Comprehensive Examination
Day 2 - Gender and Social Policy
Fall 2007

Answer two of these "two hour" questions.

1. Many observers of welfare policy in the United States have commented on a "marriage penalty" that is supposedly inherent in various public programs for the poor. Based on the literature you have read, (1) do you believe that such a penalty exists? Why? (2) Provide an example of how any potential marriage penalty might work in a specific social welfare-related program. And (3), from your reading of the literature, do you find a contradiction between the pro-family policies of the current administration and the program design of various income and welfare support programs? In your opinion, how might these be addressed through reformed public policy?

2. Studies of poverty, welfare dependency, and the consequences of welfare reform are almost inevitably based on predominantly minority samples. In your answer, (1) briefly summarize how gender and race interact to place certain groups of women at high risk of poverty and welfare dependency in the United States; (2) explain what the literature reveals about such families survival strategies and their ability to compensate for restricted income generation capacities; and (3) in your opinion, explain what are the major barriers to income self-sufficiency among poor families in the United States. Explain how and why these might operate similarly or differently for non-Hispanic whites, African-Americans, and Latinos.

3. In the 1960's and 70's, the "culture of poverty" perspective became one of the dominant, albeit controversial, perspectives used to explain the persistence of urban poverty. In your answer, (1) explain this perspective, emphasizing the gendered assumptions of this approach; and (2) offer your reflections with regard to this question: do you think that the perspective has any value today in explaining urban poverty, or should it be thrown out entirely?

4. Eleven years ago, President Clinton ended "welfare as we know it," by ending AFDC and replacing it with TANF. In your answer (1) explain the major provisions of these two policies, emphasizing their gendered assumptions; and (2) discuss how the change from AFDC to TANF has impacted poor women.