a “** (P)” are from the SPP736 coursepack, while the readings marked with a ** (PhD) are from the SPP836 (Ph.D.) coursepack.

For most days, the reading list includes a number of optional readings. Students with long-term research interests in the area of poverty will find it useful to become familiar with all of the readings. For Ph.D. students with long-term interests in the area of poverty and welfare, the following books might also be useful to acquire and read (these are all available through amazon.com.) We do not read any of these books in their entirety in this course, but reference them in several places on the reading list:


I. The Problem of Poverty
(Ford School MPP students are excused from class on January 6 and 8 due to the IPE).

(A) Organizational/Introductory Class (Tuesday, Jan 6, KS & RB)

(B) One view of Poverty (Thursday, January 8, KS & RB)

** No Shame in My Game. (Please come to class on Jan 8 prepared to discuss this book.)

II. Defining and Measuring Poverty

(A) Who Are the Poor? (Tuesday, Jan 13, KS and RB)

** It Takes A Nation. Chapter 1.

** No Shame in My Game. Chapter 1.

   A. Kotlowitz. There Are No Children Here

   M. Harrington. The Other America.

(B) Measuring Poverty (Thursday, Jan 15, RB)


(C) Poverty Dynamics (Tuesday, Jan 20, KS)


** Mary Corcoran, “Mobility Persistence and the Intergenerational Determinants of Children’s Success.” Understanding Poverty. Chapter 4.
II. Causes of Poverty

(A) Economic/Market Models (Thursday, January 22, RB)

Chapter 6 and Chapter 9. Addison-Wesley, 2000


(B) Institutional/Structural Models (Tuesday, January 27, RB)


(NOTE: When Work Disappears has been an influential book. Students with long-term research interests in poverty are encouraged to read the entire volume.)


(C) Cultural/Behavioral Models (Thursday, January 29, RB)


(NOTE: Beyond Entitlement has been an influential book. Students with long-term research interests in poverty are encouraged to read the entire volume.)


III. A History of Responding to Poverty

(A) *Before the 1960s* (Tuesday, Feb 3, RB)


(B) *The War on Poverty and Beyond: 1960-1996* (Thursday, Feb 5, RB)


(NOTE: Both *Losing Ground* and *Poor Support* have been influential books and students with long-term research interests in poverty are encouraged to read both volumes in their entirety.)


(C) *The 1996 Reforms and Afterwards* (Tuesday, Feb 10, RB)


IV. Welfare and Work

(A) PhD Seminar: Work Disincentives and Welfare Dependence (Thursday, Feb 12)

** It Takes A Nation, Chapter 3


(B) Work Disincentives/Welfare Dependence (Tuesday, Feb 17, RB)

** It Takes A Nation, Chapter 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3


(C) PhD Seminar: Mandatory Welfare-to-work Programs (Thursday, Feb 19)

** It Takes A Nation, Chapter 4.7 and 4.8.


V. Critiques of Welfare and Family

(A) Fertility and Family Structure Among the Poor (Tuesday, Mar 2, KS)


(B) Ph.D. Seminar: Marriage and Family Formation Strategies (Thursday, Mar 4)


(C) Welfare and Family Structure/Fertility (Tuesday, Mar 9, KS)


(D) Ph.D Seminar: Effects on Children (Thursday, Mar 11)


Mary Corcoran, “Mobility Persistence and the Intergenerational Determinants of Children’s Success. Understanding Poverty, Chapter 4.


VI. The Labor Market

(A) Jobs and the Economy (Tuesday, Mar 16, RB)

** It Takes A Nation Chapter 2


** No Shame in My Game. Chapter 3.


(B) PhD Seminar: The EITC (Thursday, Mar 18)


Stacy Dickert-Conlin and Douglas Holtz-Eakin. “Employee-based Versus Employer-Based Subidies to Low-Wage Workers: A Public Finance


**National Tax Journal** Vol 53:4, part 2. Special Issue on the EITC. December 2000. (Not on reserve)

**VII. Poor Neighborhoods and Peer Effects**

**(A)** *Are There Neighborhood Effects? (Tuesday, Mar 23, RB)*

**It Takes A Nation**, 4.9

**Ronald F. Ferguson, “Community Revitalization, Jobs, and the Well-Being of the Urban Poor.”* Understanding Poverty, Chapter 12.


**(B)** **PhD Seminar: Neighborhood Effects (Thursday, Mar 25)**


(C) Role of Race (Tuesday, March 30, RB)


(D) Ph.D. Seminar: Race and Immigration (Thursday, Apr 1)


VIII. Other Issues Critical Issues in Welfare Reform

(A) Declining Caseloads – What Does it Mean? (Tuesday, Apr 6, RB)


(B)  **PhD Seminar: Effects of Welfare Reform on Work Behavior (Thursday, Apr 8)**


Focus. Special Issue. 2002.


(C)  **Federalism questions: Who Should Respond? (Tuesday, Apr 13, KS)**

** (P)  *It Takes A Nation* Chapter 5


(D)  **Ph.D. Seminar: Studying Welfare Reform in Action (Thursday, April 15)**


(E) Multi-Dimensional Programs: What Have we Learned? (Tuesday, Apr 20, RB)

** It Takes A Nation. Chapters 6 and 7


***FINAL EXAM: Tuesday, April 22. 10:30-12:30 ***