

***Poverty and Place (aka P&P)***  
**Community and Environmental Sociology 578**  
**Cross-listed with Sociology and American Indian Studies**  
**University of Wisconsin-Madison**  
**Fall Semester 2018**  
3 credit hours  
Tues/Thurs 1:00-2:15  
Room 10 Agriculture Hall

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Office hours are by appointment only, email me to set up a time

**Description:** This course presents a sociological overview of place-based poverty in the United States, concentrating on the structural dimensions of poverty and poor places. We examine the allocation of economic and social rewards in contemporary society with an emphasis on persistently poor rural regions and communities, analysis of selected racial and ethnic groups and their economic opportunities and outcomes, and poverty programs and their consequences for structural and cultural changes.

**Prerequisite(s)**

Completion of introductory Sociology course (C&E SOC/SOC 140, SOC 181, C&E SOC/SOC 210, or C&E SOC/SOC 211)

**Breadths**

S - Social Science

**Instruction Mode**

Classroom Instruction

**Learning Outcomes:** As a result of participation in this course, you should:

- 1) Increase your understanding of the nature and scope of place-based poverty in the US and the differing perspectives on its causes and cures, especially the link between racial and ethnic segregation and the concentration of poverty
- 2) Increase your ability to critically evaluate knowledge claims by examining assumptions and data
- 3) Enhance your sociological research skills through gathering of evidence and application of theory
- 4) Increase your awareness of history's impact on the present, especially regarding ethnic and racial groups' positions and opportunities within US society
- 5) Enhance your participation in a multicultural society

**Ethnic Studies Requirement:** This course fulfills UW's ethnic studies requirement. The learning goals of the ethnic studies requirement are embodied in this course's integration of racial and ethnic discrimination and disadvantage with the spatial concentration of poverty. Below I quote the [learning objectives of ethnic studies courses](#) and briefly show how these objectives are embodied in this course.

***Awareness of History's Impact on the Present*** - Ethnic Studies courses highlight how certain histories have been valued and devalued, and how these differences have promulgated disparities in contemporary American society. **P&P:** The history of legal and illegal racial and ethnic discrimination in education, housing, and employment are linked to economic inequality and the spatial distribution of poverty. We will see this over and over again as we study regional patterns of poverty and look at the institutional bases of disadvantage. You can read an example of this connection here: [White economic privilege is alive and well.](#)

***Ability to Recognize and Question Assumptions*** – Ethnic Studies courses promote recognition and application of critical thinking skills, specifically with respect to teaching students to harbor a healthy skepticism towards knowledge claims, whether in the form of media, political, or popular representations, primarily as these relate to race and ethnicity. As part of this process, the ESR should challenge students to question their own assumptions and preconceived notions on these topics. **P&P:** Many Americans assume that our society is fundamentally meritocratic, resting on competition and equality of opportunity. This course challenges students to consider their own assumptions about poverty by exploring the structural and historic sources of disadvantage and advantage. You can read an example of this connection here: [Why do we think poor people are poor because of their own bad choices?](#)

***A Consciousness of Self and Other*** - Awareness of self is inextricably linked with awareness of and empathy towards the perspectives of others. In constructing a space for this kind of discussion in their classrooms, Ethnic Studies courses give students an opportunity to think about identity issues, including their own identity, as well as the connections they might have to people “outside” their focused social circle. **P&P:** Because American society is spatially and institutionally segregated by race and class, we have relatively little opportunity to see the lives of those different from ourselves. Through the readings and films in this course, we will hear the voices of, and see the conditions faced by, poor people throughout the United States. There is no “typical” poor person, so even those of us who grew up in poverty will find contrasts to our lives. You can read an example of this connection here: [What do we think poverty looks like?](#)

***Effective Participation in a Multicultural Society*** – Ethnic Studies courses should be relevant to students’ “lives outside the classroom”, and pursuing the objectives above should not only lead to student behavioral change, but to action in the real world. The ESR should ultimately engender in students the ability to participate in a multicultural society more effectively, respectfully, and meaningfully. This participation may be as mundane as being able to discuss race with a colleague or friend, or to recognize inequities in interpersonal, institutional, or other contexts. **P&P:** By taking a structural and institutional perspective on poverty, we learn that the level, distribution, and durability of poverty are not inevitable results of the characteristics of poor people. Instead, they are linked to the social and political characteristics of poor places, influenced by human actions. Much can be done to change the patterns of poverty and the distribution of opportunity and disadvantage. This potential becomes crystal clear when we look at the policy differences across the US states and between the US and other advanced industrial societies. You can read an example of this connection here: [In climbing income ladder, location matters.](#)

**Readings:** Poverty is an extremely important social and economic issue in the United States and many resources available on the internet allow us to understand the current realities. In order to incorporate these resources as they become available, I do not have a complete syllabus of assigned reading for you at the start of the semester. There are several important think-tank organizations within universities and government agencies, as well as *NGOs* (non-governmental organizations) involved in conducting and disseminating poverty research and policy briefs. We will tap into their research throughout the semester and use their e-newsletters to keep ourselves up-to-date on the latest developments in the field. I will post some of the links to these websites, but if you come across good articles or reports or blogs that highlight relevant research and analysis, please send them to me so that I can share them with the class.

We will read two books in their entirety. Other required readings for this course will be scholarly analyses published in social science journals and on the internet. These various on-line sources and the schedule for reading and discussing them will be available through the course website on Learn@UW. I will strive to give you at least a week's advance notice of readings. Sign up for email alerts of postings and develop the habit of checking the course website every day.

**Required Textbooks:** I have ordered these books through A Room of One's Own Bookstore in downtown Madison. You may of course find them through other vendors.

1) *Poverty in America: A Handbook, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, by John Iceland.

2) *\$2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America*, by Kathryn J. Edin and H. Luke Shaefer.

**Etiquette:** *Respect* must be shown toward each other at all times. We simply cannot have a quality learning environment without tolerance and respect for each other's views. That said, I expect that your comments will be informed by evidence, and we will privilege research-based evidence over our personal observations, which may reflect our subconscious biases as well as the particular nature of our lives.

*Common courtesies and professional conduct* are expected. Please remember that the classroom is a place for learning. That means that your cell phone is turned off while class is in session and that you do not engage in behaviors that place barriers to your and others' learning. Examples that spring to mind include checking your phone, texting, sleeping, chatting, eating, leaving the room, and other distracting actions. If I find your behavior distracting, I will not hesitate to point it out in class and I may ask you to leave if it continues. Also, if you leave the room for any reason, I will expect you to stay out for the rest of the class period.

***No use of laptops or other internet devices including iPads, tablets, and smartphones during class time, unless it is announced in advance.*** While computers are a valuable tool for research and study, they are inimical to participation and collegiality in the classroom, creating a "cone of distraction." I will let you know if you need to bring your computer for any data-related activities.

**RULES, RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES** -- See the Guide's [Rules, Rights and Responsibilities](#)

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison's community of scholars in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards for additional review. For more information, refer to [studentconduct.wiscweb.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/](http://studentconduct.wiscweb.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/).

Plagiarism sometimes occurs because students do not understand how to correctly acknowledge their sources. The Writing Center provides excellent guidelines that I encourage you to consult: <http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QuotingSources.html>  
Plagiarism detection software may be used in this course.

## ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform me of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. I will work either directly with you or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.

## DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

**Institutional statement on diversity:** "Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world." <https://diversity.wisc.edu/>

**Expectations and Graded elements:** This course follows UW's 3-for-1 credit hour expectation. For every hour you spend in the classroom, you should expect to spend 3 hours on classwork. If you do not have 10-12 hours per week to devote to this class, you should not be enrolled.

**Reading, discussion, attendance, and participation (worth 5% of final grade):** Do the reading assigned for each class period and be prepared to discuss it. I may call on you even if your hand is not raised. Come to class and be engaged. You can't participate if you aren't here, physically and mentally. I will take roll

on a regular basis so that I can keep track of your participation. I will automatically lower your final course grade by 10 percentage points (a full letter grade) for every 6 classes you miss.

Exams (worth 40% of final grade): There will be two exams. Each exam will be worth 20%. The likely dates of the exams are October 16 and November 20 (I will confirm exact dates as the semester goes along). The exams will be primarily essay, and may be take-home.

County poverty research project (worth 55% of the final grade): Throughout the semester you will be submitting parts of the course research project, which is a case study of US nonmetropolitan poverty. Each student will choose a different state and identify a nonmetropolitan county with high child poverty within that state. Those students taking this course as American Indian Studies will choose counties with tribal lands and a significant native population. All other students should avoid choosing nonmetro counties with substantial American Indian populations. The project will comprise 3 parts, each of which will be worth a designated share of the overall grade and due at a separate time of the semester.

Detailed instructions for the project will be provided several weeks before each part is due. In brief, each part of the project will require you to (1) assemble quantitative data pertinent to the topic, (2) interpret the data, on its own grounds, and in relation to other regions, and (3) use the assigned readings to evaluate the data.

Anticipated due dates and weighting:

INTRODUCTION – CLASS STRUCTURE (15%, 5 pages plus tables)

Oct. 1 By midnight: County and state population profile tables and summaries uploaded to Learn

Oct. 2 In class: Present and discuss your data in small groups

Oct. 9 At the start of class: Submit paper that identifies and interprets salient aspects of the social and spatial structure in your county, drawing comparisons with other regions, raising questions about poverty and privilege in your case study (hardcopy turned in and electronic copy uploaded to Learn).

OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE (20%, 7 pages plus tables)

Nov. 5 By midnight: Tables and summaries, submitted to Learn

Nov. 6 In class: Present and discuss your data in small groups

Nov. 13 At the start of class: Submit paper that identifies and interprets salient dimensions of the economic structure, drawing comparisons to other regions (hardcopy turned in and electronic copy uploaded to Learn).

POLITICAL STRUCTURE and CONCLUSION (20%, 7 pages plus tables)

Dec. 10 By midnight: Tables and summaries, submitted to Learn

Dec. 12 In class: Present and discuss your data in small groups

Dec. 15 Summary period (10:05am): Submit paper that identifies and interprets salient dimensions of the policy arena, draws comparisons to other states, and formulates conclusions about poverty in your county and state (hardcopy turned in and electronic copy uploaded to Learn).

Grading penalties for late work: The county research project depends on you completing your work on time *and* meeting with others in class to discuss and compare cases. I will deduct points equivalent to a full letter grade (10% of the points) for each late or missing aspect. For example, if you don't have your data ready on Oct. 1, but bring it with you on Oct. 2, I will deduct 10% from the grade you earn on the analysis. But if you do not have your data ready on Oct. 2, you cannot participate in the group

discussion, which will lead to another 10% deduction and then that element will be missing from your analysis paper due on Oct. 9, which will lower your grade even further. I am sure you can see that this is one class where timeliness is essential.

*Final grade "incompletes" will not be given* except under circumstances pertaining to family or medical emergencies.

Grades on exams and the term paper will be based on the following scale:

A	=	93 +
AB	=	88-92
B	=	83-87
BC	=	78-82
C	=	70-77
D	=	60-69
F	=	<60

If you have questions or concerns about any aspect of the class, do not hesitate to make an appointment to meet with me.