POVERTY IN THE UNITED STATES
Sociology 7591, Spring 2013

Thursdays, 9:00-11:50 AM
26 Stubbs Hall

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Email: slack@lsu.edu
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:00-4:00 PM and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES
This seminar examines the nature and extent of poverty, the causes and consequences of poverty, and government programs and policies crafted to address poverty in the United States. The types of questions we will explore include: How have views of poverty evolved over time? What are the different methods used to measure and understand poverty? Who are the poor? Why does poverty remain so pervasive and persistent? What processes contribute to poverty? What are the aims and impacts of social welfare programs?

The key objectives for students enrolled in this seminar are:

1. To gain a critical and analytical understanding of the theoretical, methodological, and empirical considerations relevant to sociological research on poverty in the U.S.;

2. To communicate the above effectively, both orally and in writing;

3. To produce original empirical research that incorporates this knowledge.

REQUIRED READINGS
The required readings are outlined by week at the end of this syllabus. There are two books required for the course (listed below). All other readings will be made available to you electronically via the course website on Moodle or hyperlinks in this syllabus.


COURSE STRUCTURE
The success of this course hinges on the level of student engagement. My expectation is that every student will be well-prepared and active in class discussions every week. The class will be much more interesting, rewarding, and fun if this is the case.

The first two thirds of the semester we will focus on reading and discussing scholarship on poverty. Each week discussion leaders will be designated to guide the class in a critical and analytical discussion of the readings assigned for that week. Topics to cover include such things as the basic argument being made, the theoretical approach, the empirical approach (data and methods, tradeoffs, etc.), the most important findings or conclusions, a reading’s strengths and weaknesses, linkages to other readings, and the like. Discussion leaders may find it useful to provide introductory summary remarks about a given piece, but should not provide a point-for-point recapitulation as the expectation is that everyone will have read it already. Discussion leaders should email all class members a typed outline of the questions they will use to guide our discussions by 4:00 PM the day before we meet (i.e., by 4:00 PM Wednesday). Discussion leaders should plan to use most of the class time we have allotted in a given week, making it critical that these individuals be well-prepared. That said, while it will be the role of the discussion leaders to facilitate the dialogue, it is imperative that everyone do all of the readings and be prepared to actively participate in an informed manner in order for this format to be a success.

The final third of the semester we will focus on scholarly writing and peer review. You will be required to write an original empirical research paper (or a proposal to do original empirical research) that incorporates information we have covered during the semester. On average, I am looking for papers of roughly 15 pages in length (double spaced with ample margins and not including tables and references), though good ones can range from 10 to 30 pages. Papers should not exceed 30 pages. Short descriptions (equivalent to about one single-spaced page) of your proposed topic will be due on February 14. Polished drafts of your papers will be due in class on April 18. Over the course of the next week, a number (2-3) of your peers will be assigned to write a review of your work in the manner expected by a professional peer-reviewed journal. These reviews will be due in class the following week and used as a source of class discussion (April 25). Each author will be charged with incorporating the points raised in the reviews into the final draft of their paper and drafting a memo that summarizes the changes that were made toward this end. The final paper and summary of changes will be due during finals week (May 6). (This exercise may seem a bit daunting at first, but the peer-review process is a hallmark of academic writing. Working through this process will help you learn to provide and accept constructive criticism and ultimately help you produce a better manuscript. It will also help prepare you to participate in the peer-review process as both an author and reviewer.) Finally, each student will be expected to present their work to the class during the final weeks of the semester. The presentation will need to be created in PowerPoint and carried out in a format that would be expected at a professional academic conference. We will talk about all of this more in class.
GRADING
Your grade in this class will be based on the following measures:

1. Participation
   - Performance as discussion leader 15%
   - Preparedness for and participation in class discussions 15%

2. Peer-reviews 20%

3. Term paper 50%

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
All Louisiana State University students are responsible for observing the highest standards of academic and personal integrity. The penalties for academic misconduct are severe and ignorance is not an acceptable excuse. The main issue you probably need to be aware of for this class is plagiarism. If you have any questions about conventions for attribution or citation, please ask me. You can also find tips for avoiding plagiarism from the LSU Libraries at: http://www.lib.lsu.edu/instruction/plagiarism.html.

SPECIAL NEEDS
Louisiana State University is committed to promoting an atmosphere to end discrimination against individuals with special needs, to bring persons with special needs into the social and economic mainstream, and to provide enforceable standards to address discrimination against individuals with special needs. In order to ensure reasonable accommodations, students with special needs should register with the Office of Disability Services. If you anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please contact me early in the semester. Note that both our classroom and my office are only accessible via a flight of stairs. If this presents a problem in terms of physical access, please let me know and we can determine an alternative place to meet.

SUMMARY OF KEY DATES
Week 5 (Feb. 14): One page term paper description due
Week 14 (Apr. 18): Polished draft of term paper due
Week 15 (Apr. 25): Peer reviews due
Week 17 (May 6): Final draft of term paper and summary of response to reviews due by 4:00 PM

* With the exception of your final paper, which should be left in my mailbox in 126 Stubbs, all assignments are due in class.
## COURSE OUTLINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1 (Jan. 17):</td>
<td>Introduction to the Course</td>
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<td>Week 2 (Jan. 24):</td>
<td>Views on Poverty: Past to Present</td>
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<td>Week 3 (Jan. 31):</td>
<td>Measurement and Meaning of Poverty</td>
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<td>Week 4 (Feb. 7):</td>
<td>Characteristics of the Poor Population and Dynamics of Poverty</td>
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<td>Week 5 (Feb. 14):</td>
<td>Mardi Gras</td>
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<td>One page term paper description due</td>
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<td>Week 6 (Feb. 21):</td>
<td>Geography of Poverty: Domestic and International Considerations</td>
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<td>Week 7 (Feb. 28):</td>
<td>Economic and Labor Market Processes</td>
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<td>Week 8 (Mar. 7):</td>
<td>Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration</td>
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<td>Week 9 (Mar. 14):</td>
<td>Family Structure and Culture</td>
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<td>Week 10 (Mar. 21):</td>
<td>Social Welfare Policy: Past to Present</td>
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<td>Week 11 (Mar. 28):</td>
<td>Additional Policy Considerations</td>
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<td>Week 12 (Apr. 4):</td>
<td>Spring Break</td>
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<td>Week 13 (Apr. 11):</td>
<td>Concentrated Writing Period</td>
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<td>Week 14 (Apr. 18):</td>
<td>Principles of Peer-Review</td>
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<td>Polished draft of term paper due for peer review</td>
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<td>Week 15 (Apr. 25):</td>
<td>Discussion of Peer Reviews</td>
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<td>Peer reviews due</td>
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<td>Week 16 (May 2):</td>
<td>Term Paper Presentations</td>
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<td>Week 17</td>
<td>Final draft of paper due by 4 PM, Monday, May 6</td>
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WEEKLY READINGS

Week 1 (Jan. 17):  Introduction to the Course

No assigned readings.

Week 2 (Jan. 24):  Views on Poverty: Past to Present


Week 3 (Jan. 31):  Measurement and Meaning of Poverty


Week 4 (Feb. 7):  Characteristics of the Poor Population and Dynamics of Poverty


Week 5 (Feb. 14):  Mardi Gras


Week 6 (Feb. 21):  Geography of Poverty: Domestic and International Considerations


**Week 7 (Feb. 28): Economic and Labor Market Processes**


**Week 8 (Mar. 7): Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration**


**Week 9 (Mar. 14): Family Structure and Culture**


**Week 10 (Mar. 21): Social Welfare Policy: Past to Present**


Week 11 (Mar. 28): Additional Policy Considerations


Week 12 (Apr. 4): Spring Break

No assigned readings.

Week 13 (Apr. 11): Concentrated Writing Period

Review readings from Week 5.

Week 14 (Apr. 18): Principles of Peer Review

No assigned readings.

Week 15 (Apr. 25): Discussion of Peer Reviews

No assigned readings.

Week 16 (May 2): Term Paper Presentations

No assigned readings.