Politics of Poverty and Welfare

COURSE OVERVIEW

Politics of Poverty and Welfare is a survey course designed to expose scholars to contrasting theories about poverty, the role of government in antipoverty efforts, and taxpayer-funded assistance programs in the United States. This course will challenge the scholar to think critically about arguments relating to the causes and effects of poverty, divergent political approaches to addressing poverty and poverty-related issues, and the ongoing debate over America’s social safety net. We will examine the principal theories, rationale, institutions, and processes associated with the development, implementation, and evolution of the welfare state in the United States, and we will engage in exercises to build and hone skills for identifying and accessing how political and social ideologies inform and impact public discussions, policy decisions, and program funding.

To further bolster the scholar’s proficiencies in the topic, we will explore welfare program goals, outcomes, and indicators. We will survey federal-level administrations, bureaucratic behaviors, defenses of welfare, proposals for policy and programmatic improvements, and alternatives to welfare. We will consider the implications of historical precedents and the potentialities of contemporary concepts to formulate critiques of public welfare. Each scholar will demonstrate a degree of course comprehension, analytical competence, and proclivity for candor by constructing three short argumentative essays (one for preserving, one for restructuring, and one for dismantling the welfare system in America) and by responding to questions on the midterm and final exams.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Scholars are required to perform the following four main tasks: 1.) attend class, 2.) read required materials, 3.) produce three academic writings, and 4.) take two exams. First, attendance will prove crucial to the scholar’s success in this course. The information, techniques, and caveats essential to performing well on the essays and exams will be delivered, discussed, and dissected during class meetings only. Class will begin promptly at 2:00 PM. Each meeting (except for those reserved for exams) will consist of a lecture, a guided thought exercise, and a Q&A session centered on the scheduled topic and assigned readings. The lecture will consist primarily of a logical analysis and highlighting of key elements taken from the readings. The guided thought exercise is intended to
encapsulate, reinforce, and crystallize the lesson presented in the lecture, and the Q&A session provides an opportunity to inquire, challenge, clarify, expound, revisit, share, etc.

Second, scholars must read the required materials to keep pace with the course. Lectures will not include a review of the readings but rather an interrogation of the fundamental premise, central claims, theoretical framework, and other factors associated with the broader body of work. Only when the scholar is familiar with the texts will the topic, tone, and tenor of the lectures, exercises, and Q&A discussions support and strengthen the scholar’s capacity to reason philosophically about the core conjectures, findings, and tenets put forth in the assigned works. While scholars are not required to read the recommended materials, they are encouraged to do so. Reading and contemplating the recommendations in combination with the required readings will empower the scholar to become more acquainted with the content, context, and continuity of the class and can help equip the scholar with additional insights and instruments useful for excelling in the course.

Third, scholars are required to write three short (5-7 page/double-spaced), applicable, coherent, and sound argumentative essays for supporting, amending, and opposing the welfare system in the United States. Essays must be in Microsoft Word, editable for comments and markups, and uploaded to NYU Brightspace online learning management system no later than the essay’s due date and no earlier than exactly one week prior to the essay’s due date. Due dates for the essays are spread out over the semester with the first essay due in week eight, the second in week twelve, and the third in week fifteen. For essay due dates, requirements, format, scoring, and other details, see argumentative essays beginning on page nineteen of this syllabus.

Fourth, scholars are required to take a midterm exam and a final exam. The midterm exam is intended to measure the scholar’s understanding of select course material covered from the start of the semester to the midpoint of the semester. Select course material refers to the parts of the course that are especially pertinent to the structuring of the argumentative essays (i.e., theory, claims, logical reasoning, evidentiary support, etc.). These items will be emphasized throughout the semester because they are the fundamental building blocks of a valid argument, and to prepare strong written arguments, the writer must possess a good command of these precepts. The midterm exam will serve as a valuable tool from which to draw lessons with three-fifths of the total course deliverables yet to fall due. The final exam will be cumulative and is utilized to assess the scholar’s mastery of the course’s major components (i.e., theories of poverty, political processes, antipoverty policies, programs, etc.). Both exams will consist of multiple choice, true or false, term matching, fill in the blank, and one potential score-boosting but exceptionally difficult bonus question.

**COURSE READING MATERIALS**

**No Course Textbooks Required**

In lieu of textbooks, this course leverages articles, book chapters, presentations, reports, reference tools, and other resources. For scholars’ convenience, downloadable versions of the reading materials have been uploaded to NYU’s Brightspace online learning management system under POL-UA 382 Politics of Poverty and Welfare Readings-Fall 2021. Recommended readings are listed later in this syllabus under course calendar and after listings of required readings. Recommended readings can also be found on Brightspace. Online materials will include a link to the website in the listing and will not be included in the Brightspace cache of readings.
While I have tried to devote at least one week to the most pertinent topics in the study of the politics of poverty and welfare, this course is not a comprehensive treatment of the subject. Relevant research, data, and literature are too numerous to master in one course. However, the readings will cover a wide range of intellectual problems, theoretical perspectives, research designs, and analytical methods used in the field. I hope this course will help you gain a stronger sense of how politicians, practitioners, and academics formulate, investigate, communicate, and operate and the impact these activities have on policy, programs, and the public in general.

**Required**


Increasing Ideological Uniformity and Partisan Antipathy Affect Politics, Compromise and Everyday Life.”


**COURSE CALENDAR**

**INTRODUCTION**

**Week 1**

**September 2: Introduction and Course Overview**

**Required**
No required readings assigned prior to this initial class meeting.

**Recommended**
No recommended readings suggested prior to this initial class meeting.
(1). POVERTY

Week 2

September 7: Perspectives on Poverty

Required

“Constrained versus Unconstrained Visions.” one-page reference tool, Sowell

“Crumbling American Dreams.”; “The Opportunity Gap.”; and “Our Disconnected Working Class.” (Note: These three New York Times opinion articles have been combined into one file under “Crumbling American Dream Robert Putnam.”

“Negotiating the Paradoxes of Poverty.” Carcasson: Introduction 1-4


“The New American Divide.” Murray

“Argumentative Essays.” George Brown College. 

Recommended


September 9: Theories of Poverty 1

Required

“Theories of the Causes of Poverty.” Brady

Recommended


Week 3

September 14: Theories of Poverty 2

Required

“Psychological Theories of Poverty.” Turner and Lehning

“Sociological Theories of Poverty in Urban America.” Wolf

“Structural and Individualistic Theories of Poverty.” Calnitsky

“The Causes of Poverty Cultural vs. Structural.” Jordan

Recommended


September 16: Measuring Poverty 1

Required

“Methods of Measuring Poverty.” Iceland
**Recommended**


**Week 4**

**September 21: Measuring Poverty 2**

**Required**

“Chapter 6: Poverty Measurement.” Smeeding

“Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index” Dhongde and Haveman

**Recommended**


**September 23: Conceptualizing Poverty and Poverty Trends**

**Required**


**Recommended**


(2). THE WELFARE STATE

**Week 5**

**September 28: The War on Poverty (Constrained)**

**Required**

“The War on Poverty: 50 Years Later.” House Budget Committee: Introduction pg. 3-10, Chapter 1: Cash Aid, Chapter 4: Food Aid, Chapter 6: Housing

**Recommended**

“From Food Stamps to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).” *A legislative timeline tool*

“Historical Development.” *A U.S. social welfare structure quick reference tool*


USDA Food and Nutrition Service- A Short History of SNAP

**September 30: Tackling Single Parenthood**

**Required**


**Recommended**


https://www.brookings.edu/research/welfare-reform-and-poverty/
Week 6

October 5: *The War on Poverty (Unconstrained)*

**Required**


**Recommended**

“A Brief Overview of Race and Social Welfare History- Key Legislation” *A quick reference tool*


October 7: *Expand Employment Opportunities and Raise Pay*

**Required**


“TANF at Age 20: Work Still Works.” Haskins

**Recommended**

“Subsidized Employment Is a Strategy for Tough Economic Times and for the Hard-to-Employ” MDRC policy memo

U.S. Congressional Research Service. The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant: A Legislative History (R44668; November 30, 2020).


Week 7

October 12: *In Defense of the Welfare State*

**Required**

“Government as Anti-Poverty Facilitator in the USA.” Musgrave
“Tax and Spend...Chapter 1: Defending the Welfare and Taxing State.” Michelmore

**Recommended**


**October 14: Strengthening the Defense of the Welfare State**

**Required**

“Guns and Butter: The Welfare State, the Carceral State...” Kohler-Hausmann


**Recommended**


(3). INSISTENCE, IMPROVEMENTS, INNOVATIONS, AND INDICATORS

**Week 8**

**October 19: Insistence**

**Required**

“Expanding Work Programs for Poor Men.” Mead: Chapters 3, 4, and 5

“Opportunity, Responsibility, and Security.” AEI/Brookings: Chapters 5 and 6

“Supporting Work for Low-Income People....” Loprest and Martinson.

**Recommended**


**October 21: Essay #1 and Midterm Exam (in-class)**

**Required**
No required readings assigned for this class meeting.

**Recommended**
No readings recommended for this class meeting.

**Week 9**

**October 26: Improvements**

**Required**

**Recommended**


“Smart Social Programs” - Jason Furman

**October 28: Innovations**

**Required**
“A No-Cost Proposal to Reduce Poverty & Inequality.” Sawhill and Karpilow

“Anti-Poverty Policy Innovations.” Berger, Cancian, and Magnuson

“Paycheck Plus.” Pardoe and Bloom

**Recommended**

“Which Families are Poor and Why?” Institute for Research on Poverty Fact Sheet

**Week 10**

**November 2: Indicators 1**

**Required**

“An Assessment of the Effectiveness of Anti-Poverty Programs in the United States.” Ben-Shalom, Moffitt, and Scholz

“War on Poverty: Effectiveness of Anti-Poverty Programs...” Huang and Vikse

**Recommended**


**November 4: Indicators 2**

**Required**

“The Uneven Patterning of Welfare Benefits at the Twilight of AFDC.” Kail and Dixon

“Welfare Reform: A Continued Failure?” Nino

**Recommended**


Bureau of Economic Research.


(4). THE POLITICS OF POVERTY AND WELFARE

**Week 11**

**November 9: Policy, Power, and Paradoxes**

**Required**

“How Politics and Institutions Shape Poverty and Inequality.” Brady, Blome, and Kleider

“Negotiating the Paradoxes of Poverty.” Carcasson: The Paradoxes of Poverty/Con. 4-27

“Poverty Politics and Policy.” Bane

**Recommended**


**November 11: Partisanship, Polarization, and Principles 1**

**Required**

“Party Over Policy.” Cohen

“The Politics of Social Policy in America.” Faricy

**Recommended**


Week 12

November 16: *The Role of Government*

**Required**

“Tax and Spend....” Michelmore: Chapters 3 and 5, and Epilogue: Stalemate

**Recommended**


November 18: *Essay #2 Due / Executive Rhetoric*

**Required**

“Negotiating the Paradoxes of Poverty.” Carcasson: Chapter II 35-40, Chapter III 70-73, Chapter IV 104-107, Chapter V 130-132, Chapter VI 177-180.

**Recommended**


Week 13

November 23: *Partisanship, Polarization, and Principles 2*

**Required**


**Recommended**


November 25: *HAPPY THANKSGIVING (no class)*

**Required**

No required readings assigned
(5). FRAMING THE NARRATIVE: PEOPLE, POLICIES, PROGRAMS

Week 14

November 30: Redistribution and Dependency?

Required

“Tax and Spend...Chapter 2: Market Failure.” Michelmore

“The War on Poverty After 50 Years.” Rector and Sheffield

Recommended


December 2: Disparities, Dismantling, and Deconstruction

Required

“Cash Assistance in America.” Hardy, Samudra, and Davis

“Still Not Dismantling?” Gingrich

“The End of the Welfare State?” Clarke

Recommended


“Suburban Poverty.” 2018 Fact Sheet by Will Maher, Institute for Research on Poverty

Week 15

December 7: Preferences, Portrayals, and Prerogatives

Required

“Americans Want the Federal Government to Help...” Halpin, Agne, and Jain


“Poverty as We Know It.” Clawson and Trice

“Pre- and Post-Welfare Reform Media Portrayals of Poverty....” van Doorn

Recommended


December 9: Essay #3 Due / Review and Prep for Final

Recommended


“Negotiating the Paradoxes of Poverty.” Carcasson: VII. Conclusion


Week 16
December 14: Final Exam (in-class)

*ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS*

Scholars will make definitive decisions in selecting theories, perspectives, and positions from which to argue. Playing both sides of the fence will not fly in this course. The scholar must choose a side on the issue at hand. This is precisely why the essays are split into three stances—support, improve, and oppose. For each stance, scholars must not only express why that respective position is preferable in and of itself, but the scholar must also demonstrate why that position is better than an alternative stance such as maintaining the status quo, making a change, or elimination.

Scholars are strongly encouraged not to summarize opposing theories, perspectives, and positions but to lay out crisp, debatable claims and counterclaims backed up by supporting points instead. (Remember: the most important thing about an argumentative essay is that you must show both sides of a contentious issue). While it is important to highlight the pros of the affirmative, it is just as important to defend and rationalize the affirmative against alternatives. Given the short length of the essays, scholars must utilize brevity, optimize word selection, and leverage optimal argumentative structure. Therefore, scholars are encouraged to start fast right out of the gate. In other words, get to the point, make every word count, and save the fluffy filler for your magnum opus. Most importantly, do not stress over the essays. They are not intended to fluster, frustrate, or infuriate but rather enlighten, expand, and empower the writer as well as the reader. We will go over the structure, style, and science behind the sequence of the essays incessantly this semester.

**Essay #1**

**Due October 21: An Argument to Preserve the Welfare State in the United States**

In this essay, the scholar will make an argument for maintaining America’s current welfare state. By selecting and citing theory/s of poverty, social challenges, and economic problems the welfare system addresses, outlining how the system addresses these issues, and arguing why current policies and programs are the best way to address the issues cited, scholars will defend the welfare system against proposals to amend the system and proposals to eliminate the system.

**Essay #2**

**Due November 18: An Argument to Restructure the Welfare State in the United States**

In this essay, the scholar will make an argument for improving America’s current welfare state by making fundamental changes to the system. Scholars will cite indicators, paradoxes, and other relevant reasons why the system needs restructuring, what needs to be done differently, and why these changes will prove better than the current system and better than eliminating the system.
Essay #3

Due December 9: An Argument to Dismantle the Welfare State in the United States

In this essay, the scholar will make an argument for doing away with America’s welfare state altogether. By citing relevant theories, outcomes of the war on poverty, problems with the system, prospects, and alternatives, scholars will argue for the complete dismantling of the welfare system in the United States. We use “dismantle” as it is unlikely that such a robust and complex system can simply be ended. Scholars will argue for, how, and why policy/processes wind programs down.

Essay Format

Type- Microsoft Word Document (editable, no pdf).

Cover Page- essay title, scholar’s name and e-mail address, course title and number, and date.

Essay Length- 5-7 pages, excluding cover page, references, tables, figures, end notes (footnotes are fine, but their impact on the page count needs to be considered).

Margins- standard one-inch (1”) margins all around.

Font- Times New Roman 12, (Note: for tables, figures, end notes, and footnotes, use Calibri 10)

Spacing- double-spaced

Page Numbering- top, middle, beginning with page number (1) on first page after cover page.

Sources- only the required and recommended readings assigned for this course.


Submission- essays are to be uploaded to the NYU Brightspace online learning management system no later than the essay’s due date and no earlier than exactly one week prior to the essay’s due date. Papers may not be submitted as hard copies in person, via fax, or e-mail. Essays uploaded up to a week after the deadline will receive a 15-point deduction. No essay over one week past due will be accepted. Unforeseen mishaps are unfortunate, but they are not sufficient for extensions in this course. Only medical emergencies with official documentation are considered admissible.

Essay Scoring

Essays are assessed for strength of argument (60%) and grammatic structure and correctness (40%). Each essay begins with a total of 100 points (60 for argument and 40 for writing) which are subject to protection and deduction. Arguments are measured according to the George Brown College “Argumentative Essays” reference tool: https://www.georgebrown.ca/sites/default/files/uploadedfiles/tlc/_documents/argumentative_essays.pdf. There are 15 four-point elements (for a total of 60 points) to the argument. We will go over each of these elements in the coming weeks. Grammatic structure and correctness refers to the standard spelling, usage, punctuation, length, and format accuracy and has 20 two-point
elements (for a total of 40 points). In other words, every grammatic error receives a two-point deduction (Note: each violation of the essay format receives an automatic six-point deduction).

The final score of each essay is derived from the total points remaining after each four-point element of the argument is either protected by its presence or deducted on account of its absence, and the 40-point grammatic allowance is figured by deducting two points for every grammatic error. Also, remember essay format violations cost six points each; make sure to format your essays according to the essay format provided above. Once again, most importantly, do not stress over the essays. They are not intended to fluster, frustrate, or infuriate but rather enlighten, expand, and empower the writer as well as the reader. We will go over the structure, style, and science behind the sequence of the essays incessantly this semester.

My goal is to provide you encouragement, guidance, and insight that helps illuminate whatever path you choose to take in the next step on your academic and professional journeys. I take my roles as an educator, mentor, and coach serious. I approach each of these responsibilities with careful consideration, and I treat each scholar that I have the pleasure and privilege of encountering and affecting with the utmost respect. I expect nothing more and nothing less in return. As we embark on this voyage of engagement, exploration, and discovery, let us remember that although this expedition is meant to enhance our intellect, we are also allowed to enjoy the experience.

“One of the great challenges in this world is knowing enough about a subject to think you're right, but not enough about the subject to know you're wrong.”

— Neil deGrasse Tyson

Policy Regarding Disability Services and Programs

Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities, 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, (212-998-4980). Reasonable accommodations can be made for students with qualified disabilities, but only for students who have registered with the Moses Center and provide documentation from that office. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me in the first three weeks of the term.

Grading

There are five, equally weighted components to the grade:

1. Essay #1 20%
2. Midterm Exam 20%
3. Essay #2 20%
4. Essay #3 20%
5. Final Exam 20%
*FINAL GRADE IS BASED ON SUM OF SCORES DIVIDED BY FIVE*

**Academic Integrity**

New York University is a community of scholars who value academic integrity a great deal. As a member of the NYU community, you are encouraged to learn and study with other members of our community but remember that individual assignments are just that—individual. To view a full list of New York University College of Arts and Sciences’ academic codes, conducts, and procedures, visit:

[https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html](https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html)

**Additional Administrative Details**

- You are responsible for obtaining any materials distributed in or outside of class.
- I reserve the right to revise this syllabus as the term progresses.
- Regarding lateness:
  - Class begins promptly at 2:00PM. Late arrivals and early departures can be disruptive to the lecturer, other scholars, and discussions. Please, stay mindful of this, plan accordingly, and reserve late entries, early exits, and reentries for those unavoidable occasions only. Your adherence to this request is appreciated.
  - For essays and exams, scholars are only permitted to take a make-up if they have a prior arrangement with me, or they produce official documentation from a doctor or university dean excusing the absence due to serious illness or family matter.
  - Travel, conflict with another activity or job, and other nonmedical reasons are not acceptable excuses for missing class, essay deadlines, or exams.
  - Technical difficulties uploading essays to Brightspace will not excuse you from the assignment or the repercussions for missing the deadline.
- For meeting requests, use my office hours, and if possible, email me ahead of time.
- Last but certainly not least, have a wonderful and fulfilling semester!