

Sociology 124: The Sociology of Poverty
UC Berkeley, Spring 2022

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Tues/Th 2:00 - 3:29 PM
Social Sciences Building 166

Office Hours: TBD on Zoom

Sign up: <https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/siwtw>

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 the strengths and weaknesses of these measures
2. To appreciate how poverty is a multi-dimensional concept
3. To comprehend the major causes of poverty in developed nations
4. To appreciate some of the consequences and experiences of poverty
5. To understand and evaluate major anti-poverty policies
6. To appreciate how research, debates, and even our own views on poverty are deeply political
7. To prepare you to engage in conversations about poverty beyond the classroom

COMPONENTS

50% Two Analytic Papers (**250 points each; 500 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. Prompts will be issued 14 days before the paper is due.

-First paper due: **3/16** at 11:59PM (on bCourses)

-Second paper due: **4/13** at 11:59PM (on bCourses)

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

25% Final Exam (**250 point**)

Two essay questions covering material from the semester. Take home, open note format.

-Due **Tuesday, 5/10** at 11:59PM (on bCourses)

25% Daily Quizzes (**250 points**):

Goal: 1) To keep you on top of assigned reading. 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 8:00AM to 2:09 PM the day of class. You have 10 minutes to answer the questions. 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 three lowest grades will be dropped. There are no make-up quizzes.

Attendance is not required, but it is highly encouraged. Lectures will *reinforce* and *clarify* the assigned materials; *broaden* and *deepen* your knowledge with additional information; and offer opportunities to *apply* this knowledge to your own life and outside materials such as videos. Lectures will also help auditory and visual learners by presenting course content in a different format. Attendance and participation do not factor into your grade, but I do take note when students consistently participate in lecture. However, if you're having COVID symptoms, please stay home! I will post recorded lectures, but Zoom recordings don't always capture all the audio, so make sure you also connect with a classmate who can fill you in.

GRADING

This course has a total of **1000 points**:

Analytic papers: **500 points** (250 each)

Final exam: **250 points**

Daily quizzes: **250 points**

A	94-100%	B+	87%-89.99%	C+	77%-79.99%	D+	67%-69.99%
A-	90-93.99%	B	84-86.99%	C	74-76.99%	D	64-66.99%
		B-	80-83.99%	C-	70-73.99%	F	<63.99%

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 three quizzes, 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

Assigned readings and videos are available in two places (sometimes in both):

1. As PDFs in **bCourses** under **Files → Readings**, where they're listed by week.

2. **Links and hyperlinks** in the syllabus.¹ These direct you to various websites and digital library books. (Check the syllabus for these ones; don't rely on bCourses to tell you what to read!) If a reading is missing or a link is bad, please email me! I'll fix things as soon as I can.

For some weeks, I include a **reading guide**. These are in the bCourses Readings folder.

COURSE ORGANIZATION

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

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. Also sign up for bCourses daily updates so you see comments on assignments.

Devices and Distraction

Non-assistive devices like your phone, laptop, or tablet compromise your learning by splitting your attention. Keep them out of sight during class. Studies show that the mere presence of a cell phone can be distracting. If you have an accommodation allowing an assistive device OR you use a tablet to take notes by hand, let me know within the first week.

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!

Classroom Culture and Academic Citizenship

We have the opportunity to engage important scholarly debates that will deepen our understanding

¹ Some hyperlinks are blue, some aren't, but all of them are underlined.

of current social issues and our own lives. Meaningful engagement depends on everyone feeling comfortable with sharing their thoughts—and their confusion. It will help if we all approach this course with *curiosity* and *humility*. Curiosity involves wanting to understand what other people think and why, as well as interrogating why *we* think what we think. Humility requires recognizing that we don't always have the answer and being open to reconsidering our views. Finally, we must all engage each other and the course material with *respect*. Disagreement is fine—it can even be really fruitful—but we need to keep derogatory language and personal criticisms at the door.

COVID Precautions and Disruptions

Campus COVID policies will be enforced. Everyone must wear a mask covering nose and mouth. You will be asked to wear a mask if you come without one. Those who do not comply must leave the room. Let me know early in the semester if you have a medical exemptions.

We may also experience disruptions due to COVID. Possible interruptions include moving back online or me staying home due to illness or COVID exposure. If I can't teach in person, we'll move online, and I am unable to teach synchronously, I will post pre-recorded lectures.

OFFICE HOURS:

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 was a first-gen student, too, struggling with money and problems back home. Don't be afraid to come on by. Sign up at: <https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/siwtw/edit>

“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.

STUDENT SUPPORTS

Economic, Food, and Housing Support

If you need economic, food, or housing support, you can find help at basicneeds.berkeley.edu. You may be eligible for money to buy groceries via calfresh.berkeley.edu or our Food Assistance Program: <https://financialaid.berkeley.edu/financial-literacy-and-resources-financial-literacy-and-resources/basic-needs/>. If you need of food immediately, please visit our UC Berkeley Food Pantry at pantry.berkeley.edu/.

Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Services

Survivor Support Services provides information on these issues, including how to file a report and receive support services: <http://survivorsupport.berkeley.edu>. Please note that I am legally required to report incidents of sexual harassment or violence that students disclose to me. To speak to a confidential care advocate: <http://sa.berkeley.edu/dean/confidential-care-advocate/>

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, and some readings are TBD. I will inform you of any changes.

Class, Date	Topic
1. TRENDS, CONCEPTUALIZATION, AND MEASUREMENT	
1 1/19	Introduction: Poverty Across Place and Time No Reading
2 1/20	Measuring Poverty: Absolute and Relative The syllabus (it will appear on the quiz!) Brady, David. 2009. <i>Rich Nations, Poor People</i> . Chapter 2, section called “Relative vs. Absolute Measures” (ending at Taxes, Transfers, and the State). pp. 10-15 in PDF bCourses (also at UC Berkeley Library online) UNICEF. 2012. <i>Measuring Child Poverty</i> . pp. 2-3, 6-11. 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 1/25	Conceptualizing Poverty: Inclusion and Capability Brady, David. 2009. Chapter 2 from “Conceptualizing Poverty as...” to “Relative vs. Absolute...” pp. 7-10 in PDF in bCourses Amartya Sen, 1983. “Poor, Relatively Speaking.” bCourses 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 1/27	Measuring Poverty in the US Brady, David. Chapter 2, pp. 1-7, 15-22. bCourses Edin, Kathryn and Luke Schaefer. 2015. “Introduction” in <i>\$2.00 A Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America</i> . Pp. xi-xviii. UC Berkeley library online US Census. “What Is the Supplemental Poverty Measure?” bCourses
2. CAUSES OF POVERTY	
5 2/2	Popular Beliefs and Attitudes Population Reference Bureau. 2002. “American Attitudes about Poverty and the Poor” in <i>Population Bulletin</i> 57(2). bCourses Gans, Herbert. <i>War Against the Poor</i> . Introduction: 1- 7 (through point #4) and Chapter 4, “The Undeservingness of the Poor,” pp. 74-91; skip “The Epidemiology of Threats.” bCourses

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.” **bCourses**

7 2/9 Cognitive Bandwidth: Consequences
Mullainathan and Shafir. *Scarcity*. Chs 6-7 “The Scarcity Trap,” “Poverty” **bCourses**

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>

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/working-poor-lisa-millard_n_5627747

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/working-poor_n_5548010

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/bestsy-andrews-working-poor_n_4896748

Brady, D. Chapter 7, “Structural Theory and Poverty” (see reading guide in bCourses Files for selected pages) [UCB Library online](#)

“David Autor on the China Shock.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUngEbyiaFs>

9 2/16 Poverty in COVID
Reading TBD

10 2/18 Are There Enough *Good* Jobs?: Underemployment
Edin, Kathryn and Luke Schaefer. Chapter 2: “Perilous Work,” pp. 35-63 in *\$2.00 A Day*.
[UC Library online](#)

Kalleberg, Arne. Chapter 6, “Economic Rewards: Earnings and Fringe Benefits” in *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs*, pp. 105-107 (skim), 116-119. **bCourses**

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>

Political Causes

11 2/23 Welfare States Create Poverty
Murray, Charles. 1984. Pp. 145-146 and Chapters 12 and 13 in *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980*. **bCourses**

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> or
<https://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/focus/textver/17.2.a/edin.txt>

12 2/25 Welfare States Prevent Poverty
Brady, David. 2009. Chapter 1, “Beyond Individualism” pp. 1-4 (until “Institutionalized Power Relations Theory) and pp. 12-17 (“The Individualist Perspective” until “Empirical Analyses”); Chapter 4, “The Welfare State and Poverty” in *Rich Democracies...* See reading guide in bCourses Files for more details. **bCourses**

13 3/2 The Welfare State: A Closer Look
No reading

14 3/4 **DISCUSSION and REVIEW**
No reading

3. EXPERIENCES and CONSEQUENCES OF POVERTY

15 3/9 Concentrated and Persistent Poverty
Wilson, William J. 1996. Chapter 3 “Ghetto-Related Behavior and the Structure of Opportunity” in *When Work Disappears*, pp. 51-86. **bCourses**

Video: “Joblessness and Poor Neighborhoods: William Julius Wilson”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=de11sq17VTI>

16 3/11 Concentrated and 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. 104-137. **bCourses**

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

17 3/16 Persistent Poverty: Mobility and Human Capital
Mobility Animation Article. *New York Times*
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/03/27/upshot/make-your-own-mobility-animation.html?smid=pl-share>.

Read and play around with the section Create Your Own Mobility.

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

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

18 3/18 Physical Health
Video: “Eliminating Food Deserts In America:”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8My-iWjTBO8>

Allcott, Hunt, Jean-Pierre Dubé, Molly Schnell. 2019. "[Why Food Deserts Aren't the Key Cause of Nutritional Inequalities.](#)" *USA News and World Report*.

Parker-Pope, Tara. 2007. "[A High Price for Healthy Food.](#)" *The New York Times*.

Bittman, Mark. 2011. "[Is Junk Food Really Cheaper?](#)" *The New York Times* and **bCourses**

Stic. 2013. "[How To Eat Good on a Hood Budget.](#)" (read comments as well—enough to get an idea of people's varying reactions)

Daniel, Caitlin. 2021. "[Is Healthy Eating Too Expensive?: Ask Those Who Know Best.](#)"

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

19 3/30 Diet and Nutrition, Continued

Warin M. et al. 2015. "Short Horizons and Obesity Futures: Disjunctures Between Public Health Interventions and Everyday Temporalities." *Social Science & Medicine* pp. 309-315. **bCourses**

20 4/1 Mental Health and Drug Use

Case, Anne and Angus Deaton. 2019. [Introduction, Ch. 4, Ch. 9 \(Opioids\).](#) *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism.* [UC Berkeley library online](#)

21 4/6 Housing

Edin and Schaefer. Ch 3, "A Room of One's Own," pp. 63-91 in *\$2.00 A Day.* [UC Berkeley library online](#)

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

22 4/8 Punishment

Wacquant, Loic, 2009. Chapter 2 "The Criminalization of Poverty in the Post-Civil Rights Era" of *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity.* [UC Berkeley library](#) and **bCourses**

23 4/13 **DISCUSSION AND REVIEW**

No reading

4. POLICY and CHANGE

23 4/15 Earned Income Tax Credit

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

24 4/20 Minimum Wage

Dube, Arindrajit. 2019. "Making the Case for a Higher Minimum Wage." [Milken Institute Review](#).

Second reading TBD

→ 4/21 **PAPER 2 DUE** ←

26 4/22 Universal Basic Income vs. Jobs Guarantee
Calnitsky, David. 2019. "Basic Income and the Pitfalls of Randomization." *Contexts*.

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**
No reading

→ 5/10 → **Take-home test due by 11:59PM to bCourses**
