This course is designed to introduce students to the sociology of poverty. In that effort it will engage a broad literature on the topic that incorporates the research from the disciplines of sociology, economics, and anthropology. The sociology of poverty involves many interrelated topics and we will only be able to touch on some of them. However, the student interested in pursuing specific topics of the subject in more depth will have a firm foundation from which to do so.

The course is about understanding the causes and conditions called poverty. Poverty, or the state of being categorized as living in it, is part of the social stratification system as well as a condition with properties that objectively characterize the experience of individuals living with extreme material scarcity. As such, it involves both the physical (material and body) and social world. This will necessitate looking at food, shelter, disease, markets, and interactions of individuals and states. Having some familiarity with economic theory is useful since a good deal of work on poverty incorporates such theory, but it is not required. What is required is that students consistently and thoroughly engage and interrogate the readings so that learning can be maximized.

Finally, this course will attempt to identify what factors cause and keep people in the condition of poverty, as well as how they relate to produce the type of life people experience when they are in this condition. To do this we will consider the impact of structure, culture and agency in creating and maintaining individuals and groups in the poverty condition. This will allow us to begin to marry explanation with understanding, and increase the likelihood of optimal prediction and successful intervention in one of the more troubling aspects of the human condition.
REQUIREMENTS

There will not be a final paper. Instead we will concentrate on learning what the research assigned has to tell us, and what we make of it in helping us to explain and understand poverty. In order to do this, we will have two requirements for grades:

1. Each student will be responsible for providing three, 5-10 page papers on the readings for a particular week. They will then present their paper’s argument and engage in dialog with others in the class regarding their arguments. The instructor will provide the students with the question they are to address for that week’s papers and discussion.

BOOKS

There have been a number of books ordered for the course. If you are thinking of having poverty be one of your specialty areas, then you may want to purchase all of the books. I have also put together reader for the course that you will have to purchase.

READINGS

I. The Concept of Poverty: Human Welfare and Inequality

II. Measuring Poverty

III. Causes of Poverty


IV. Poverty and Place


V. Social and Cultural Basis of Poverty


VI. Poverty and Health


VII. Poverty and Crime


VIII. Poverty and the Life Course


IX. Poverty and Policy
