POLS 435: POWER AND POVERTY IN THE U.S.
Fall 2016 – Section 2

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Class Days: Tuesdays and Thursdays
Class Time: 9:30-10:45 a.m.
Class Location: LL 406
Schedule Number: 22844

Office Hours: 11:00 – 12:00, Tuesdays and Thursdays, and by appointment
Office Hours Location: 118 Nasatir Hall

CAL EXPERIENCE
The College of Arts and Letters has selected “Poverty” to be the central concept for the CAL Experience, 2016-2017. The object is for students and faculty across the college to engage the concept and consider its importance for contemporary society. This class, POLS 435, has been designated as a cornerstone class for the CAL Experience this year. In addition to its usual content, professors from various departments in the college have been invited for special lectures and presentations.

COURSE DESCRIPTION
The United States, despite egalitarian democratic rights, remains a stratified society conspicuous for substantial disparities in the allocation of income and wealth. The purpose of this class is to investigate these disparities, both empirically and normatively, and to assess the impact of government upon them. Topics for discussion will include:
- what is the extent of inequality and of poverty in America today?
- what are one’s minimum standards for distributional justice?
- is the United States currently on the road toward achieving that minimum standard?
- who are the poor and why are they poor?
- what is the array of federal welfare programs presently available, and what is their effect?
- how does one understand the role of the welfare state and what different forms has it assumed in different industrial democracies?
- how should the welfare state balance both individual responsibility and social justice?
- what explains the form of welfare system chosen by the United States?
- what reforms are currently on the political agenda?
- do we wish America to adopt an alternative welfare system to better advance distributional equity?

These are difficult questions that permit no simple answers. The topics for this course are controversial and essentially contested. My purpose is to pose the questions clearly, to present relevant data, to indicate some of the answers systematically given, and to help students to define and justify their own personal ideological stance. It is my belief that, by confronting these questions in a classroom setting, we can all improve the quality of our beliefs and understandings.
REQUIRED TEXTS AND MATERIALS
Assigned readings include both books for purchase and supplementary articles found on Blackboard. Some of the assigned readings are technical but necessary to establish a common database regarding a subject prone to considerable popular misunderstanding. Other readings are more argumentative and are intended to be thought-provoking. The following three books have been ordered from the campus bookstore and should be purchased:


GENERAL EDUCATION:
This course satisfies the General Education requirement under Explorations of the Human Experience: Social and Behavioral Sciences. Completing this course will help you learn to do the following with greater depth: 1) explore and recognize basic terms, concepts, and domains of the social and behavioral sciences; 2) comprehend diverse theories and methods of the social and behavior sciences; 3) identify human behavioral patterns across space and time and discuss their interrelatedness and distinctiveness; 4) enhance your understanding of the social world through the application of conceptual frameworks from the social and behavioral sciences to first-hand engagement with contemporary issues.

GENERAL COURSE OBJECTIVES:
1. Construct, analyze and communicate arguments:
   -- by thinking, reading, and writing critically about the topics of inequality, poverty, and welfare as they relate to good citizenship and the problems confronting American society.
   -- by developing better skills in close reading of texts, note-taking, verbal and written communication, the organization of ideas, and problem-solving.
   -- by demonstrating the ability to write formal essays that impart information, frame and support an argument, use critical thinking and analysis, make logical assumptions, derive sound conclusions from evidence, and display college-level use of language, grammar, and rhetorical structure.

2. Apply theoretical models to the real world:
   -- by analyzing and comparing various theories that seek to explain the differences in achievement and well-being across individuals.
   -- by analyzing and comparing various theories that seek to explain the differences in social welfare policies cross-nationally.
   -- by analyzing and comparing various theories that provide justification for different policy prescriptions regarding what to do about poverty and inequality in the United States.
3. Illustrate the relevance of concepts across boundaries; integrating global and local perspectives:
   -- by becoming more insightful on topics of inequality, poverty, and welfare at home and around the world.
   -- by analyzing the extent of poverty and inequality cross-nationally and here in the San Diego region, and by analyzing differences in policy approaches at the international, national, and regional levels.

4. Evaluate the consequences of actions:
   -- by analyzing and engaging actively in the contemporary debate regarding the degree of individual versus community responsibility as they affect the inequality of achievement and well-being within the United States.
   -- by analyzing and engaging actively in the contemporary debate regarding the effects and importance of policy interventions, from both the public and private sectors, for improving the well-being of individuals and reducing the degree of poverty and inequality in our society.

**FUNDAMENTAL COURSE PRINCIPLES**

This course will combine lecture and open discussion. Students in the course should remember:

1. They are expected to come to every class session, and to have read, understood, and thought about the assigned readings for that class session. This preparation is necessary in order to get maximum value from the lectures and to participate fully in discussions.

2. Examinations will cover the course materials presented in lectures, assigned readings, class discussions, and handouts. Students need to show up on time for the exams. Excused absences for missed examinations will be permitted only for extreme situations. Do not anticipate leniency.

3. Understanding, not memorization, is the foundation of college education. Study to understand, and memorize only what is important. Understanding is different than reading, for it entails actively thinking about the materials presented rather than merely absorbing them.

4. It is important to take careful class notes and to review them often. Do not write down everything said in class. Do not write down only those words the instructor puts on the board. Instead, attempt to reproduce the organization of the lecture, attending to the main points and the supporting arguments.

5. Students who come late or leave early can be disruptive to others in the class. Please come on time, and plan to be in class the entire session. If necessary, use the rest rooms before the class session begins. Interruptions are often rude.

6. Turn off your cell phones, pagers, text-messagers, etc. Please use your computers only for purposes of class note taking.

7. The classroom is a formal and polite setting. Please reserve individual discussions for before or after class. Please treat other students with respect and courtesy, even when you disagree with them.
**Students with Disabilities**
If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.

**Academic Honesty**
The University adheres to a strict policy regarding cheating and plagiarism. These activities will not be tolerated in this class. Become familiar with the policy (http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/srr/conduct1.html). Any cheating or plagiarism will result in failing this class and a disciplinary review by Student Affairs. Examples of Plagiarism include but are not limited to:

- Using sources verbatim or paraphrasing without giving proper attribution (this can include phrases, sentences, paragraphs and/or pages of work)
- Copying and pasting work from an online or offline source directly and calling it your own
- Using information you find from an online or offline source without giving the author credit
- Simply replacing words or phrases from another source and inserting your own words or phrases
- Submitting a piece of work you did for one class to another class

If you have questions on what is plagiarism, please consult the policy (http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/srr/conduct1.html) and this helpful guide from the Library: (http://infodome.sdsu.edu/infolit/exploratorium/Standard_5/plagiarism.pdf)

**COURSE GRADING FORMULA**
Grades will be computed based on the following weighting:

- Examination 1 (Midterm): 25% of grade (100 points x .25)
- Examination 2 (Final): 25% of grade (100 points x .25)
- Formal Essay 1: 15% of grade (100 points x .15)
- Formal Essay 2: 25% of grade (100 points x .25)
- Attendance and Participation: 10% of grade (100 points x .10)

There will be unannounced in-class quizzes, given at the instructor’s discretion.

Weighted point scores from 90-100 will earn a grade in the A-range
Weighted point scores from 80-89 will earn a grade in the B-range
Weighted point scores from 70-79 will earn a grade in the C-range
Weighted point scores from 60-69 will earn a grade in the D-range
Weighted point scores below 60 will earn a grade of F

Scheduled dates for the Midterm and Final, and the due dates for Essays 1 and 2 are found below, on the Preliminary Agenda of Class Sessions.
PRELIMINARY AGENDA OF CLASS SESSIONS/ASSIGNMENTS

NOTE: On BLACKBOARD, in the “Course Documents” section for this course, are the supplemental readings and outlines for each class session. You should download the outlines and bring them to class to aid in your note taking.

1) August 30 (Tuesday): Introduction
   Basic Data on Inequality and Poverty

2) September 1 (Thursday): On Income, the Median Income, and Income Trends
   On Individual Achievement and Socio-Economic Constraints
   Median Household Income Data Table (on Blackboard)

3) September 6 (Tuesday): On Inequality of Income and Wealth
   A Look at Inequality Data, U.S. and Comparatively
   Possible Explanations for Inequality
   Possible Justifications for Equalization
   Readings: Inequality Data Tables (on Blackboard)

4) September 8 (Thursday): On Social Mobility and the American Dream
   Readings: Pew Charitable Trust, “Economic Mobility: Is the American Dream Alive and Well?” (on Blackboard)
   Robert Putnam, Our Kids, Chapter 1

5) September 13 (Tuesday): Inequality Today: Families
   Readings: Robert Putnam, Our Kids, Chapters 2-3.

6) September 15 (Thursday): Inequality Today: Social Institutions
   Readings: Robert Putnam, Our Kids, Chapters 4-5.

7) September 20 (Tuesday): On Poverty
   The Political Definition of Poverty
   Who Is Poor in the U.S.?
   Readings: Iceland, Poverty in America, Chapters 1-2, pp. 1-38
   Poverty Data Tables (on Blackboard).
8) September 22 (Thursday): A Closer Look at Poverty Data, U.S. and Comparatively
Length of Poverty Spells
Effects by Age, Race, Gender, Family Status
Persistent Poverty and the Underclass

9) September 27 (Tuesday): On the Causes of Poverty
Individual; Cultural; Governmental; Social; Economic; Structural
Reading: Iceland, Poverty in America. Chapters 5-6, pp. 79-129.

10) September 29 (Thursday): Understanding Poverty: How Responsible are the Poor?
How Responsible is Society?

The Size of the U.S. Government
The Size of Welfare relative to the Size of Government
Readings: Iceland, Poverty in America. Chapter 7 and Conclusion, pp. 130-163.
Government Size Data Tables (on Blackboard)
**Formal Essay #1 due at the start of class** (see below for instructions)

12) October 6 (Thursday): On the Contraction of the U.S. Welfare State
The Types of Programs and their Current Cost
Reading: U.S. Welfare State Size Data Tables (on Blackboard)

13) October 11 (Tuesday): The U.S. Welfare State -- Social Insurance Programs
Social Security
Unemployment Insurance
Disability

14) October 13 (Thursday): The U.S. Welfare State -- Means-Tested Programs
AFDC into TANF
Supplementary Security Income
EITC and Other Public Assistance
Readings: Congressional Research Service, “Eligibility and Benefit Amounts in
TANF Cash Assistance Programs,” 2014. (on Blackboard)
State TANF Data Tables (on Blackboard).

15) October 18 (Tuesday): The U.S. Welfare State -- In-Kind Programs
Food, Health, and Shelter
Readings: Health Insurance Data Table (on Blackboard)
U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P60-253, “Health
Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2014 (on
Blackboard)

16) October 20 (Thursday): The U.S. Welfare State – Preventative Programs
Education and Job Training – Their Extent and Effects
17) October 25 (Tuesday): MIDTERM EXAM **

18) October 27 (Thursday): The Impact of the U.S. Welfare State
Redistribution via Taxing and Spending
Programmatic Reduction of Poverty -- Levels and Gap
Effects on the Economy and on Society
Readings: Anti-Poverty Effect Data Tables (on Blackboard)

19) November 1 (Tuesday): The Goals of Recent Welfare Reform

20) November 3 (Thursday): On Comparative Poverty Regimes
The Types of Welfare State
Market Opportunity and Employment
Social Paternalism and Cultural Reform
Insurance and Self-Protection
Residualism and Minimum Standards
Equalization
Universalism

21) November 8 (Tuesday): Comparative Welfare States - Programs and Effects

22) November 10 (Thursday): Poverty in Less Developed Nations
In-Class Film: A brief documentary about poverty in Brazil, with support from the J. Keith Behner and Catherine M. Stiefel Program on Brazil
Readings: World Poverty Data (on Blackboard)

23) November 15 (Tuesday): Guest Lecturer: Profession Kristen Hill Maher, Political Science Department. “Poverty and Immigration”

24) November 17 (Thursday): Guest Lecturer: Professor Audrey Beck, Sociology Department. “Poverty and the Family”

25) November 22 (Tuesday): Guest Lecturer: Professor Doreen Mattingly, Women’s Studies Department. “Poverty and Women”

-- November 24 (Thursday): no class (Thanksgiving Weekend Break)
26) November 29 (Tuesday): Guest Lecturer: Professor David Kamper, American Indian Studies Department. “Poverty and the Native American Experience”

27) December 1 (Thursday): Welfare Reform -- Debate Between Liberals and Conservatives
   Readings: Religion and Poverty – Notes (on Blackboard)
   Mary Jo Bane and Lawrence Mead, Lifting Up the Poor

28) December 6 (Tuesday): Welfare Reform: Alternatives Outside the U.S. Mainstream
   Further Right – Private Charity over Government Welfare
   Residualism and the Guaranteed Minimum Income
   Integration of Welfare, Family, and Labor Market Policy
   Feminist and Marxist Left
   Readings: Olasky, Excerpts from Writings (on Blackboard)
   Putnam, Our Kids, Chapter 6, “What is to Be Done?” pp. 227-261.


30) December 13 (Tuesday): Why is Welfare So Hard to Reform?
   ** Formal Essay #2 due at the start of class ** (see below for instructions)

** December 15 (Thursday) FINAL EXAMINATION **
8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.
Last week, two of my neighbors got into a heated discussion. One asserted that social mobility is like a ladder, in which each person has the opportunity to climb or not climb according to his/her own talents, abilities, and desire to achieve; poverty and inequality, therefore, are primarily the consequence of individual choices. The other neighbor also said that social mobility is like a ladder, but with relatively fixed rungs based on the socio-economic structure of the job market and with a clear hierarchy showing who is above and who is stuck below; poverty and inequality therefore largely reflect the differences in the available life choices within America and across Americans.

Upon hearing the debate, I told my neighbors that this controversial topic was precisely the one my students were currently considering in class. I promised to ask my students to present their own views -- and so you shall. Your task is to enter the debate, commenting wisely. In your opinion, is the American dream still alive? What are the major causes of poverty and inequality in the U.S.? To what extent are poverty and/or inequality due to individual traits and behaviors; to what extent are they due to social and economic structures? What are the consequences of your position for the interpretation of American society and for the tasks of the welfare state?

There exist considerable data regarding the degree of inequality and poverty in the U.S., and a number of contrasting theories attempting to explain these data. Much of this we have reviewed in class. You will consider the available data and the various theoretical approaches – and then construct a reasoned position of your own.

Your essay should begin with an explicit claim, followed by a justification of the position taken. You should consider the importance of hard work and hard times, of individual choices and social conditions, of personal motivation and available opportunities. Your essay should be grounded in class materials but should not merely be a review of those materials. It should recognize the reasonableness of alternative positions but make the case for the position you personally believe.
Last night, I had a very strange dream. I dreamed that I received personal telephone calls from the major policy advisors to both political parties. The parties, allegedly, have decided to make welfare reform a major government priority for the coming legislative session and are looking for both basic understanding and specific policy recommendations. I told them all that, as an ivory-tower academic, I usually refuse to give practical counsel to politicians, but that my students would be most anxious to offer their thoughts – and so you shall.

Your task, quite simply, is to design a welfare system for America. It should be quite specific. The candidates are interested in such possible topics as local vs. national responsibilities; the extent of coverage; universal vs. categorical aid packages; benefit levels vs. costs; possible distinctions between deserving vs. undeserving poor; the relative balance among insurance, means-tested, and in-kind programs; the usefulness of family allowances or minimum income guarantees; the role of social services; the value of work incentives and requirements; the importance of the family and the role of women; the relative emphasis on making individuals self-supporting vs. assisting them in times of need, etc.

Importantly, this is not to be just a list of desired items. A reasonably coherent philosophy of welfare reform must underlie your choice.

-- Your proposed welfare program will embody assumptions regarding the reasons for poverty, the characteristics of the poor, the nature of American society, and the proper role for government assistance. Make sure that your paper is grounded in the relevant data. In order for you to address the problem of poverty, you need to specify exactly what ‘the problem’ is.

-- Your proposed reform package also involves an inherent choice in favor of a specific theoretical conception of the appropriate welfare state for the U.S. and against others. In order to construct a better welfare state, you need to specify what principles underlie your conception of “better.” What alternative principles might others espouse? Why do you reject these alternative principles? What defense do you give for your theoretical approach?

-- You need to understand whether the U.S. currently is on the right road or the wrong road, based on your understanding of the problem and the principles you wish to achieve.

-- Then you are to offer your proposed welfare program. It is necessary that you make explicit the connections between your principles, your problem, and your recommendations. Explicitly how do the particular policies you advocate satisfy your objectives? Why are other possible programs insufficient to solve the problem and achieve your ideals? Why is this the very best imaginable program given your aims?
-- Finally, your recommendations are to be practical. What is the right balance between ideal proposals and achievable ones? What complications might your proposal encounter? How might you deal with the feasibility problem, if one exists?

**FORMAL ESSAYS -- GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS**

**Editing:** The essays must be edited and proof-read.

Essays with an excessive number of elementary grammatical or spelling errors will be penalized heavily. I will automatically subtract 5 points from any paper that uses (even once) the wrong “its/it’s” or “which/witch” or “whether/weather” or “their/there/they’re.”

**Content:** Each essay must contain a clear topic sentence in the first paragraph, stating explicitly the specific position you wish to defend (the claim). This should be followed, in a tightly organized fashion, by the reasons and evidence you believe give adequate defense for this claim (the support), such that you conclude it should be preferred to various alternate and competing plausible claims.

**Citations:** You are expected to cite all sources, using a standard format.

Be aware of the definition of plagiarism and the severe penalties for plagiarism.

**REGARDING THE FORMAL ESSAYS:**

Your essays should not become an excuse for rhetorical excess or empty exhortation. You should assume a sophisticated audience, with high-level critical capacities, that is already well acquainted with our class materials. Your papers should be grounded firmly in the data discussed in class. In writing, you will be expected to utilize information from the lectures and readings, but you are not to summarize extensively or to reproduce at length the data you have learned. Instead, I am most interested in how you incorporate class materials creatively for the purpose of fashioning a plausible argument of your own.

The essays will be graded based upon qualitative standards -- on the richness, coherence, and comprehensiveness of the views expressed, and upon the depth of the arguments used to support them relative to other plausible positions.

The main goal is to help you clarify your own beliefs, to push you to defend them rigorously, and thus to assist you in your own personal, intellectual, and political development. The range of possible options is enormous. I fully appreciate the impossibility of the task before you. All I can say is that you have been fully forewarned. Have fun.