

Poverty & Public Policy – Summer 2025

Professor: Casey Stockstill, PhD

Class Meetings: 2A (X-hour used on July 30 and Aug 6) 208 Dartmouth Hall

Office Hours: Drop-in, in-person from 1:30-2:15 on Tuesdays; 301E Blunt Alumni Center; on Zoom by appointment

Course Description

Despite long-standing efforts to reduce or eradicate poverty, the United States has persistent poverty, with deep race and gender divides in the experience of poverty. This course examines the American welfare state and its role in addressing the needs of the poor. We will draw from multiple disciplines but will somewhat center sociological approaches to understanding poverty and anti-poverty initiatives.

Student Learning Outcomes

- Define and explain current anti-poverty policy initiatives in the United States
- Understand how poverty policies can shape people's relationships to institutions and to others
- Critically assess the potential efficacy of one current poverty policy

Course Structure & Etiquette

Attendance is important in this class. You will have the first 15 minutes of class to take a quiz. We will spend the remainder of class delving further into the material through discussions, videos, and activities. Laptops are allowed for students with needed accommodations. **Cell phones are not permitted** in the class for any reason. If you are seen on your cell phone, you will receive a zero on the day's quiz.

Workload

This class requires consistent weekly preparation time outside of class. Rather than a slow burn that culminates in a ton of work during finals week, you can expect to need to devote about 8 hours per week to closely read for class and to work on your anti-poverty program project. The workload concentrates in Weeks 1-7. The upside of this is that Weeks 8-10 are relatively chill. If you are looking for a seminar where you can get some AI summaries of readings and bluff through discussion, this is not the seminar for you.

Course Communication

Please first check the syllabus for logistical information. If you need further help, contact me. I am always available to discuss course content with you. Please try to office hours if possible, otherwise contact me for an appointment. I try to respond to all emails within two business days.

Class Attendance & Participation

You should attend every class, if possible. You may only take quizzes in-person, in-class. If you need to miss class, for any variety of reasons, from work conflicts, to illness, to a mental health day, I encourage you to spend the time resting or attending to other matters. To support this, all students can miss two classes, with no questions asked or explanations needed, and without any effect to your grade. You will also get a "zero" on the quiz for the day. However, the gradebook drops the two lowest quiz scores for each student. With your third and subsequent absence, you will have a grade impact to participation and quizzes. I think that is reasonable as you will have missed 15% or more of our class meetings. If you face extenuating circumstances or prolonged illness that results in you needing to miss more than two classes, please talk to me. Excellent participation includes being on time, alert, and engaged in class activities and discussions. You can show engagement through talking in small groups, written reflections, and/or in large group discussions.

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Required Readings

Please acquire the following three books. All other required readings are PDFs on Canvas.
Calarco, Jessica. 2024. *Holding It Together: How Women Became America's Safety Net*. Portfolio/Penguin.
Fong, Kelley. 2023. *Investigating Families: Motherhood in the Shadow of Child Protective Services*. Princeton University Press.
Seim, Josh. 2020. *Bandage, Sort, and Hustle: Ambulance Crews on the Front Lines of Urban Suffering*. University of California Press.

Daily Quizzes

I give daily quizzes for two reasons. (1) To help you stay on top of the readings. When the whole class has done the reading, we are able to have a richer discussion. (2) To allow me to address any misunderstandings students may have.

Each quiz will cover readings due for that day. The quiz is open note and open book. The quiz must be taken during the first 15 minutes of class, and it **must be taken in class**. Quizzes will have 1-5 questions, usually open-ended. There is no quiz on Day 1 of class, but I'll go through example questions. You'll have the chance to take 13 quizzes. I will drop your two lowest quiz scores, leaving 11 quiz scores for this part of the grade.

Grading

Item	Percent
Daily Quizzes (drop lowest two lowest scores)	40
Class Participation	10
Anti-poverty initiative project	50
<i>Total</i>	100

Final grades will be assigned using the following point distribution:

94.0-100% = A
90.0-93.99% = A-
87.0-89.99% = B+
84.0-86.99% = B
80.0-83.99% = B-
77.0-79.99% = C+
74.0-76.99% = C
70.0-73.99% = C-
60.0-69.99% = D
60% or below = E

Grade disputes and late work

You may dispute quiz or assignment grades up to one week after the graded assignment has been returned. Please note that a regrade may result in a higher, similar, or lower grade. I will accept late work up to 72 hours past the deadline. If you submit it at 12:01am, the assignment is indeed late. However, I'll deduct 10% from your final grade on the assignment for each 24 hours that the assignment is late. After 72 hours, you automatically get a zero.

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Topic Overview & Due Dates

Week	Day	Topic	Project Due Dates
1	1	Origins of the Welfare State: Conceptual	
2	2	Origins of the Welfare State: Historical	Topic selection
	3	Origins of the Welfare State: Historical	
3	4	Measuring Poverty	
	5	1996 and beyond	
4	6	Gender and the Safety Net	Case study description due
	7	Gender and the Safety Net	
5	8	Culture	Source list due
	9	Stigma	
6	10	Policy types	Show 5 annotated sources
	11	Service Organizations & Implementation	
7	12	Sociological Spotlight: Health Care	
	13	Class cancelled	Written overview and 3 additional annotated sources due Sunday, August 10 th at midnight
8	14	Sociological Spotlight: Child Care	
	15	Sociological Spotlight: Child Care	
9	16	Student presentations	
	17	Student presentations	
10	18	Student presentations	

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Week 1

Origins of the Welfare State: Conceptual – Thursday June 26

Myles, J., & Quadagno, J. (2002). “Political Theories of the Welfare State.” *Social Service Review*, 76(1), 34–56.

Smeeding, T. M. (2011). “Poorer by Comparison: Poverty, Work, and Public Policy in Comparative Perspective.” In D. B. Grusky & S. Szelenyi (Eds.), *The Inequality Reader* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Week 2

Origins of the Welfare State: Historical – Tuesday, July 1

Gordon, L. (1995). “State Caretakers: Maternalism, Mothers’ Pensions, and the Family Wage.” In *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare 1890-1935*. (pp. 16–36). The Free Press.

Katznelson, I. (2005). “Welfare in Black and White.” In *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of America*. (pp. 25–52). WW Norton & Co Inc.

Origins of the Welfare State: Historical – Thursday, July 3

Fox, C. (2012). “Race, Immigration, and the American Welfare State.” In *Three Worlds of Relief: Race, Immigration, and the American Welfare State from the Progressive Era to the New Deal*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Haveman, R., Blank, R., Moffitt, R., Smeeding, T., & Wallace, G. (2015). The War on Poverty: Measurement, Trends, and Policy. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 34(3), 593–613.

Week 3

Measuring Poverty - Tuesday, July 8

Desmond, M., & Western, B. (2018). “Poverty in America: New Directions and Debates.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, 44(1), 305–318.

Fisher, G. (2008). “Remembering Mollie Orshansky—The Developer of the Poverty Thresholds.” *Social Security Bulletin*, 68(3), 1–4.

Pimpare, S. (2009). “The Failures of American Poverty Measures.” *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 36(1), 103–122.

1996 and beyond – Thursday, July 10

Tach, L., & Edin, K. (2017). The Social Safety Net After Welfare Reform: Recent Developments and Consequences for Household Dynamics. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 43, 541–561.

Halpern-Meehin, S., Edin, K., Tach, L., & Skyes, J. (2015). Chapter 1: Family Budgets: Staying in the Black, Slipping in the Red. In *It’s Not Like I’m Poor: How Working Families Make Ends Meet in a Post-Welfare World*. University of California Press.

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Week 4

Gender and the Safety Net - Tuesday, July 15

Calarco, J. (2024). *Holding it Together: How Women Became America's Safety Net*. Read through Chapter 4.

Gender and the Safety Net - Thursday, July 17

Calarco, J. (2024). *Holding it Together: How Women Became America's Safety Net*. Complete the book.

Week 5

Culture - Tuesday, July 22

Lewis, O. (1966). *The Culture of Poverty*. 215(4), 19–25.

Streib, J., Verma, S., Welsh, W., & Burton, L. (2016). “Life, Death, and Resurrections: The Culture of Poverty Perspective.” In *The Oxford Handbook of the Social Science of Poverty* (pp. 247–269). Oxford University Press.

Small, M. L., Harding, D. J., & Lamont, M. (2010). “Reconsidering Culture and Poverty.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 629(1), 6–27.

Brady, D. (2019). Theories of the Causes of Poverty. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 45, 155–175.

Stigma – Thursday, July 24

Brown, H. E., & Best, R. K. (2017). “Logics of Redistribution: Determinants of Generosity in Three US Social Welfare Programs.” *Sociological Perspectives*, 60(4), 786-809.

Moffitt, R. A. (2015). “The Deserving Poor, the Family, and the U.S. Welfare System.” *Demography*, 52(3), 729–749.

Halpern-Meehin, S., Edin, K., Tach, L., & Skyes, J. (2014). Chapter 3: The New Regime through the Lens of the Old. In *It's Not Like I'm Poor: How Working Families Make Ends Meet in a Post-Welfare World* (pp. 100–125). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Wetts, R., & Willer, R. (2018). “Privilege on the Precipice: Perceived Racial Status Threats Lead White Americans to Oppose Welfare Programs.” *Social Forces*, 97(2), 793–822.

Week 6

Policy Types – Tuesday, July 29

Mead, L. (1986). “The Problem of Obligation in Social Policy.” In *Beyond Entitlement: The Social Obligations of Citizenship*. (pp.1-17). Free Press.

Howard, C. (1993). “The Hidden Side of the American Welfare State.” *Political Science Quarterly* (Vol. 108, Issue 3). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2151697?seq=1&cid=pdf->

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Skocpol, T. (1991). “Targeting Within Universalism: Politically Viable Policies to Combat Poverty in the United States,” pp. 411-36 in *The Urban Underclass*, edited by Christopher Jencks and Paul E. Peterson. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.

Wednesday, July 30, 5:30-6:20pm (our X-hour)

- **Optional Zoom meetings to discuss your Written Overview.**

Service Organizations & Implementation – Thursday, July 31

Siliunas, A., Small, M. L., & Wallerstein, J. (2019). “We Can Help, But There’s a Catch: Nonprofit Organizations and Access to Government-Funded Resources Among the Poor.” *Journal of Organizational Ethnography*, 8(1), 109–128.

Hackworth, J. (2012). Practicing Religious Neoliberalism. In *Faith Based: Religious Neoliberalism and the Politics of Welfare in the United States* (pp. 86–113). Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.

Week 7

Sociological Spotlight: Health Care – Tuesday, August 5

Seim, J. (2020). *Bandage, Sort, and Hustle: Ambulance Crews on the Front Lines of Urban Suffering*. University of California Press. **Complete the book. This will be a long quiz, and worth two quiz grades.**

Wednesday, August 6, 5:30-6:20pm (our X-hour)

- **Required Zoom Q&A with Josh Seim**

Sociological Spotlight: Health Care – Thursday, August 7

Class Cancelled, Professor at academic conference

Week 8

Sociological Spotlight: Child Welfare – Tuesday, August 12

Fong, K. (2023). *Investigating families: Motherhood in the Shadow of Child Protective Services*. Princeton University Press. **Read pages 1-106.**

Sociological Spotlight: Child Welfare – Thursday, August 14

Fong, K. (2023). *Investigating Families: Motherhood in the Shadow of Child Protective Services*. Princeton University Press. **Read pages 107-240.**

Week 9

Tuesday, August 19

Student presentations

Thursday August 21

Student presentations

Week 10

Tuesday, August 26

Student presentations

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IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Academic Honor Principle

As a Dartmouth student, you must follow the [Academic Honor Principle](#).

Use of Generative AI Tools in SOCY55

Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT and similar technologies are rapidly becoming part of our professional lives. Used properly, these tools can enhance our work; used improperly, they can result in plagiarism, academic dishonesty, and false information. Use of these tools is permitted in this course for the following activities:

- Formatting references in APA style
- Checking grammar, style, and clarity when revising drafts

The use of generative AI tools is not permitted in this course for the following activities:

- Brainstorming or gathering ideas for your essay
- Writing entire sentences, paragraphs or papers to complete class assignments. You are expected to compose your written assignments yourself.

If you use Generative AI tools on anything you submit for SOCY55, you must provide sufficient documentation or attribution, just as you would for any other source or reference. Any violation of this policy is a violation of the Dartmouth Academic Honor Principle and will be reported to the Committee on Standards

Students with Disabilities/Medical Issues

Students requesting disability-related accommodations and services for this course are required to register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS; student.accessibility.services@dartmouth.edu; 1-603-646-9900) and to request that an accommodation email be sent to me in advance of the need for an accommodation. Then, students should schedule a follow-up meeting with me to determine relevant details such as what role SAS or its [Testing Center](#) may play in accommodation implementation. This process works best for everyone when completed as early in the quarter as possible. If students have questions about whether they are eligible for accommodations or have concerns about the implementation of their accommodations, they should contact the SAS office. All inquiries and discussions will remain confidential.

Religious Observances

Dartmouth has a deep commitment to support students' religious observances and diverse faith practices. Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during this academic term. If you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please meet with me as soon as possible—before the end of the second week of the term at the latest—to discuss appropriate adjustments.