Soc 592: Poverty and Family
Fall 2016, Fridays 2:50-5:40
Wilson-Short 201

Professor Jennifer Sherman
Office: Wilson 215
Email: jennifer_sherman@wsu.edu
Office Phone: 509-335-4163
Office Hours: by appointment
3 Credits

POVERTY AND FAMILY IN THE UNITED STATES
This course explores how families experience poverty, and how the experience of poverty affects family life, family structure, and family formation in both rural and urban America. Its aim is to provide a broad understanding that is relevant to the many different communities in which poverty is prevalent. It begins by exploring the ways in which income, employment, and poverty affect family life, focusing on how economic stress can lead to marital and family stress. It then looks in more depth at the lives of poor families, including the different strategies employed by families to cope with and survive poverty. The readings cover a number of different high poverty settings, which vary by region, cultural norms, and ethnic groups. The third section of the course focuses on the link between poverty and family structure, and in particular the high incidence of single parent families among the poor in both rural and urban America. It introduces early theories to explain this link, and then delves into more recent research that explores this link from a number of different points of view. The final section of the course looks at public policies that attempt to regulate the reproduction and family life of the poor.

Learning Outcomes
Objectives:
  1. That students gain an in-depth understanding of the ways in which poverty impacts family life, family structure, family decisions, and family outcomes, and the roles that larger social structures including labor markets, social divisions, and policies play in influencing these impacts.
  2. That students use the tools of sociology, including different theoretical understandings and research methodologies, to analyze the impacts of poverty on family from different perspectives.
  3. That students learn to think critically about the impacts of poverty on families, including synthesizing existing research to make unique observations and arguments.

Assessment:
Students’ progress toward all three course objectives will be assessed through 1) their contributions to in classroom discussion, including leading discussion during their assigned weeks; 2) two short papers that reflect in depth on particular course readings to showcase understandings, analysis, and critical thinking; and 3) the completion of a seminar paper or research proposal that draws upon class readings, but goes beyond assigned readings to present a unique research-based argument or poses a research-informed question that addresses the causes,
consequences, and/or impacts of poverty on families in the U.S. Part of the assessment of this seminar paper will include a short presentation to the class.

**READING LIST**

**Books (Available at Bookie)**

**Articles (available on Blackboard)**


**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**Seminar Participation (10%)**

This is a seminar and its success depends on your commitment. Attendance and participation are mandatory, and are an important part of your grade. Participation includes discussion, but also being prepared with questions and ideas that can help stimulate others’ thoughts as well. For each class you should have read the assigned reading, and be prepared to discuss it in detail.

**Leading Class Discussion (20%)**
Students are required to lead discussion twice during the semester (exact details may change, depending on final enrollment). As leader, your job is to briefly summarize the week’s reading, providing an overview of important themes and issues, as well as criticism and concerns about the content, arguments, or methodology. Class leaders will also be responsible for stimulating the week’s discussion, and will present the class with discussion questions to this end.

**Reflections (20%)**
Each student is expected to write 1-2 (single spaced) page reflection pieces based on four weeks of reading, one from each of the course sections. These reflection pieces should analyze and ask questions of the texts, not summarize them. Reflections are due by the Tuesday evening before that Friday’s class. They are to be uploaded to the Blackboard site and should be considered part of that week’s required reading.

**Seminar paper (50%)**
In addition, the course requires a seminar paper that will be due on Friday, December 9. This paper should be either 1) a prospectus for a research project, or 2) a research paper in which you attempt to answer a significant sociological question about poverty and family. You will be required to make a brief presentation to the class on your paper during the last week of class, worth 10% of the paper grade.

**Grading Policies:**
Work handed in late will be graded down. For each day late assignments will be graded down by one-third of a letter grade (i.e. from an A to an A-, from an A- to a B+, etc.). Assignments turned in more than one week late will not receive credit. If a student has a legitimate excuse for turning in work late (see “Absences” below), he/she must submit the request ahead of time in writing.

**Grade Distribution:**
- 94.0-100% = A
- 90.0-93.9 = A-
- 86.0-89.9 = B+
- 83.0-85.9 = B
- 80.0-82.9 = B-
- 76.0-79.9 = C+
- 73.0-75.9 = C
- 70.0-72.9 = C-
- 65.0-69.9 = D+
- 60.0-64.9 = D
- < 60.0 = F

**Other Class Issues**
**Absences**
Absences impede a student’s academic progress and should be avoided. Excused absences include those that are university sponsored, related to military service, and occasional illness, personal crises, mandated court appearances, parental responsibilities, etc., in accordance with WSU Absence Policy (73.C). In the case of university-sponsored absences, students should
obtain an official Class Absence Request form from the faculty or staff member supervising the off-campus activity. The form must contain specific information concerning the activity and date, be signed by the supervising faculty or staff member, and be submitted by the student at least one week in advance to the individual instructors of the student’s classes. In the case of military responsibilities, students inform the instructor of the duty before the absence and complete the missed work as soon as reasonably possible. In the case of other absences, the student should inform the instructor ahead of time in writing.

**Academic Integrity**
Academic integrity will be strongly enforced in this course. Any student who attempts to gain an unfair advantage over other students by cheating will fail the course and be reported to the Office of Student Standards and Accountability. Each student must turn in original work. No copying will be accepted. Any time another person’s work is used or referenced, it absolutely must be properly cited. Students who violate WSU’s Standards of Conduct for Students may receive an F as a final grade in this course. Cheating is defined in the Standards for Student Conduct WAC 504-26-010 (3).

**Accommodations for Disabled Students**
We are committed to providing assistance to help you succeed in this course. Students with Disabilities: Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and need accommodations to fully participate in this class, please either visit or call the Access Center (Washington Building 217; 509-335-3417) to schedule an appointment with an Access Advisor. All accommodations MUST be approved through the Access Center. For more information about the Access Center please refer to: [http://accesscenter.wsu.edu/](http://accesscenter.wsu.edu/), email the center at: Access.Center@wsu.edu, or call them at: 509-335-3417.

**Emergencies and Safety**
Washington State University is committed to enhancing the safety of the students, faculty, staff, and visitors. It is highly recommended that you review the Campus Safety Plan [http://safetyplan.wsu.edu/](http://safetyplan.wsu.edu/) and visit the Office of Emergency Management web site [http://oem.wsu.edu/](http://oem.wsu.edu/) for a comprehensive listing of university policies, procedures, statistics, and information related to campus safety, emergency management, and the health and welfare of the campus community. An emergency alert system is also available. You can sign up for emergency alerts (see [http://alert.wsu.edu](http://alert.wsu.edu)) through the my.wsu site [http://portal.wsu.edu](http://portal.wsu.edu/).

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**PART I: ECONOMIC STRESS AND FAMILIES**

**Week 1: Introduction**
No readings.

**Week 2: Economic Stress and Family Distress**
Week 3: Personal and Psychological Impacts of Job Loss and Poverty
Howe, Levy, and Caplan, “Job Loss and Depressive Symptoms in Couples: Common Stressors, Stress Transmission, or Relationship Disruption?”
DeMantas and Myers, “‘Step Up and Be a Man in a Different Manner’: Unemployed Men Reframing Masculinity.”

PART II: SURVIVING POVERTY
Week 4: Social Networks
Readings: Stack, All Our Kin
Nelson, “Single Mothers and Social Support: The Commitment to, and Retreat from, Reciprocity.”

Week 5: Low-wage and Informal Sector Work
Readings: Dodson, “Stereotyping Low-Wage Mothers Who Have Work and Family Conflicts.”
Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, “I’m Here, but I’m There: The Meanings of Latina Transnational Motherhood.”

Week 6: Welfare
Readings: Hays, Flat Broke with Children

Week 7: Housing and Homelessness
Readings: Desmond, Evicted

PART III: POVERTY AND FAMILY STRUCTURE
Week 8: The Poverty-Family Structure Link
Readings: Wilson, The Truly Disadvantaged, Chapters 3 and 4.
South and Crowder, “Neighborhood Poverty and Nonmarital Fertility: Spatial and Temporal Dimensions.”
Snyder, “Patterns of Family Formation and Dissolution in Rural America and Implications for Well-Being.”

Week 9: Women’s Motherhood and Marriage Choices
Readings: Edin and Kefalas, Promises I Can Keep

Week 10: Shifting Romantic and Family Boundaries
Nelson, “Reciprocity and Romance.”
Roy and Burton, “Mothering through Recruitment: Kinscription of Nonresidential Fathers and Father Figures in Low-Income Families.”
Newman, “Men and Women: Together and Apart in the Later Years.”

Week 11: Poor Men, Marriage, and Fatherhood
Readings: Anderson, “Sex Codes and Family Life among Poor Inner-City Youths.”
Tach, Edin, Harvey, and Bryan, “The Family Go-Round.”
Augustine, Nelson, and Edin, “Why Do Poor Men Have Children?”
Sherman, “Bend to Avoid Breaking.”

**PART IV: FAMILY REGULATION AND POLICY**

**Week 12: Policy and Poor Families**
Readings: Lopoo and Raissian, “U.S. Social Policy and Family Complexity.”
Randles, “Repackaging the Package Deal.”

**Week 13: Domestic Violence and Abuse**
Cherlin, Burton, Hurt, and Purvin, “The Influence of Physical and Sexual Abuse on Marriage and Cohabitation.”

**Week 14: “Fixing” Poor Parents**
Edwards, “Saving Children, Controlling Families.”

**Week 15: Paper Presentations and Course Wrap-Up (no readings)**

*Papers due!"