

PS335 Poverty, Inequality and Social Policy in the United States

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Office Hours: By appointment.

Course Description

How does the state ensure the welfare of its citizens? Who decides who gets what, and under what conditions? How are resources redistributed fairly to alleviate inequality? What can the state demand of its citizens in exchange for social welfare? These questions are at the heart of decisions about social policy and the welfare state. Social policy directly affects how individuals and groups fare, and how they perceive of their government and their own role in society. In considering these questions, this course will introduce students to the politics of social policy and inequality in the United States, and examine concepts of social control and poverty governance. The first part of the course provides an overview of U.S. social policy: we consider what policies fall under this umbrella, the role of the state in providing welfare to its citizens, as well as contestations over social rights and the provision of benefits. Further, we will engage critically with constructions of target populations, including (racialized) narratives of deservingness, concepts of paternalism and social control, and the role of spatial inequality. The second part considers three major social policy domains: housing and homelessness, healthcare, and cash assistance/poverty relief. We will explore what policies exist to respond to pressing social issues and how they have developed, and how the respective target groups and their perceived deservingness affects policy design and eligibility requirements.

Following the successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Understand important concepts in social policy and political science research
- Understand and critically assess relevant social science research outputs
- Understand and discuss the political, economic, socio-cultural, and institutional factors shaping the development and the design of social policy in the United States
- Critique coverage of social policy developments and narratives about poverty

Communication

For short questions, email is the best way to contact me. For everything else please schedule a time to come to my office hours. Office hours are a chance for you to get help on essays, go over material covered in class, talk about connections between class material and other ideas, and so on. They are generally student-led but I can help you formulate questions and point you in the direction of additional material for your term papers based on my sense of your strengths and interests. I really encourage you to take advantage of this time.

Requirements

1. Regular and active attendance is required. You are expected to come to class having read the assigned readings, and ready to contribute to our discussion. For each text, you should be able to articulate the following:

- What problem or gap is this work addressing?
 - What is the research question? What are the dependent and independent variables? What method(s) does the author use to answer the research question?
 - What is the theoretical argument? What is the empirical finding?
 - How does this text relate to other readings in our class?
 - What do you think about this text? Are you convinced by the argument the author makes?
 - Was anything about this text or the broader topic unclear or confusing?
2. You will be scheduled as the discussant for one session. This means you are prepared to speak on and engage with the readings, and help guide the discussion during that session. We will discuss the schedule in the first session, and I will make it available on Google Classroom.
 3. You are required to submit two essays for this course, a midterm essay, and a final essay. Instructions and deadlines for the essays are included in the syllabus, and will be discussed throughout the course.
 4. In addition, we will have research workshops in sessions 6 and 12, where you will be able to present your initial idea (for the midterm) and your research project (for the final essay) to your peers and receive feedback.

Finally, you are expected to come to class ready to contribute to a pleasant learning environment. I expect everyone to behave respectfully, keep an open mind when listening to their peers, and avoid interrupting each other. Student conduct that disrupts the learning process will not be tolerated. Please let me know if you feel that the discussion atmosphere or the structure of the sessions can be improved, and I will make an effort to adjust it accordingly. Please let me know if I can do more to make the class (and class materials) more accessible.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Please let me know ahead of time if you will be missing a session. No documentation or explanation of the reasons for absence is required. If you are to miss a session in which you fulfill a specific task (i.e., are scheduled as the discussant or are scheduled to present your work), you will need to let me know ahead of time to discuss an alternative. Ideally, if you know ahead of time that you will miss your discussant session, please arrange to switch with one of your peers and email me about the changes. If you have missed multiple sessions, please make sure to reach out to me proactively to ensure you can still pass the class. According to Bard College Berlin policy, no credit can be offered for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assessment

Assessment will be based on the written assignments (see below), participation in class, contributions to the paper workshops, and the discussion activities. This syllabus includes all stipulations concerning the completion of assignments, submission guidelines, as well as deadlines. Please let me know if anything is unclear, or if there is anything else you need to be able to succeed in this course.

Assignments

You will complete two writing assignments for this course.

Midterm essay (deadline March 20) expected length: 2000 words.

Final essay (deadline May 10) expected length: 6000 words (includes the 2000 words you wrote for the midterm).

For the midterm, you are expected to select a social policy issue you are interested in and discuss its relevance, as well as the current state of the literature on the topic. Alternatively, you can submit a synopsis of your final essay on the same topic as your midterm paper. Synopses should include a research question, clarification of dependent and independent variables, method, and an indication of data to be used (data do not need to be collected by this point). Depending on your individual progress and preference, you may choose to focus on either the literature review or your planned research design, or elements of both. The expected length for the midterm essay is approximately 2000 words.

For the final essay, you are expected to submit a research paper of approximately 6000 words. This essay should build on the topic of your midterm essay, and expand on the literature review as a starting point, or execute the research design proposed in your synopsis. You should use your midterm essay as the basis for this final essay, and can include the midterm essay in its entirety if you wish to do so. Should you choose to change your topic for the final essay, please discuss this with me during office hours ahead of time.

In addition to introducing you to social policy research, this course is intended to help you become successful readers and writers of academic work. We will discuss essay writing throughout the course. Please feel free to reach out with questions at any point during the semester. Refer to this syllabus for instructions on formatting and submission.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Please email me ahead of time if you anticipate problems submitting your work on time. If you want to discuss the content of your work prior to submitting, please make sure to reach out via email or come to my office hours.

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours. Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Essay 1: 20% of final grade (Midterm essay, submission deadline March 20)

Essay 2: 50% of final grade (Final essay, submission deadline May 10)

Participation: 30% of final grade, broken down as follows:

10% Discussant activity, 10% classroom participation weeks 1-7, 10% classroom participation weeks 8-14.

Classroom participation includes participating in the paper workshops.

Schedule

Below is our schedule for the semester. Depending on our progress throughout the course, and based on students' interests, we can expand or reduce certain sections. The (academic) readings for each session will be provided as PDFs. I will also provide optional supplementary materials where appropriate.

Session 1	Feb 1, 2023	Introduction: What is Social Policy? <i>In our first session together, we will discuss the structure of the course, and undertake some initial activities to start a conversation about social policy, poverty, and your goals for this course.</i>
Session 2	Feb 8, 2023	Poverty and the U.S. welfare state in comparative perspective - Howard, Christopher. 1993. "The Hidden Side of the American Welfare State." <i>Political Science Quarterly</i> 108 (3): 403–36. https://doi.org/10.2307/2151697 . - Brady, David. 2019. "Theories of the Causes of Poverty." <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i> 45: 155–75.
Session 3	Feb 15, 2023	Geographic Inequality - Grumbach, Jacob M. 2018. "From Backwaters to Major Policymakers: Policy Polarization in the States, 1970–2014." <i>Perspectives on Politics</i> 16 (2): 416–35. - Stewart, Emily. 2020. "The American Unemployment System Is Broken by Design." <i>Vox</i> . May 13, 2020. Link: https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2020/5/13/21255894/unemployment-insurance-system-problems-florida-claims-pua-new-york . - Fellowes, Matthew C., and Gretchen Rowe. 2004. "Politics and the New American Welfare States." <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> 48 (2): 362–73. https://doi.org/10.2307/1519888 .
Session 4	Feb 22, 2023	Target Groups: Concepts of Deservingness - Kreitzer, Rebecca J., Elizabeth A. Maltby, and Candis Watts Smith. 2022. "Fifty Shades of Deservingness: An Analysis of

		<p>State-Level Variation and Effect of Social Constructions on Policy Outcomes.” <i>Journal of Public Policy</i> 42 (3): 436–64. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0143814X21000222.</p> <p>- Somers, Margaret R., and Fred Block. 2005. “From Poverty to Perversity: Ideas, Markets, and Institutions over 200 Years of Welfare Debate.” <i>American Sociological Review</i> 70 (2): 260–87. https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240507000204.</p>
Session 5	March 1, 2023	<p>The Social Contract: Rights and Retrenchment</p> <p>- Hacker, Jacob S. 2004. “Privatizing Risk without Privatizing the Welfare State: The Hidden Politics of Social Policy Retrenchment in the United States.” <i>The American Political Science Review</i> 98 (2): 243–60.</p> <p>- Gilbert, Neil. 2009. “US Welfare Reform: Rewriting the Social Contract.” <i>Journal of Social Policy</i> 38 (3): 383–99. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279409003043.</p>
***	March 8, 2023	State Holiday: No Class
Session 6	March 15, 2023	<p>Student Presentations, additional readings tba</p> <p><i>In this session, each student will present their topic of choice for the midterm essay and receive feedback from the group. We will discuss the broader topics of the first half of the class, and set goals for the second half of the course. Midterm essays are due on March 20th.</i></p>
Session 7	March 22, 2023	<p>Segregation</p> <p>- Trounstein, Jessica. 2016. “Segregation and Inequality in Public Goods.” <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> 60 (3): 709–25.</p> <p>- Mejía, Ryan Best, Elena. 2022. “The Lasting Legacy of Redlining.” <i>FiveThirtyEight</i>. February 9, 2022. Link: https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/redlining/.</p>
Session 8	March 29, 2023	<p>Race, Policing & Social Control</p> <p>- Prowse, Gwen, Vesla M. Weaver, and Tracey M. Meares. 2019. “The State from Below: Distorted Responsiveness in Policed Communities.” <i>Urban Affairs Review</i>, 1–49.</p> <p>- The Sentencing Project. 2015. “A Lifetime of Punishment: The Impact of the Felony Drug Ban on Welfare Benefits.” The Sentencing Project. Link: https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2022/08/A-Lifetime-of-Punishment.pdf.</p> <p>- Herring, Chris. 2021. “Complaint-Oriented ‘Services’: Shelters as Tools for Criminalizing Homelessness.” <i>The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science</i> 693 (1): 264–83.</p>

***	April 5, 2023	Spring Break: No Class
Session 9	April 12, 2023	Health Care Policy - Michener, Jamila. 2019. "Medicaid and the Policy Feedback Foundations for Universal Healthcare." <i>The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science</i> 685 (1): 116–34. - Brooks, David. n.d. "Medicare for All': The Impossible Dream."
Session 10	April 19, 2023	Housing Policy - Einstein, Katherine Levine, Maxwell Palmer, and David M. Glick. 2019. "Who Participates in Local Government? Evidence from Meeting Minutes." <i>Perspectives on Politics</i> 17 (1): 28–46. https://doi.org/10.1017/S153759271800213X . - Hankinson, Michael. 2018. "When Do Renters Behave Like Homeowners? High Rent, Price Anxiety, and NIMBYism." <i>American Political Science Review</i> 112 (3): 473–93. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055418000035 .
Session 11	April 26, 2023	Unemployment Policy and Poverty Relief - Yu-Ling, Chang. 2020. "Unequal Social Protection under the Federalist System: Three Unemployment Insurance Approaches in the United States, 2007–2015." <i>Journal of Social Policy</i> 49 (1): 189–211. - Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. n.d. "Policy Basics: Unemployment Insurance." Link: https://www.cbpp.org/research/economy/unemployment-insurance . - Parolin, Zachary, and David Brady. 2018. "Extreme Child Poverty and the Role of Social Policy in the United States." <i>SocArXiv</i> . https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/u5ecn . - Appelbaum, Binyamin. 2015. "Out of Trouble, but Criminal Records Keep Men Out of Work." <i>The New York Times</i> , February 28, 2015, sec. Business. Link: https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/01/business/out-of-trouble-but-criminal-records-keep-men-out-of-work.html .
Session 12	May 3, 2023	Student Presentations <i>In this session, each student will present their final essay and receive feedback from the group. Final discussion on essay writing and questions.</i>

Session 13

May 10, 2023

Wrap Up Session

Depending on student interest and time, the last week provides space to discuss the potential for alternative modes of providing welfare. Topics include innovations and experiments (e.g., Universal Basic Income), social movements and protests, community-based aid. Final essays are due on May 10th.

Essay Deadlines

Deadline Midterm Essay: March 20, 2023

Deadline Final Essay: May 10, 2023

Submission of Essays: Please submit your essays using Google Classroom by the deadline (end of day). Please submit your essays using the following format: PDF file, 12 pt. font, 1.5 spacing, standard margins, page numbers. Please include a cover page (no page number on cover page) that includes your name and the title of your essay, but do not include your name on the remainder of the pages. For citations, use an in-text citation style (name-date format), and include a reference list at the end of the document. You must cite all sources of information, quotations or ideas which are not your own. Do not copy and paste text from the internet into your papers and attempt to pass it off as your own writing. You may not turn in a paper that someone else has written or that you have bought or downloaded.