RSOC 5510/6510

Social Welfare, Families and Poverty

1) Credits and Hours:

Credit Hours:  RSOC 5510 (3)  RSOC 6510 (3)
Lecture Hours:  3
Labs and Studios:  None

2) Texts or Major Resources:

Primary Text, RSOC 5510 and RSOC 6510:

Supplemental Readings, RSOC 5510 and RSOC 6510:


Additional Readings, RSOC 6510:

Based on topics chosen by the graduate students for their papers, a selection of 10 research articles published in peer-reviewed journals will be assigned each semester. All graduate students will read these papers as background for their discussion of their colleagues' papers.

3) Course Description:

Normative debates surrounding the notions of equality and inequality, analytic tools for measuring and explaining income inequality, determinants of wage income and property income, the importance of inheritance, the feminization of poverty, and policy options for reducing poverty.

4) Course Objectives (RSOC 5510 and 6510):

a) Students will gain an understanding of what is meant by "poverty" in the United States
b) Students will understand how income inequality is measured and the problems inherent in such measures
c) Students will understand basic theories of poverty attribution and theories explaining the causes of income inequality
d) Students will learn how to evaluate the impact of historical and proposed policies on income distribution and poverty

Additional Objectives for RSOC 6510
e) Students will gain familiarity with public data sets available for poverty-related research.
f) Students will gain experience performing statistical analyses on a topic related to poverty.

5) Course Content and Class Schedule:

(Based on 30 class meetings of 75 minutes each)

Section 1: Overview of Poverty and Inequality (5 class lectures)
Class 1: Introduction
Class 2: Views of Inequality and Poverty (Schiller, chapter 1 and 2)
Class 3: Measuring Poverty (Schiller, chapter 3)
Class 4: Measuring Inequality
Class 5: Inequality in the U.S. (Supplemental reading: Jones and Weinberg

Section 2: Labor Force Participation and Poverty
Class 6: The Labor Force Participation Decision (Schiller, chapter 4)
Class 7: The Working Poor (Schiller, chapter 5)
Class 8: Minimum Wage, the Economic Theory and the Policy Debate
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Class 9: Interconnected Decisions: Work and Welfare. (Supplemental reading: Mead, chapter 1)

Class 10: Exam 1

Section 3: Causes of Poverty, Part 1
Class 11: Personal Attributes (Schiller, chapter 6)
Class 12: Family Size and Structure (Schiller, chapter 7)
Class 13: Culture and Race (Schiller, chapter 8)
Class 14: Education and Ability (Schiller, chapter 9)
Class 15: Educational Achievement and Poverty (Supplemental reading, Dahl and Lochner.)

Section 4: Causes of Poverty, Part 2
Class 16: Discrimination in Education (Schiller, chapter 10)
Class 17: The Labor Market (Schiller, chapter 11)
Class 18: Attributions of Poverty: Flawed Individuals or Flawed System? (Supplemental article: Bullock)

Class 19: Exam 2

Section 5: Social Welfare History
Class 20: A history of social welfare (Axinn and Stern, chapters 5-9)
Class 21: A history of social welfare, continued
Class 22: A history of social welfare, finish

Section 6: Welfare Programs and Policies
Class 23: Cash welfare, how it works and who is eligible
Class 24: Food Assistance
Class 25: Private provision of charity and faith-based initiatives (Supplemental reading, Bartkowski and Regis, chapter 1)
Class 26: The Foster Care System (Supplemental reading, Courtney)

Class 27: Exam 3

Class 28: Term paper/service learning report discussions
Class 29: Term paper/service learning report discussions
Class 30: Term paper/service learning report discussions
Exam Schedule

Three major in-class examinations to be held:

Exam I     Class 10
Exam II    Class 20
Exam III   Class 26

There will be a comprehensive Final Exam: See University Calendar

6) Course Requirements/Evaluation: Grading Policy

RSOC 5510 (undergraduate) grading policy

Option 1) Term Paper Option

3 Hour Exams (total)      50%
Homework                  10%
Term Paper                12%
Quizzes                    3%
Final Exam                25%

Option 2) Service Learning Option

3 Hour Exams (total)      50%
Homework                  10%
Service Learning Report   12%
Quizzes                    3%
Final Exam                25%

RSOC 6510 (graduate) grading policy

3 Hour Exams (total)      45%
Homework                  10%
Literature Review          5%
Research Paper             12%
Paper comments             3%
Final Exam                25%
Grading Scale (RSOC 5510 and RSOC 6510)

90.0-100     A  
80.0-90.0    B  
70.0-80.0    C  
**60.0-70.0**    D  
below **60**  F

There is no flexibility with respect to rounding up grades. An 89.9 is a B, a 79.9 is a C, and a 69.9 is a D. Final letter grades are calculated in Excel, set to one decimal point accuracy.

Please do not ask to "drop" any of your test or assignment grades or to be provided with any special "extra credit" assignments to boost your grade. Such favors would provide special and differential treatment, and thus are strictly against my policies. We want every student in this class to learn the material and earn a good grade, but only by following the rules set out in this syllabus or in the "Tiger Cub." Providing special favors is a disincentive to the learning process and is unfair to those who do not receive the same treatment.

**Exams:** Three hour exams will be held during class hours. The exams will consist of a combination of essay questions, multiple choice questions, and fill in the blanks. The tests will cover material presented in class and material in the readings, whether or not it has been covered in class.

**Grading Disputes:** If you think there is a mistake in the grading of a test, please inform me as soon as possible, and certainly before the next week has passed. Disputes about exam questions are handled the following way: The student will write a note, explaining the problem he or she perceives with the grading. I will take the item up again, and re-evaluate the question. If there is, in fact, a mistake, the grade will be corrected. If the original grading is correct, a written explanation will be provided. If the student is still not satisfied, he or she should see the instructor in the office for further explanation. If the student is still not satisfied, he or she should consult the Tiger Cub and follow the procedures therein. Please remember that when it comes to matters of judgment regarding the quality of essays questions and term papers, the final decision is mine.

A missed exam will be assigned a grade of zero, unless a student has a university-approved excuse, as listed in the Tiger Cub.

**Final Exam:** The final exam will be comprehensive and similar in format to the hour exams (but longer). The final exam is held during the time scheduled by the University. To take the final exam at a different time, the students must have a valid excuse and, following university policies, must obtain written permission from the dean of their college for a rescheduling.

**For undergraduates:** There will be one major term project, an individual paper. Students doing a term paper will meet with me no later than the 10th class day to discuss a topic in keeping
with the course outline. Students doing the service learning report (in semesters when this option is available) must meet with me no later than the 4th class day to discuss the service learning project. The finished paper, in both cases, will be no less than 10 and no more than 15 typed, double-spaced pages in a standard font (e.g. Times New Roman 12 pt). The paper will be due on the 20th class day. Students will provide a pdf file (emailed to me) as well as a printed copy. The pdf file will be distributed by me to all students in the class. The final three lectures will be devoted to class discussion of student papers.

A short quiz will be given at the start of each of these three classes concerning the material in the papers that will be discussed that day.

**Researched Term Paper (undergraduate Option 1):** The term paper is an individual project in which student will present a coherent argument concerning a topic related to poverty or income distribution and supports that argument with authorities (e.g. published works by experts), data, or logical analysis. As part of this project, the student must read books, book chapters and/or articles on a particular topic in poverty and summarize the major arguments and findings of the authors. The paper should be no less than 10. and no more than 15 typed, double-spaced pages, 1" margins all around, Times New Roman 12 point font (or similar font). In other matters, follow the ASA style conventions. Late papers are docked 5 points per week day, down to a grade of zero.

**Service Learning Report (undergraduate Option 2):** A service learning option may be available in a given semester. In service learning, the students sign up to work with a non-profit organization that directly benefits low-income families in our community. Students selecting the service learning option will write a report about the service learning project in lieu of the term paper. Details about service learning opportunities, if available, will be provided no later than the second class day.

**Literature Review (graduate only):** Graduate students will read peer-reviewed journal articles in Sociology, Economics, Anthropology, or related fields on a topic germane to this course and write a 1200-1500 word review of these articles. The topic must be approved by the instructor by the end of the eighth class meeting. The literature review will be due, via an emailed pdf file, by the 20th class meeting.

**Research Paper (graduate only):** Students will use existing, public data to write an original research paper on the topic selected for the literature review. The paper will include a statistical analysis of the data. Students will submit an outline of the work to be performed no later than the fifteenth class meeting. The final paper will be submitted to me, in pdf form, no later than the 26th class day and will be shared with all graduate students in the class. Graduate students are expected to read all graduate paper submissions and to provide written comments, to be submitted to me for grading and shared with the paper author. A comment form and guidelines will be provided.
7) **Course Policy Statements:**

**Excused Absences:** If you know you will have a conflict with an exam or assignment date, please provide that information well beforehand to arrange a make-up test or extension of the assignments. (Make-ups and extensions will be granted in accordance with Tiger Cub policies.) At a minimum, please provide **one-week notice** for an excused absence for any scheduled event, such as a field trip or court appearance. All excuses require documentation.

**Sudden Illness:** Students missing exams because of sudden illness will need appropriate documentation, verifying this illness. A make-up will be scheduled at a mutually convenient time within one week of the missed exam, unless circumstances (e.g. extended illness) require a longer period for rescheduling. Students who cannot reschedule within a week will need an excuse covering the period of delay.

**Family Emergencies:** The death or serious illness of a member of the student's immediate family is also grounds for an excused absence. In such cases, the student should provide me with a letter (on office stationery) from your dean's office as verification of the emergency. If you need leave or extensions for a family emergency, please do not hesitate to see your dean about the situation.

**Make-Up Exams:** A make-up exam will be provided for a student with a validated, university-approved excuse for missing the original exam. It is the student's responsibility to get in touch with me as soon as possible after the missed exam (or beforehand if the excused absence is for a scheduled event). (See the information on "sudden illness" above.)

**Homework:** Numerous short homework assignments will be given to aid students in understanding the material in the readings. Homework will be accepted for up to two class days after the due date, with a reduced grade (see section on homework grades) unless there is prior arrangement or verification of sudden illness or family emergency (as in the case of exams). Homework is returned in class, about two or three class days after it is turned in. If you miss class or arrive late, **it is your responsibility to ensure that your graded homework is returned to you.** If you believe there is a mistake grading your homework, follow the procedures described above for exams.

**Extra Credit:** A few extra credit homework assignments may be given. These assignments may provide an opportunity for the student to earn 1 or 2 extra points to be added into the student's grade for the exam on the appropriate unit.

**General Attendance Policy:** Attendance is not figured directly into your grade calculation, but please be advised that students who do not attend class regularly generally perform poorly on exams and assignments. **A student with unexcused absences is entirely responsible for missed material.** See the *Tiger Cub* for more details on class attendance policy and excused absences.
Academic Honesty: I follow the guidelines in the Tiger Cub in dealing with academic honesty cases, which means turning in all suspected cases of academic dishonesty to the Academic Honesty Committee, no exceptions.

Class Website: Some of my notes and other materials for this class will be made available on the class website: http://pduffy.pageout.net

Office Hours: Office hours for Dr. Duffy are posted on the class website. If they are changed temporarily, an announcement will be made via email or in class. If these hours are inconvenient for you, please make an appointment. Email is probably the best way to arrange an appointment. If you drop by without an appointment, you may find me already occupied or out of the office.

Phone: You are welcome during normal work hours, or after hours if you plan to leave a message to be received the following day. There is voice mail on the office phone, 844-5629. Speak slowly and clearly as you say your name. If you wish to be called back, please provide your phone number, and then repeat your name and phone number.

Taping: Taping the lecture requires permission from the instructor. Such permission is only granted in special cases (accommodation memo, English as second language), with limiting conditions on use of the tapes.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Students who need accommodations are asked to arrange a confidential meeting during the first week of class, or as soon as possible thereafter. This meeting may be set up by phone, (844-5629), email (duffypa@auburn.edu), or in person during my office hours. Students should bring a copy of the Accommodation Memo and Instructor Verification form. Students who require accommodations but do not have these documents are encouraged to contact the office of the Program for Auburn Students with Disabilities, 1244 Haley Center (334-844-2096). I will work to accommodate special needs in a manner consistent with the recommendations of this office.

Cell Phones: Turn them off during class. If you have a valid reason to have a cell phone turned on (such as a medical emergency or a job requirement) please inform me as soon as possible and also please set your phone to vibrate or flash instead of ring. You may not have a cell phone, even turned off, visible on your desk during exams.

Music players and similar equipment: You may not use a music player of any kind, even with an earpiece, during class or exams. Students will be required to show both ears during exams so that I can ascertain no audio devices are being used.

Teaching philosophy: Although I am an economist (or perhaps because I am), I reject the notion of education as a consumer good. Instead, I regard education as human capital formation, which has more in common with the production process than with consumption. Inputs into this
human capital formation come from the student, the university, and the faculty member. The most important inputs come from the student. To gain value from a class, a student must attend regularly, keep up with assigned readings, and work to understand the material. The amount of effort required to master a subject is highly variable, and each student is the best judge of how much effort he or she must expend to master the material. Students would do well to anticipate putting time into this course. I believe every student in this class has the ability to do well in it, with appropriate effort.

8) Justification for Graduate Credit (RSOC 6510): This class will “foster independent learning” (SACS guidelines 3.6.1 and 3.6.2) through an individual research project that will involve identification of a topic area, a review of peer-reviewed articles, and the completion of a research paper that includes statistical analysis. Graduate students will read peer-reviewed research articles in academic journals, material that is well beyond the introductory level. Patricia Duffy holds graduate faculty status.