THE STRUCTURE OF POVERTY, GLOBALLY AND LOCALLY
SOC 351/POLS 380/WSTD 393-05

Course description

This course examines the structural causes of poverty at the global and local levels from a multidisciplinary perspective. It also gives students an opportunity to explore ways in which average citizens can take action to alleviate poverty. While other variables will not be discounted, we will concentrate on the social, political, and economic structures that produce and perpetuate cycles of poverty. The global dimension of the course will focus primarily on developing countries while the local dimension will focus on policies and programs in the U.S. We will also examine the extent to which the structural causes of poverty are the same or different between the global and local levels.

Upon completion of the course, students should be able to

• identify structural sources of, and some solutions to, poverty;
• analyze the impact of social policies on social problems, especially poverty;
• propose some ways that individuals can work together to bring about social change, in particular to alleviate poverty; and
• recognize the value of civic-political engagement for bringing about greater social justice.

Textbooks: The following texts are required for the course:

• Mark Robert Rank, One Nation, Underprivileged (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
• Paul Rogat Loeb, Soul of a Citizen: Living with Conviction in Challenging Times (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2010).
• There are also a number of additional articles that will be made available electronically.

Course requirements and grades: Your final grade in this course will be determined as follows:

Attendance: It is important to attend each class meeting so that you remain engaged with the class material and discussions. I will keep a record of attendance. You may miss a total of two class periods during the semester for any reason, including illness (you need not provide an excuse); additional absences will lower your grade. I strongly suggest that you “save” your absences for times when you may really need them during the semester, such as when you are ill.
Class preparation and participation. I expect you to do each assigned reading before it is discussed in class (I will announce at the end of each class what material we will cover in the next class meeting). Since the class periods will be a combination of lecture and discussion, your substantial, consistent, and thoughtful contributions to class discussion (as both a speaker and a listener) are essential. I will use participation in class discussion as a factor in deciding borderline grades for the course.

Lists of reflections about the assigned readings (15%): You will need to make a list of five things that you learned from each day’s assigned readings (e.g., a bullet point list). These don’t need to be academic notes in the traditional sense, but instead can include topics such as things that inspire or surprise you, things that do/don’t resonate with your own experience, or things that motivate people to become politically engaged. We will use these as a basis for some class discussions, and they should also assist you when you write your papers for the course. Your individual entries need not be full sentences, but feel free to include longer reflections if you want. Include some indication of which readings prompted each entry. Please type each day’s reflections on a separate sheet of paper and date each sheet. Turn in the sheets for each week on Wednesday during class. I will grade them credit/no credit. You can skip turning these in for two days during the semester; if you miss more, it will lower your grade for this portion of the course.

Social change project and writing assignments: (This will comprise the bulk of your course grade.) As a Jesuit university, St. Louis University has an interest not only in teaching students about social justice but also in helping them explore ways to promote it in practice. For this course, every student is required to complete 20 hours of work on a social change project during the course. This project will serve as the core of your reflection and research papers and determine the general topic for your annotated bibliography. I will provide a list of sample issue areas and projects to help you start thinking about what to do. All students will meet with me individually twice during the semester to plan and discuss your project; I will circulate sign-up sheets for these meetings in February and in April. Following are the individual components of the project:

**Project log:** You will need to keep a log of the time you spend on your project (include date, time spent, and brief description of activity), and turn it in at the end of the semester. If you do not put in the minimum of 20 hours work on the project, it will lower your final paper grade.

**Annotated bibliography of your research (20%):** Each student must turn in an annotated bibliography of at least 10 reference works that you anticipate will be useful for your final paper. There will be an online resource list prepared by Miriam Joseph, a reference librarian in Pius Library, to help you get started. Each student’s bibliography should contain at least one reference from each of the following categories:

- scholarly books
- scholarly articles
- statistical abstracts or other statistical source
- encyclopedias (e.g., *The Encyclopedia of Poverty*)
• websites run by established organizations (e.g., the U.S. government, international institutions such as the U.N., or NGOs), newspapers, or magazines
• Congressional or other legislative hearings (e.g., Congressional Quarterly Weekly)

Each bibliographic entry should contain both a summary of what is in the source and an assessment of how useful it is likely to be for your final paper. You can find a good online guide for writing an annotated bibliography at the Purdue University OWL website: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/01/. The due date can be found in the class schedule, below.

**Reflection paper (20%)**: Each student must turn in a 3-5 page essay in which s/he reflects upon her/his experience working on her/his project. No scholarly references are required, although you may include some if you want. Make sure to answer the following questions somewhere in the essay:

• What did you do for your project?
• Why did you choose this issue?
• Why did you choose to do the project in this way?
• How has it been going?
• What impact do you hope it will have? (Explain how this impact might happen.)

**Final paper (40%)**: This paper should be a scholarly analysis of your social change project’s contribution to poverty alleviation. Your goal is to use your research and your experience working on the project to evaluate how citizens can bring about greater social justice for the issue you have chosen. In some cases, students’ projects will fall short of their initial expectations, but these will still be opportunities for learning. Be sure to address the following questions somewhere in your paper:

• What does this issue have to do with poverty? (Include some history of the issue here.)
• What have been the dominant political discourses about the issue?
• What is the history of public policy about the issue?
• How does your project fit into this broader context of political action and discourse?
• To what extent did, or can, your project make a difference in poverty alleviation?
• What additional things need to happen in order to bring about greater social justice in your issue area?

This paper should be approximately 12-15 pages long. Where possible, incorporate material from your annotated bibliography, your reflection paper, the assigned readings, class discussions, and perhaps things you have learned from your fellow students’ projects. Please include citations for those articles/books/websites assigned in the course that you use in your paper. Use either the APA citation style or the one I can provide for you that is commonly used in sociology. There should be a minimum of 10 citations; as a rule of thumb, the more the better. And be sure to proofread all of your work.
Take-home course evaluation (5%): At the end of the semester, I will give you a questionnaire with approximately 20 open-ended questions asking for your thoughts about the course. If you complete this with thoughtful and thorough answers, you will receive an A for this assignment.

Keep up on current events: I expect students to keep abreast of current events and politics, since we will refer to current issues throughout the course. Read a credible newspaper (e.g., The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, The Economist) or listen to a reliable broadcast news program (e.g., NPR) on a regular basis.

Electronic devices: Students are not allowed to use any electronic devices in class, including cell phones and laptop computers

Academic Integrity and Honesty
The University is a community of learning, whose effectiveness requires an environment of mutual trust and integrity. Academic integrity is violated by any dishonesty such as soliciting, receiving, or providing any unauthorized assistance in the completion of work submitted toward academic credit. While not all forms of academic dishonesty can be listed here, examples include copying from another student, copying from a book or class notes during a closed book exam, submitting materials authored by or revised by another person as the student’s own work, copying a passage or text directly from a published source without appropriately citing or recognizing that source, taking a test or doing an assignment or other academic work for another student, securing or supplying in advance a copy of an examination without the knowledge or consent of the instructor, and colluding with another student or students to engage in academic dishonesty.

Any clear violation of academic integrity will be met with appropriate sanctions. Possible sanctions for violation of academic integrity may include, but are not limited to, assignment of a failing grade in a course, disciplinary probation, suspension, and dismissal from the University. Students should review the College of Arts and Sciences policy on Academic Honesty, which can be accessed on-line at http://www.slu.edu/colleges/AS/ under “Quicklinks for Students” or in hard copy form in the Arts and Sciences Policy Binder in each departmental or College office.

Students with Special Needs
If any member of the class has a disability and needs special accommodations of any nature, please let me know immediately after the first scheduled class period. I will work with you and the campus Disability Coordinator to arrange for appropriate assistance or design an alternative procedure to grade your work.

SLU Writing Center
I encourage you to take advantage of the Writing Center’s services. The Center can help if you want assistance developing answers to the essay exams in this course or preparing the extra credit assignments. They offer one-on-one consultations that address everything from generating and developing ideas to crafting strong sentences and documentation. Call 977-2930 to schedule an appointment.
This syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor to accommodate instructional and/or student needs.

Class Topics and Readings

January 18, 23: Introduction and overview of the course
Focus: What is the difference between an individual and a structural explanation?
• What does social justice entail?
• Is charity the best way to achieve social justice?
• Is there a difference between service and political engagement?

Readings:
• Mark Rank, One Nation, Underprivileged (2005), chapters 1-3.

January 25: How do we define and measure poverty?
Focus: What does it mean to be poor in the U.S.?
• How do we define poverty in the U.S.?
• How can poverty be measured?
• How does Sen define poverty?
• Why do measures of poverty matter?

Readings:
• Amartya Sen, Development as Freedom (1999), pp. xi-xiv, 3-8, 20-24, and 33-34.

Internet assignment: What is the Human Development Index?
• How has it been used, and by whom?
• What are its advantages and disadvantages?

January 30: Policy advocacy in practice
Focus: The Rebecca Project

GUEST LECTURER: Participants in the Rebecca Project

Internet assignment:
• The Rebecca Project: Find out about this organization from their website: http://www.rebeccaproject.org

Readings:
• Loeb, Soul of a Citizen, chapters 2, 3, 5, and 6.
February 1: Global poverty
Focus: Poverty around the world

- How do we measure poverty around the world? Extreme, moderate, and relative poverty
- The development ladder
- In what ways does development affect women’s and men’s lives differently?
- The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Readings:

February 6, 8, 13: The demographics of poverty in the U.S.
Focus:

- Who is more likely to be poor?
- What does race and ethnicity have to do with it?
- What is meant by the “feminization of poverty”?
- How do gender inequalities intersect with and impact poverty among women?
- Wealth vs. income: why is the distinction important?
- Residential segregation and poverty

Readings:
- Paul Loeb, *Soul of a Citizen*, chapters 7 and 8.

Internet assignment for February 13:
Find out about the Moving to Opportunity for Fair Housing Demonstration Program by going to their website: MTOresearch.org.
February 15: Anti-poverty efforts in St. Louis
Focus: • What do some local anti-poverty programs look like?
  • Where are the gaps in services? What works and what doesn’t?
  • Are there policy changes that would help alleviate poverty?

GUEST LECTURER: Staff person from Karen House

Begin reading Kristoff and WuDunn, *Half the Sky*

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February 20: The demographics of global poverty
Focus: Poverty in the developing world
• What is meant by the term, “structural violence”?  
• How do different axes of oppression (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity) affect poverty?  
• Why are women key to reducing poverty in the developing world? 
• What is the connection between violence and women’s economic livelihood? 
• What is the role of health care in reducing poverty? 
• What is the role of education in reducing poverty?

Readings:
• Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, *Half the Sky* (2009), Introduction and chapters 1-9 and 12.

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February 22, 27: The U.S. market economy and structural vulnerability
Focus: The structure of employment and unemployment in the U.S.
• Cyclical unemployment, sunrise/sunset industries 
• Low-wage jobs at or below the poverty line; lack of opportunities 
• Human capital, social class, and individual vulnerability

Readings:
February 29, March 5: The global market structure and globalization
Focus: The poverty trap and the developing world: Getting your foot on the ladder
- The prerequisites of development
- Kicking away the ladder: From statism to neoliberalism
- The gendered impact of globalization

Readings:

March 5
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE

March 7: Discourses on poverty
Focus: How do we view “the poor”? 
- “Us” vs. “them”
- “The undeserving poor” and “the culture of poverty”: Is it possible to talk about a “culture of poverty” without blaming the victim?
- In what ways is poverty discourse gender-specific?
- The role of politics

Readings:
SPRING BREAK

March 19, 21: Political ideologies in the U.S. regarding poverty and welfare
Focus: The U.S. view of poverty and the welfare state
- Different types of Western welfare states and their underlying ideologies
- U.S. views of poverty, inequality, and rights
- Contract vs. charity, and their implicit gender codes
- From the New Deal to the Great Society
- What does poverty have to do with citizenship?

Readings:
- Mark Rank, One Nation, Underprivileged (2005), chapters 5-6.

March 26: “Welfare reform” or a “war on welfare”? The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRWORA)
Focus: • Political values and U.S. social welfare policy
• The evolution of social welfare policy in the U.S.

Readings:

March 28, April 2: Poverty alleviation strategies: The role of microfinance
Focus: • Microfinancial services: Microcredit, microsavings, and microinsurance
• Microlending in the developing world: Grameen Bank and Jami Bora

GUEST LECTURER: A representative from Microfinancing Partners in Africa

Readings:
- Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, Half the Sky (2009), chapter 11...


Internet assignment:
- Check out the following websites for a description of Microfinancing Partners in Africa and the Grameen Bank (and Jami Bora), two very successful microfinancing programs:
  - [http://www.microfinancingafrica.org](http://www.microfinancingafrica.org)

**April 4: Poverty alleviation strategies: Asset building approaches in the U.S.**

GUEST LECTURERS: Dr. Julie Birkenmaier, Assoc. Prof. and Director of Field Education in SLU’s School of Social Work, and Dr. Jami Curley, Assist. Prof., SLU’s School of Social Work

Focus: Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) and microfinance in the U.S.

Readings:

Internet assignment: Find out what the “earned income tax credit” is if you don’t already know.

**April 4**

REFLECTION PAPER DUE

**April 11, 16: Poverty alleviation strategies: Macro-level policy changes**

Focus: Do we need to re-form the U.S. welfare state?
- What’s wrong with current policies?
- What poverty-alleviation policies will work in the U.S.?
- What is politically feasible?
- What does it mean to be an “informed advocate”?

Readings:
  
  cont....
• Nancy Fraser, “Reinventing the Welfare State,” in Boston Review (Feb./Mar., 1994).
• Paul Loeb, Soul of a Citizen, chapter 10

April 18: International economic institutions: The International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and World Trade Organization (WTO)
Focus: • IMF: From embedded liberalism to the Washington consensus
  • Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) and the poor
  • The World Bank and its poverty reduction mandate
  • WTO: Agricultural subsidies and complaints from developing countries

Readings:

April 23: The role of political institutions: Bad governance
Focus: Bad governance: Poverty, politics, and corruption
• Democratic vs. authoritarian regimes
• Political development: Political decay or political institutionalization
• U.S. Millennium Challenge account

Readings:
• William Easterly, The White Man’s Burden: Why the West’s Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good (2006), pp. 112-159.
April 25: The UN Millennium Development goals and foreign aid
Focus: The Millennium Development goals and international security
- Investments in people and infrastructure: On-the-ground solutions
- The poverty trap and the need for foreign aid

Readings:
- Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, *Half the Sky* (2009), chapters 10 and 13

April 30: The role of multinationals (MNCs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
Focus: Public-private partnerships and poverty alleviation

Readings:
- Listen to NPR story about Tom’s Shoes (Nov. 26, 2010, 6 minutes long) at: http://www.npr.org/player/v2/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=131550142&m=131612208

May 2: Poverty alleviation: Active citizens, advocacy, and the role of civil society
Readings:

May 7: A matter of justice, a matter of citizenship, a matter of security
Readings:
- Paul Loeb, *Soul of a Citizen*, chapter 12.

Wednesday, May 9, 2:00
FINAL RESEARCH PAPER DUE