

Sociology 124: The Sociology of Poverty

UC Berkeley, Spring 2021
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Tues/Thurs 2:00 - 3:30 PM
OH: Thurs 4-5PM; Friday 10-12 PM

How can one of the richest nations on Earth have the highest poverty rate of any Western democracy? Starting from this paradox, this course examines what poverty is, what causes it, how it affects people, and how we might address it. We will highlight how poverty has multiple dimensions—not just material, but also social and humanistic. We will examine research on poverty's causes, interrogating common assumptions that don't always hold up to critique. Next, we will consider the consequences and experience of poverty, including how poverty intersects with other social statuses like race/ethnicity, gender, and parenthood. Finally, we will survey various proposed solutions to poverty, while appreciating how social constructions of poor people shape what policies we support in the first place. More broadly, this course will address key sociological questions regarding the role of structure, culture, and individual agency creating and sustaining our social world.

OBJECTIVES

1. To understand how poverty is measured and to assess the strengths and weaknesses of different measures
2. To appreciate how poverty is a multi-dimensional concept
3. To comprehend the various causes of poverty and evaluate their relative strength
4. To appreciate some of the consequences and experiences of poverty
5. To understand the role of structure, culture, and individual agency in the causes and consequences of poverty
6. To understand and evaluate a range of anti-poverty policies
7. To appreciate how research, debates, and even our own views on poverty are deeply political
8. To prepare you to engage in conversations about poverty beyond the classroom

COMPONENTS

60% Three Analytic Papers (**100 points each; 300 points total**):

Goal: These papers provide an opportunity to apply your new knowledge by developing a logical, well-substantiated argument in response to a prompt. This is open book, but the work must be your own. Format: 5-6 pages, double-spaced. Schedule and Timing: Prompts will be issued 10-14 days before the paper is due.

-First paper: 3/9 at 11:59PM (on bCourses)

-Second paper: 4/8 at 11:59PM (on bCourses)

-Third paper: 5/13 at 11:59PM (on bCourses)

Late assignments lose a letter grade for each day (or fraction thereof) that they are late.

20% Lecture Attendance and Participation (**100 points**):

Goal: To *reinforce* and *clarify* the assigned materials; to *broaden* and *deepen* your knowledge with complementary information; and to offer opportunities to *apply* this

knowledge. They will also help auditory and visual learners by presenting course content in a different format. Logistics: Lecture slides will be made available by 10PM the day before lecture so you can print them out and take notes as we go. I will track attendance via Zoom and an “exit ticket” submitted at the end of class. Exit tickets consist of a question, comment, or point of clarification to help me track your understanding and interest, and sometimes a summary or reflection. They are to be submitted to “Assignments” or “Modules” in bCourses. Exit tickets are graded as complete/incomplete, and there is no “right” or “wrong” answer. Links to each lecture will be posted as an Announcement to bCourses and sent out by email (so keep your eyes open!). Do not share links with anyone outside the course.

Because this course has no discussion section, three class periods will serve as a discussion and review session. I will split students into two “sections.” Each section will last 45 minutes and will begin either at 2:00 PM or 2:45 PM *sharp*. Logistics: So that these sessions address your concerns, you will submit three discussion questions to “Assignments” or “Modules” by 11:59PM two days before we meet. During the session, you should participate actively; be ready to be called on to pose your question.

This last year has been hard. We all need a break. You get one free excused absence. After that, absences are excused only for true emergencies or religious observances, and require documentation. You are still accountable for the material covered in any missed classes.

20% Daily Quizzes (**100 points**):

Goal: 1) To keep you on top of assigned readings and videos and 2) to assess your comprehension of that material. Format: Three questions in yes/no, multiple-choice, and/or fill-in-the-blank format. Schedule and duration: every Tuesday and Thursday before lecture. Quizzes will be open 12:00-2:15 PM (from two hours before class to 15 minutes into class).¹ Once you log on, you have 10 minutes to answer the questions. There will be 24 quizzes total. (No quizzes on first day or on discussion and review days.) Content: Basic concepts and key arguments from readings and videos. You can look at your materials for the quiz, but you won’t have a ton of time to do so. Buffer/Stress Reducer: The four lowest grades will be dropped (meaning you’ll be graded on 20/24 quizzes). There are no make-up quizzes.

GRADING

This course has a total of **500 points**:

Analytic papers: **300 points** (100 each)

Attendance and participation: **100 points**

Daily quizzes: **100 points**

A	94-100%	B+	88%-89.99%	C+	78%-79.99%	D+	68%-69.99%
A-	90-93.99%	B	84-87.99%	C	74-77.99%	D	64-67.99%
		B-	80-83.99%	C-	70-73.99%	F	<63.99%

¹ This window lets you start early in case you tend to experience technological glitches, while also allowing you to use class time so you don’t *have* to find time outside class for the quiz

Incomplete Grades: Incompletes are the last resort for students experiencing true medical or other emergencies that make it impossible for them to complete their coursework on time. To be considered for an incomplete grade, students need to speak with me about it DURING the semester, and you must provide documentation of the reason for the request.

“Borderline” Grades: After you receive your final grade, please do not ask me to raise your grade if you feel that you are very close to the next highest grade. Because I drop four quizzes and offer one free unexcused absence, your grade has already been raised. I will only change grades if there has been a factual error in calculation.

If you need **accommodations** for a disability or medical condition, or have a conflict due to the observance of religious holidays, please email or speak with me early in the semester.

MATERIALS

Course materials include academic articles, book chapters, news articles, and videos on YouTube. They are available online in three locations: E-Reserves (for links to digital copies); PDFs in bCourses; and links listed in the syllabus. The syllabus indicates each material’s location in **bold**. The e-Reserves list is in bCourses’s “Files” folder. (Note: This list, kindly created by the library, is not in any particular order... Use Command + F to search for the author if need be.) The PDFs in bCourses are under the relevant Module, as well as the “Files” folder.

Note: Some readings are TBD and others may change due to availability. I will give you an ample heads up about any changes to the assigned materials.

The main requirement is that you have reliable access to an internet connection and an up-to-date computer. Please let me know if access to reliable technology is a problem for you.

COURSE ORGANIZATION

The course has four thematic sections: 1) Trends, Conceptualization, and Measurement; 2) Causes of Poverty; 3) Consequences of Poverty; and 4) Policy and Change.

Each class meeting is organized into a module. Modules will contain any uploaded readings; any reading guides; the daily quiz; the daily “exit ticket;” and, in the case of discussion and review sessions, the space to enter three discussion questions by 11:59PM two days before class. Please have the quiz and exit tickets ready to go at the appropriate time so you don’t miss the submission deadline. (This may mean having bCourses open as lecture is underway.)

The **weekly flow** is as follows:

Monday	Tuesday	Wed	Thurs
10 PM: lecture slides posted	12:00–2:15 PM: Daily quiz open 2:15-3:30 PM: Lecture: talking starts	10PM: lecture slides posted	12:00–2:15 PM: Daily quiz open 2:00-3:30 PM: Lecture: talking starts

	3:25-3:55 PM: Exit ticket submission is open		3:25-3:55 PM: Exit ticket submission is open
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For discussion and review sessions on 3/2, 4/6, and 4/29, discussion questions are due by 11:59PM two days prior.

POLICIES

Academic Integrity and Honesty:

Academic dishonesty of any kind (including, but not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, and falsification) will not be tolerated, as specified in UC Berkeley’s Code of Student Conduct: <http://sa.berkeley.edu/conduct/integrity/addressing-misconduct>. All course assignments are checked by Turnitin, a plagiarism detection tool. You will get **no** credit for a paper with plagiarism. Other instances of dishonesty may result in **zero** points for the **entire** course component. Cases of academic dishonesty will be reported to Student Judicial Affairs. It is possible to plagiarize without intending to do so (e.g., failing to cite references properly; sticking too closely to an author’s original wording). If you have any questions about plagiarism, do not hesitate to contact me.

Email

I will respond to emails once a day, excluding weekends, when I check email infrequently. If your question is answered on the syllabus or a handout, I will not reply. Regularly check your school email for emails from me. They will include announcements, updates, and any changes.

Devices and Distraction

Non-assistive devices like your phone—or activities on your computer other than attending lecture—compromise your learning by splitting your attention. Keep them out of sight while class is in session. Studies show that the mere presence of a cell phone can be distracting.

Back Up Your Work

Save your paper and exam response somewhere other than your computer, such a thumb drive, an external hard drive, Dropbox, or Google Docs—or just email yourself a copy when you’re done doing a chunk of work. Computers can fail, and we don’t want to lose the fruits of our effort. I expect you to back up your work. This means I will not be lenient in grading if you say your computer crashed and you lost what you wrote.

Recording Lectures

Lectures will be recorded. If you speak up, keep in mind this in mind!

OFFICE HOURS:

Don’t be shy, come on by! Office hours can feel intimidating, but don’t be scared and don’t worry about asking “stupid” questions. There’s nothing stupid about wanting to learn or just say “hi.” Research shows that office hours can be especially intimidating for first-gen college students, who often think that academic success comes from toughing it out alone, or who they feel unprepared to interact with authority figures. I’ve been there. I was a first-gen student, too, struggling with money and problems back home. Don’t be afraid to come on by.

Sign-up sheet: <https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/eikew>

Zoom Log In:

<https://berkeley.zoom.us/j/5308475197?pwd=NFBFT21yVWRialBKRFRjbUNNOIRBQT09>

Meeting ID: 530 847 5197

Passcode: 537704

“USER AGREEMENT”

A syllabus is like a contract that outlines the rights and responsibilities of instructor and student alike. Students are responsible for understanding the syllabus and its policies.

SCHEDULE AND TOPICS:

Below is a schedule of reading assignments and topics of discussion. **Readings must be completed by the time you come to class that day.** Our pace and agenda may change somewhat throughout the term. I will keep you informed of such changes.

Module, Date	Topic
1. TRENDS, CONCEPTUALIZATION, AND MEASUREMENT	
1 1/19	Introduction: Poverty Across Place and Time No Reading
2 1/21	Measuring Poverty: Absolute and Relative The Syllabus (it will appear on the quiz!) Brady, David. 2009. Chapter 2, “Rethinking the Measurement of Poverty,” section called “Relative vs. Absolute Measures” (ending at Taxes, Transfers, and the State) Starts page 32 in the online version read directly off the browser. pp. 10-15 if you download the chapter as a PDF E-Reserves UNICEF. 2012. <i>Measuring Child Poverty</i> . pp. 2-3, 7-11. bCourses Seebohm, Rowntree. 1902. <i>Poverty: A Study of Town Life</i> . Pp. 87-88, 99-110. https://www.google.com/books/edition/Poverty/YuMiAAAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&printsec=frontcover
3 1/26	Conceptualizing Poverty: Inclusion and Capability Brady, David. 2009. Chapter 2 in <i>Rich Democracies, Poor People</i> , from “Conceptualizing Poverty as...” to “Relative vs. Absolute...” Pages 7-10 if you download the chapter as a PDF; end of page 29 to page 32 if you read book off browser . E-Reserves Amartya Sen, 1983. “Poor, Relatively Speaking.” E-Reserves Harford, Tim. 2008. “Finally a Sensible Way to Measure Poverty.” <i>Slate</i> https://slate.com/culture/2008/07/finally-a-sensible-way-to-measure-poverty.html
4 1/28	Measuring Poverty in the US

Brady, David. Chapter 2, pp. 1-7, 15-22. **E-Reserves**

Edin, Kathryn and Luke Schaefer. 2015. "Introduction" in *\$2.00 A Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America*. Pp. xxi-xxiv. **E-Reserves**

"What Is The Supplemental Poverty Measure?" US Census.

https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2018/09/what_is_the_suppleme.html

2. CAUSES OF POVERTY

5 2/2 Popular Beliefs and Attitudes

"American Attitudes about Poverty and the Poor"

<https://www.prb.org/americanattitudesaboutpovertyandthepoor/>

Gans, Herbert. *War Against the Poor*. Introduction: 1- 7 (through point #4) and Chapter 4, "The Undeservingness of the Poor," pp. 72-102. **E-Reserves**

Psychological Causes

6 2/4 Cognitive Bandwidth: Fundamentals

Mullainathan, S. and Shafir E. *Scarcity* 2013. Chs 1, 2, and 5, "Focusing and Tunneling," "The Bandwidth Tax," and "Tunneling and Myopia." **E-Reserves**

Video **TBD**

7 2/9 Cognitive Bandwidth: Consequences

Mullainathan and Shafir. *Scarcity*. Chs 6-7 "The Scarcity Trap," "Poverty" **E-Reserves**

CNN Payday loans: **<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EtqchgO03xI>**

Structural and Macroeconomic Causes

8 2/11 Are There Enough Jobs?: Joblessness

Urban Institute, *27 Weeks and Counting*:

<https://apps.urban.org/features/longtermunemployment/index.html>

Brady, D. Chapter 7, "Structural Theory and Poverty," (only parts about manufacturing and agriculture) **E-Reserves**

"David Autor on the China Shock." **<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUngEbviaFs>**

9 2/16 Are There Enough *Good* Jobs?: Underemployment

Kalleberg, Arne. Chapter 6, "Economic Rewards: Earnings and Fringe Benefits" in *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs*. **E-Reserves**

Edin, Kathryn and Luke Schaefer. Chapter 2: "Perilous Work," pp. 35-63 in *\$2.00 A Day*. **E-Reserves**

Vox Video: “The Fight to Make Bad Jobs Better.” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-4_6bThk2E (~9 minutes)

10 2/18 Are There Enough *Good* Jobs?: The Gig Economy

Ravanelle, Alexandra. 2019. “Introduction” and Chapters 3-4 in *Hustle and Gig: Struggling and Surviving in the Gig Economy*. **E-Reserves**

Abdille, Sahra. 2019. “Poverty while employed has effectively replaced unemployment as a result of the gig economy” <https://www.thersa.org/blog/2019/10/poverty-while-employed-has-effectively-replaced-unemployment-as-a-result-of-the-gig-economy>

NBC News. “The False Promise of the Gig Economy.” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9IdNJ0K_zRc (2:43 min)

NBC News. “The Gig Economy and the End of Employment as We Know It.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNmaovbG8N8> (3:32 min)

Political Causes

11 2/23 Welfare States Create Poverty

Murray, Charles. 1984. Part III of *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980*. **E-Reserves**

Edin, Kathryn. 1995. “The Myths of Dependence and Self-Sufficiency: Women, Welfare, and Low-Wage Work,” *Focus* pp 1-9
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED417274.pdf>

12 2/25 Welfare States Prevent Poverty

Brady, David. 2009. Chapter 1, “Beyond Individualism,” pp. 12-17, and Chapter 4, “The Welfare State and Poverty” in *Rich Democracies...* **E-Reserves**

The Economist video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5i45h76ioHY>

13 3/2 **DISCUSSION and REVIEW**

Reading and Video TBD

3. EXPERIENCES and CONSEQUENCES OF POVERTY

14 3/4 Persistent Poverty: Culture of Poverty?

Wilson, William J. 1996. Chapter 3 “Ghetto-Related Behavior and the Structure of Opportunity” in *When Work Disappears*, pp. 51-86. **E-Reserves**

“Beauty Salon Behind Bars” (video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eeldaXgz-c>

15 3/9 Persistent Poverty: Culture of Poverty?

Edin, Kathryn and Maria Kefalas. 2011. *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage*. Ch 4: “What Marriage Means,” pp. 88-109. **E-Reserves**

“Re-evaluating the ‘Culture of Poverty,’” *The Society Pages*.
<https://thesocietypages.org/roundtables/culture-of-poverty/>

→ → **First paper due to bCourses by 11:59PM**

16 3/11 Persistent Poverty: Mobility and Human Capital

Sampson, Robert J. 2016. "The Characterological Imperative..." *Journal of Economic Literature*, 54 (2): 493-513. **E-Reserves**

Lareau, A. (2015). “Cultural knowledge and social inequality”, *American Sociological Review*, pp: 1-27. **E-Reserves**

Multigenerational Neighborhood Effects: Patrick Sharkey:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ugiM2F_2BA

17 3/16 Physical Health

Reading and Video TBD

18 3/18 Mental Health and Drug Use

Case, Anne and Angus Deaton. 2019. *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism*. Chapters TBD. **E-Reserves**

Video TBD

NO CLASS SPRING BREAK 3/22 - 3/28 NO CLASS

19 3/30 Housing

Edin and Schaefer. Ch 3, “A Room of One’s Own,” pp. 63-91 in *\$2.00 A Day*. **E-Reserves**

Desmond, Matthew. 2015. “Unaffordable America: Poverty, Housing, and Eviction.”
<https://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/fastfocus/pdfs/FF22-2015.pdf>

20 4/1 Punishment

Wacquant, Loic, 2009. Chapters 2 & 3, “The Criminalization of Poverty in the Post-Civil Rights Era,” and “Welfare Reform as Statecraft” of *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*. **E-Reserves**

Video TBD

21 4/6 **DISCUSSION AND REVIEW**

Reading and Video TBD

4. POLICY and CHANGE

22 4/8 Nudges and Incentives

Banerjee and Duflo. 2011. Introduction, Chapter 3, “Low Hanging Fruit for Better (Global) Health?,” and Chapter 4, “Top of the Class” in *Poor Economics*. **E-Reserves**

Mullainathan and Shafir. Chapter 7, "Improving the Lives of the Poor" **E-Reserves**

→ → **Second paper due by 11:59 PM**

23 4/13 Charity and Philanthropy

Poppendiek, Janet. 1998. *Sweet Charity?: Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement*.
Chapters **TBD**

Video **TBD**

24 4/15 Minimum Wage

TBD

25 4/20 Earned Income Tax Credit

Sykes, Jennifer, et al. 2015. "Dignity and Dreams: What the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) means to low-income families." *American Sociological Review*: 243-267.

bCourses

Video **TBD**

26 4/22 Universal Basic Income vs. Jobs Guarantee

TBD

27 4/27 Family Policy

Bruenig, Matt. 2019. *Family Fun Pack*.

<https://www.peoplespolicyproject.org/projects/family-fun-pack/>

Rector, Robert. 2016. *Marriage: America's Greatest Weapon Against Child Poverty*.
Heritage Foundation. **<https://www.heritage.org/poverty-and-inequality/report/marriage-americas-greatest-weapon-against-child-poverty-0>**

28 4/29 **DISCUSSION and REVIEW**

Reading and video **TBD**

→ 5/13 → **Third PAPER DUE by 11:59PM to bCourses**
