

Government 312L (# 38625)

POVERTY AND POLITICS

Prof. Henry Dietz - h.dietz@austin.utexas.edu
Fall 2012 – meets in JGB 2.324

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Government 312L satisfies the second half of the mandated six hours of government that every UT student must take. Its topic - Poverty and Politics - deals with questions concerning what poverty is and why it exists, with welfare policies in the US and in Texas, and with poverty and politics in the Third World. The course assumes the basic knowledge of government from GOV 310L, but nothing more.

Questions concerning the nature and cause of poverty and what to do about it are by definition controversial and subject to much debate. This course does not presume that either the instructor or the readings has The Answer to such questions. Rather, our collective goal for the semester is to identify the major schools of debate around such questions and for you to think about them. If you have already decided how you feel about poverty, the course may provoke you to think again; if you have never given the question any thought, the course may provoke you into thinking about such questions.

Given the size and nature of the course, it is taught by lecture. There will always be time for discussion and participation in class, however. Attendance can make a clear difference at the end of the semester and failure to attend class can lower your grade. On the other hand, active participation in class can raise your grade if you are borderline.

Grades are drawn from three in-class exams; each counts one third of your grade. These exams are not cumulative. I shall look for evidence of improvement over the semester and will reward progress as appropriate. In addition, you may write an optional extra paper that counts the same as one mid-term (*the paper is not a substitute for a midterm, however; it is in addition to the required three midterms*). You are strongly encouraged to consult with me about a paper if you want to write one. See p. 3 of this syllabus.

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

Students with disabilities may request appropriate assistance from SSD (471-6259).

Grading: final grades will be determined on a +/- basis as follows:

| | | |
|------------|------------|--------------|
| 93-100 = A | 80-82 = B- | 69-67 = D+ |
| 90-92 = A- | 77-79 = C+ | 66-63 = D |
| 87-89 = B+ | 73-76 = C | 60-62 = D- |
| 83-86 = B | 70-72 = C- | Below 60 = F |

Books to be purchased

Dinitto and Johnson, *Essentials of Social Welfare: Politics and Public Policy*, 2012
Isbister, *Promises Not Kept*, 7th edition (2005)
Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed to Death in America* (2008)
Rodgers, *American Poverty in a New Era of Reform*, 2nd ed. (2006)

READING ASSIGNMENTS

29 August - **Introduction to the Course**

31 August, 3, 5 September - **What is Poverty?**

Dinitto/Johnson, introduction and chapter 1
Rodgers, chapters 1, 2, 3

7, 10, 12, 14 September - **Why Does Poverty Exist?**

Dinitto/Johnson, chapters 2
Rodgers, chapter 4

17, 19, 21, 24, 26 September - **Poverty in Texas**

Google "Texas Politics" or go to <http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu> and click on "Poverty".
Read the materials on this site during this period.

28 September - First Examination

1, 3, 5, 8 October - **Policies Directed Toward Poverty**

Dinitto/Johnson, chapters 3, 4, 7
Rodgers, chapter 5

NOTE: During the 1-26 October period read Ehrenreich, complete

10, 12, 15 October - **Social Groups and Policies**

Dinitto/Johnson, chapters 5 (pp. 110-113), 6, 8, 11(248-256),

17, 19, 22, 24 October - **Programs and Policy Evaluation**

Dinitto/Johnson, chapters 9, 10 (220-236), 12
Rodgers, chapters 6, 7, 8, 9

26 October - Second examination

29 October to 7 December – **Global Poverty and Inequality**

Isbister, complete

Wednesday, 12 December, 9:00-12:00 – Final exam

Optional papers are due on or before **16 November**. No exceptions!

Optional Papers

If you wish, you may write a short (6-8 pp. double-spaced) paper. This paper will be in addition to (NOT as a replacement for) the three exams. In other words, the exams are required; the paper is not.

The paper can count as much as one of the exams, but that depends on how you do on the paper. If you have an overall average of (for example) 78 on your exams and write a B paper, this will clearly bring your grade up. If, however, you have an average of 82 and write a C paper, the paper grade will not bring your overall average down. That is to say, if your paper grade can raise your overall grade, it will; if it would lower your overall grade, it won't count. The only thing your paper grade can do is raise your grade or keep it where it is – it can't lower your semester grade.

The topic for your paper is pretty much up to you, and students in the past have written on a wide variety of topics. These have included family histories (tied in to some readings), home town profiles of poverty, first-hand experiences, and the like, as well as more or less standard research papers. I have also had students do photo essays on poverty, interview people involved with poverty (charity groups and the like), and so forth. Use your imagination – but be prudent and realistic at the same time. If we have covered a topic in class and you want to pursue it, fine; if there's a topic we haven't covered, fine as well.

I strongly suggest that see me (*not* the TAs) once you have thought about a topic. Even if you know you want to write a paper but can't think of a topic, by all means come by. And don't wait until April 1 to start your paper (it's due **16 November**); it won't be worthwhile doing.

If two (but no more) of you want to write a joint paper, that's fine, but just know that each of you will receive the same grade.

On-line sources are fine and may be necessary, but they won't be sufficient. Use the libraries on campus!