COURSE OVERVIEW
Families and children in poverty are increasingly found in the policy spotlight and researchers and policy makers are struggling to understand the effects that poverty and social policies have on children. Now, a decade after the passage of landmark welfare legislation—the 1996 Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) – it is time to reassess what we know and what we do not know about America’s poor families and children.

The seminar will begin by examining poverty in the U.S., including how we measure it, recent trends, and who is poor. Second, we will focus on welfare reform, trying to understand what was reformed, why reform was needed, and the implications of reform. Next, we will focus the majority of our attention on some of the major issues in reauthorization, including marriage and child well-being. Finally, we will examine some emerging issues in the poverty and welfare debate and the implications these issues have for poor families and children.

This course will attempt to cover several different policies aimed at America’s poor families. However, because of the timeliness of welfare reauthorization (reauthorized in Jan. 2006), much of the readings and discussions will focus on TANF and related issues. A major emphasis of this course is on the relationship between research and policy. This goal will be addressed in the course readings and class discussions, and also with a field trip to Washington D.C. to meet with various policy makers and researchers that work closely with the policy process. Transportation and hotel costs for all students are covered through generous funding from the Department of Human Development and Family Studies and the Department of Sociology.

This is an interdisciplinary seminar drawing mainly from the fields of sociology, demography, economics and psychology. This course “counts” as a family class in HDFS and/or as seminar in population studies in the dual-degree demography program.
**COURSE MATERIALS**

*Books.* Students will experience substantial cost saving by purchasing the books on-line. Therefore, the books have not been ordered through the campus book store. Students should place their orders for the books well in advance to ensure delivery prior to the start of class.

There are two required books:


**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

*Class Participation.* This is a graduate seminar, meaning that we are all expected to heavily participate in class discussions. Thoughtful participation includes careful listening, as well as sharing ideas, observations, evaluations, and questions in a respectful manner.

*Discussion Questions/Comments.* Starting with the second day of class, May 17, each class member will prepare 2-3 questions or a comment based on the readings that can be used as a starting point for class discussions. The questions/comments are meant to generate a range of views and concerns about the issues covered in the class session. They are also intended to provoke discussion about how the assigned articles address the issues. For example, you might ask about the appropriateness and plausibility of an article’s assumptions (explicit or implicit) or its theoretical perspective. You might want to question a study’s empirical methods, its interpretation of the empirical findings, or its discussion of the findings’ policy implications. You might want to comment on how the research could be extended. Please email your questions/comments to the class by 10pm the night before class. This will give us some time to think about the issues everyone has raised. Late submissions will not be accepted. The questions will not be graded but are an important ingredient of the seminar and of your contribution to a stimulating intellectual environment.

*Reaction Papers.* Students will be expected to prepare weekly reaction papers to the assigned readings. These reaction papers should not exceed 2 pages of double spaced text. These reaction papers are meant to stimulate and focus your understanding of the readings.

*Discussion Leadership.* Each week a student(s) will serve as discussion leaders for about an hour of the class. Discussion leaders are responsible for asking questions, providing commentary on the assigned readings, and/or presenting additional material related to the topic of the week. Discussion leaders should schedule a meeting with the professor prior to class.

*Policy Brief and Presentation.* Students will select a policy, or part of a policy, that is focused on poverty and is of particular interest to them (i.e., child care, Medicaid, CHIP, EITC, food stamps) and make a presentation of that policy to the class. Students should identify the policy they want to focus on as soon as possible and decide on a class date for presentation with the professor. Presentations should be limited to 20 minutes, with an addition 10 minutes for questions and discussion. The policy brief is due on the same day as the policy presentation. The brief should
summarize key academic research findings and highlight important implications for policy. The reading list (both the required and recommended) provides several examples of policy briefs.

Research Proposal or Paper. The research proposal will review and critique the theories of empirical research on a poverty-related topic of your choice, develop testable hypotheses, and present a research plan designed to test them. While you may wish to choose a topic covered during the course, you are free to choose an area not covered here.

WEB PAGE
There is a web page for this class. All relevant information for the seminar will be available on this page, including links to relevant news stories, all class schedules, weekly reaction questions, and e-mail addresses for all seminar participants. The URL for this web page is: http://www.courses.psu.edu/hdfs/hdfs577_rxj9/
This web page contains links to all required readings that are available through the web.

CLASS TRIP
Seminar participants will be going on a field trip to Washington D.C. to meet with various individuals/organizations about the research and policy process and to learn more about welfare reform. This trip will leave State College at 7:00am on Monday, June 5th and will return to State College the following evening, Tuesday June 6th. Attending the field trip is not required, but it is a valuable learning opportunity. You should let the professor know immediately if you will not be going on the field trip.

CLASS MEETINGS
This seminar is scheduled to meet on Monday and Thursday from 3:00-5:00 during the first summer session in 105 White Bldg. However, there are several exceptions to this. Below is our meeting schedule (exceptions to the regular schedule are bolded):

CLASS 1: May 15 (Mon.) 3:00-5:00
CLASS 2: May 17 (Wed.) 3:00-5:00
CLASS 3: May 22 (Mon.) 3:00-5:00
CLASS 4: May 25 (Thu.) 3:00-5:00
CLASS 5: May 29 (Mon.) 3:00-5:00
CLASS 6: June 1 (Thu.) 3:00-5:00
CLASS 7: June 5&6: fieldtrip
CLASS 8: June 8 (Thu.) 3:00-5:00
No class on June 12 or 15
CLASS 9: June 18 (Mon.) 3:00-6:00
CLASS 10: June 22 (Thu.) 3:00-6:00
COURSE TOPICS AND READINGS

CLASS 1, May 15: Course Introduction and In-class Exercise

- Students should come to class having completed their corpus allocation, having written down their allocations and having justifications for their allocation (See First Day Exercise).
- Prior to class, by noon on Monday, students should have emailed the professor their top 4 choices for discussion leadership (what topics/dates do you prefer). Students should also e-mail a one paragraph description of their research interests. This one paragraph will be distributed to the class.
- Students should have completed reading the DeParle book

CLASS 2, May 17: Poverty in America


Recommended:


Recommended:

CLASS 4, May 25: “From Welfare-to-Work”: The Implications

Recommended:

CLASS 5, May 29: Poverty, Family Structure and Child Well-being


Recommended:

The ACS is a new, national, monthly survey that provides community level demographic, social, housing, and economic data.

CLASS 6, June 1: Marriage as an Anti-Poverty Policy

Recommended:

CLASS 7: June 5 & 6: Fieldtrip to DC

CLASS 8, June 8: Does Money Matter for Children’s Development?

Recommended:

CLASS 9, June 19: Children and Welfare Reform
Recommended:


CLASS 10, June 22: Fathers, Families, and Children’s Well-being


Recommended: