

MILLSAPS COLLEGE
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY & ANTHROPOLOGY
Course Syllabus

SOAN/PEAC: 2750-01 Many Dimensions of Poverty
Spring 2015; SHH-347
TTH 2:45-4:00
Office Hours: TTH 12:30-2:00 or by appointment

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Course Description

The Many Dimensions of Poverty examines poverty as a problem for individuals, families, and societies. It focuses on the United States, which is arguably the most impoverished of any developed nation. In this course, we ask: How should we define and measure poverty? Who is poor and who is not? Are there different kinds of poverty? What is it like to live in poverty? What are the causes of poverty? What are its effects on individuals, families, communities, and societies? What values does it undermine? What moral and legal rights should the poor have, and what obligations do societies, governments, organizations, and individuals have to the poor? Do the poor also have obligations to themselves, others, and society? What are the plausible remedies for the negative aspects of poverty? The approach we will take is interdisciplinary but is mainly from a social scientific perspective. The readings and lecture/discussions draw on economics, political science, psychology, philosophical and religious ethics, public policy analysis, sociology, journalism, and professional social work. The authors we read hold conflicting views on poverty and its remedies. We will consider these different and even incompatible judgments about poverty and the supporting arguments for these judgments. These views occupy a broad spectrum of political, economic, and moral opinions.

Expect to read carefully and discuss the assignments. Be prepared to offer considered judgments and reasons for holding them, orally and in writing. Spouting judgments and labeling others views as ludicrous will not be sufficient. Understanding precedes critical assessment. On the other hand, I do not expect mastery of a particular discipline or adherence to a particular point of view. Indeed, I prefer good arguments for views with which I disagree and new arguments for views with which I concur. That is how I learn from you. The authors and discussion in this class will bring light and sophistication to understanding poverty. It will refine and perhaps even transform you current views. *However, don't expect a complete resolution to the issues that confound us in public and political discourse.*

Academic knowledge and skills development (e.g., improving writing and speaking skills) are essential, but they are not the whole story. Plan to engage your *minds and hearts* in focused attention on one of the three or four most important social problems of our era (viz., poverty in the midst of plenty). This engagement should stimulate you to read the news with greater critical acuity, to become better citizens because you are informed about poverty and ways to diminish it, to volunteer in efforts to diminish poverty, and to think more clearly about how your career work will impinge on poor persons and communities. Although the course does not propose a particular solution to poverty, it assumes a concern for persons stifled by poverty. We assume care for those whose poverty is of their own making as well as for those who are victims of injustice or misfortune, although the responsibility for overcoming poverty differs depending on its causes. We also assume that a society is weakened when nearly 1 in 7 of its citizens—and more than 1 in 5 of its children—are officially poor. We assume a problem that demands our attention.

Shepherd Consortium Opportunities

The Shepherd Alliance unites students from member institutions with agencies that work to benefit impoverished members of society. Students learn first-hand about the multiple dimensions of poverty in the United States by working for eight weeks to strengthen impoverished communities and work alongside individuals seeking

to improve their communities. The agencies, located in various urban and rural sites in the United States, focus on education, healthcare, legal services, housing, hunger, social and economic needs, and community-building efforts. Students work with agencies that fit their intellectual interests in order to develop their experience and skills for future civic involvement and employment. This summer, 1-2 Millsaps students will have the opportunity to work in a variety of areas and all juniors and sophomores enrolled in this course are encouraged to apply. ***Because the deadline is early in the semester, please submit your application by January 17, 2015.***

Community Engaged Learning Component

This course has a community engagement component that all students are required to participate in to gain “real world” experience. Hours of participation are open and students will have the opportunity to engage in community outreach through a variety of programs. In total, this component of the course will take only about fifteen hours to complete, including in-class discussion time. During the semester, several speakers from local organizations will be meeting with our class to discuss different organizations that are open to student volunteers.

Core Requirements and Expectations

Students should expect to read carefully and to discuss the assignments reflecting the aforementioned array of approaches and opinions. Be prepared to offer considered judgments and reasons for holding them. The course emphasizes critical examination of these diverse approaches, arguments, and judgments more than mastery of a particular discipline or point of view. No particular point of view is required in order to do well in the course. Indeed, I welcome good arguments for views with which I disagree, and new arguments for views with which I do agree.

Student performance will be evaluated on the basis of (1) preparation for and participation in classes; 2) one early 3-4 page paper addressing your social location and definitions of poverty; 3) a mid-term and final exam; 4) three reading critique papers; 4) two film-critiques; 4) a ten-to-fifteen page final paper that combines your experiences volunteering with the crucial questions we are addressing throughout the course. More particular information on the requirements for the exam and papers will be made available as those assignments approach.

1) Preparation and Participation (100 points): Participation will consist of a combination of course attendance, participation in discussions, and assignments conducted during class. Thus, you are required to complete the assigned readings before coming to class. Regular attendance is required to earn credit for participation. As such, please note that more than two absences will result in a grade deduction of a letter grade.

2) Midterm/Final Exam (100 points each) You will have a midterm and final exam in this course, each worth 100 points. Each exam will consist of discussion questions centered from the readings and class discussions.

3) Writing: Writing is a significant portion of this course. You will have one early paper on your social location and the various definitions of poverty (25 points). You will also have two short film critiques that will/should combine the readings and films viewed in class. Finally, you will be evaluated on three reading critique papers (50 points each).

4) Final Paper, CEL component, journal entries (150 points): The final writing assignment will be a combination of your experiences with volunteering, conceptualizations of poverty, as well as personal reflections contained in your journals (blue book). All components should be submitted at the end of the semester and more details will be circulated as the course progresses.

Late Policy: Late papers will be accepted at a 10% point deduction per day late (days are counted consecutively, not by class period). Papers more than one week late will not be accepted.

Required Texts and Supplies

Please purchase a journal (bound notebook or blue book—no loose pages please).

Ansell, David A., *County: Life, Death, and Politics at Chicago's Public Hospital*. (2011)

DeParle, Jason, *American Dream: Three Women, Ten Kids, and a Nation's Drive to End Welfare* (2004).

Shipler, David, *The Working Poor: Invisible in America* (2004).

Kozol, Jonathan, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* (1991).

** In addition to these required readings, articles will be posted on Course Connect. Print a copy of the articles and bring them to class on the day of discussion. **Enrollment Key: majors***

COURSE SCHEDULE

This outline provides the direction of the course, but the character and pace of the class will determine the final schedule. I reserve the right to spend more time on some issues, less time on others, or to substitute out various topics or readings, if I believe it will benefit the class. **Therefore, this schedule is tentative.**

WEEK ONE

January 13: Introduction to Class

January 15

- **A:** Chapter 1 (C&D): Economic Changes, Demographic Changes, and Trends in Poverty (Pp. 35-51)
- **A:** Putting a Face on Poverty (Pp. 1-21)

WEEK TWO

January 20

- **A:** Who are the Poor, and What Exactly is Poverty, Anyway?
- **A:** Evaluating Living Wage Laws
- Shipler, Preface (Pp ix-xi); *At the Edge of Poverty; Money and its Opposite* 3-38, from *The Working Poor*.

January 22

- Film: Where There is a Will
- **A:** Chapter 1: Why are the Poor Poor?
- **A:** Work and Working

WHAT CAUSES POVERTY?

Individuals, Culture, and Welfare System?

WEEK THREE

January 27

- Jason DeParle, *American Dream*, Part I: Welfare, pp. 3-81.

January 29

- J. DeParle, *American Dream*, Part II: Ending Welfare, pp. 85-172

WEEK FOUR

February 3

- A: Stigma and Discrimination
- A: Day-to-Day Living

Paper 1 due

February 5

- Shipler, *The Working Poor*, “Work Doesn’t Work,” pp. 39-76
- Shipler, *The Working Poor* “Importing the Third World,” pp. 77-95

WEEK FIVE

Work Habits, Labor Markets, and/or Structural Conditions?

February 10

- Shipler, “The Daunting Workplace,” pp. 121-41.
- Shipler, “Sins of the Fathers”

February 12

- Ansell: Introduction-Chapter 4 (pp. 13-41)
- Shipler, *The Working Poor*, pp. 201-230

WEEK SIX

February 17

- Ansell: Chapters 4-9
- C&D: Enduring influences of Childhood poverty

MIDTERM EXAM

February 19

- A: American Apartheid
- A: Frisk and Stop

Consequences of Poverty: Education, Health, Housing, and the Law

WEEK SEVEN

February 24

- A: Jobless Poverty
- Ansell: Chapters 9-15

February 26

- Kozol, *Savage Inequalities*, pp. 1-48.

WEEK EIGHT

March 3

- Kozol, *Savage Inequalities*, pp. 49-100
- Ansell: Chapters 16-17

March 5

- Kozol, *Savage Inequalities*, pp. 101-160

Paper 2 Due

WEEK NINE

March 10-12—Spring Break

WEEK TEN

March 17

- Kozol, *Savage Inequalities*, pp. 161-210
- Film: *Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making us Sick?*

March 19

- Ansell: Chapters 18-23

WEEK ELEVEN

March 24

- A: Changes from the Bottom Up
- A: One Step Away

March 26

- Kozol, *Savage Inequalities*, pp. 211-282

WEEK TWELVE

March 31

- Housing Opportunities after Katrina
- Film: When The Levees Broke

April 2

Cont.

Paper 3 Due

Remedial Policies: Who is Responsible and What Should We do?

WEEK THIRTEEN

April 7

- A: Poverty, Morality, and Affluence
- A: Life Boat Ethics

April 9

- DeParle, *American Dream*, Part III, pp.175-221

WEEK FOURTEEN

April 14

- DeParle, *American Dream*, Part III, pp. 222-end

April 16

(cont)

WEEK FIFTEEN

April 21

- [recommended: A: Welfare and Its Reform: Temporary Assistance to Needy Families—this is a good short chapter that talks about the pros/cons of TANF and if TANF is working]

April 23—Last day of class

- A: Building Resiliency: Programs and Policies for Families
- A: Can Poverty Be Eliminated? Lessons We Could Learn

May 1, 2015: Final Exam 9 a.m.

ACADEMIC HONOR CODE of MILLSAPS COLLEGE

Millsaps College is an academic community dedicated to the pursuit of scholarly inquiry and intellectual growth. The foundation of this community is a spirit of personal honesty and mutual trust. Through their Honor Code, the students of Millsaps College affirm their adherence to these basic ethical principles.

An Honor Code is not simply a set of rules and procedures governing students’ academic conduct. It is an opportunity to put personal responsibility and integrity into action. When students agree to abide by an Honor Code, they liberate themselves to pursue their academic goals in an atmosphere of mutual confidence and respect.

The success of the Code depends on the support of each member of the community. Students and faculty alike commit themselves in their work to the principles of academic honesty. When they become aware of infractions, both students and faculty are obligated to report them to the Honor Council, which is responsible for enforcement. A representative, but not exhaustive, list of academic offenses and violations covered by the Millsaps Academic Honor Code is provided at http://www.millsaps.edu/academics/honor_code.php.

The pledge signed by all students upon entering the College is as follows:

As a Millsaps College student, I hereby affirm that I understand the Honor Code and am aware of its implications and of my responsibility to the Code. In the interests of expanding the atmosphere of respect and trust in the College, I promise to uphold the Honor Code and I will not tolerate dishonest behavior in myself or in others.

Each examination, quiz, or other assignment that is to be graded will carry the written pledge: **“I hereby certify that I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment. (Signature)”** The abbreviation “Pledged” followed by the student’s signature has the same meaning and may be acceptable on assignments other than final examinations.

It is the responsibility of students and faculty to report offenses to the Honor Code Council in the form of a written report. This account must be signed, the accusation explained in as much detail as possible, and submitted to the Dean of the College.

The Honor Council, 2013–2014

Students:

Daniella Rossano, Chair
 Sarah Peterman, Vice-Chair
 Rebecca Foreman, Sergeant-at-Arms
 Konstantin Baizat
 Pooja Goel
 Amanda Kaminski

Faculty:

Dr. Brent E. Hendrixson, Faculty Chair
 Dr. Ted Ammon
 Dr. Bill Brister

*One more undergraduate position will be filled at the beginning of the spring term.