**IS402**

**Global Poverty and Inequality**

**Instructor:**  Dr. Stephen Young, Science Hall 234

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**Office Hours:** Open office hours on Mondays 5:15-6:15 Crossroads Café in the Education building and by appointment on Wednesdays in SH 234.

**Course Overview**

There has recently been a surge in optimism that the first half of the twenty-first century will mark the moment when poverty finally becomes history. But who are “the poor”, and why is their share of the world’s resources so dismal? Moreover, does ending poverty also mean addressing inequality and extreme concentrations of wealth at the top-of-the-pyramid?

These are some of the key issues we’ll be tackling in this course. We’ll begin by looking at broad statistical trends in poverty and inequality over the last century. In the process, we’ll also evaluate the different ways in which poverty can be conceptualized and measured. Are absolute poverty lines, such as the World Bank’s $1-a-day threshold, actually meaningful? Or should poverty instead be understood as a relative condition - if so, relative to whom? As we’ll see, there is a lot at stake politically in how we construct and interpret the numbers.

Next, we’ll examine different approaches to explaining and intervening in poverty. We begin with work that treats poverty as *residual*. The economist Jeffrey Sachs suggests that a combination of climate and geography has produced “poverty traps”, places that cannot be effectively integrated into global markets without the help of international aid. But scholars such as Dambisa Moyo see aid as part of the problem, arguing that it is failed policies and institutions, not geography, that sustains poverty.

We then turn our attention to work that sees poverty as *relational*. According to David Mosse, poverty is a consequence of unequal political and economic relations and processes of social categorization. Tackling poverty therefore means altering the structures through which wealth and power are distributed. But how might this be done? We’ll examine efforts to raise wages, increase incomes and build political alliances in different parts of the world.

Finally, I will be collecting $1 each from each student during the Monday lecture of week 2. At the end of the course we will take a vote as a class to determine which poverty alleviation organization we want to donate our kitty too. Suggestions will come from the students based on their service learning experience [see the Presentation assignment].

**Learning Goals**

By the end of the course, all students should have developed:

1. a lifelong concern with questions of poverty and inequality
2. an increased awareness of the major institutions working in this field
3. the ability to evaluate different explanations for poverty and inequality
4. the ability to apply their ideas to different situations
5. improved research, writing and presentation skills

**Course Schedule**

Lectures are on Mondays and Wednesdays from 4.00-5.15pm in Ingraham 22. You will also meet for discussion section [or “lab”] once a week with your TA.

**Readings**

There are four required books for this course. The books are available for purchase at the University Bookstore and at Rainbow Bookstore (University Ave & W Gilman Street). They are also copies on reserve at College Library.

Branko Milanovic 2012. *The Haves and Have-Nots: A Brief and Idiosyncratic History of Global Inequality* Basic Books

Lisa Ann Richey & Stefano Ponte 2011. *Brand Aid: Shopping Well to Save the World* University of Minnesota Press

Abhijit Banerjee & Ester Duflo 2011. *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty* Public Affairs

Richa Nagar & the Sangtin Writers 2006. *Playing with Fire: Feminist Thought And Activism Through Seven Lives In India* University of Minnesota Press

Besides the books, there are also a number of required scholarly articles available through the “Readings” link on the course Learn@UW site. Please note that I have provided electronic copies of the articles in order to contain course costs but you should feel free to print hard copies.

**Assessments**

There are six ways you will be evaluated in this course:

***Paper One: Jan 31*** 5%

In your first discussion section you will submit a short paper [2 pages, double-spaced] reflecting on your efforts to compose a family food budget at the official US poverty threshold.

***Paper Two: February 11*** 15%

The second paper will take the form of a 1200 word letter [approx. 4 pages, double-spaced] to the President of the World Bank addressing the problem of how poverty should be conceptualized and measured. The letter must be submitted in pdf format to the correct dropbox.

***Midterm Exam: March 20***  25%

There will be an in-class midterm examination in week 9. The exam will comprise two short essay questions related to microfinance and aid. Please note that this will be an open book exam.

***Presentation: In section weeks 13, 14 and 15*** 15%

In the last three sections of the semester, students will take turns to give a 7-8 minute TED Talk on the organization they organization they have been doing service learning with. The best five cases will go to a class vote in the final Monday lecture to determine which organization the class kitty of $100 should be donated to.

***Final Exam: May 8*** 30%

There will be a final exam. The final will be a closed-book essay-based exam and will cover material from the whole semester. You will see the questions in advance.

***Section Participation*** 10%

You will be evaluated based on your contributions to discussion section. The sections will be run like a lab, with students working on assignments for the course and receiving assistance from the TA.

You can find more information on each assignment via the course website.

**Grading Scale**

The grading scale used in the class follows the standard scale used in most UW courses:

A: 93-100

AB: 88-92

B: 83-87

BC: 78-82

C: 70-77

D: 60-69

F: 59 or lower

Please note that the average score for this course is 83.

**Course Communication**

During class, everyone will be given an opportunity to ask questions and discuss course content. If you have additional questions you can either:

1. Write me an email
2. Come to open office hours, or
3. Make an appointment to meet with me

**Plagiarism**

The University of Wisconsin takes matters of academic honesty very seriously. Plagiarism in particular is a very serious offense that can pose a real threat to your success and to the integrity of our broader learning community. I will strictly enforce the university policies on academic honesty. If you are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, please be on the safe side and check. You can start here: <http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QPA_plagiarism.html>

**Disabilities and Special Needs**

Any student with special needs or a disability should contact the teaching assistant or the professor as early in the semester as possible in order to coordinate necessary arrangements

**Weekly Topics, Readings and Deadlines**

1. Making Poverty Historical

***Reading***: The course syllabus

This week I’ll outline my expectations and objectives for the course and we’ll look at how ideas about poverty have shifted over time.

2. Measuring Poverty

***Reading***: Milanovic, chapter 1

This week we’ll explore the different ways in which poverty is currently conceptualized and measured at both the national and global scale.

3. Measuring Inequality

***Reading****:* Milanovic, chapters 2 and 3

This week we’ll examine trends in inequality within nations, between nations and globally.

4. Theories of Development

***Reading****:* Richey & Ponte, Introduction, chapters 1, 2.

This week we’ll examine how the field of Development emerged in the postwar years and how it was reshaped by the debt crisis in the 1980s.

5. Philanthrocapitalists

***Reading****:* Richey & Ponte, chapters 3, 4, 5 and Conclusion

This week we’ll explore new entanglements between poverty, philanthropy and consumerism.

6. Searchers

***Reading****:* Moyo and Easterly

This week we’ll evaluate arguments that we should abandon aid and macro-level planning strategies

7. Microfinance

***Reading****:* Yunus andSen

One of the most celebrated anti-poverty tools of recent years is microfinance. This week we’ll examine who is really benefitting from these programs.

8. Education

***Reading****:* Banerjee & Duflo chapters 1-4

Does education offer a route out of poverty? We’ll assess this claim and evaluate different models of education during week 8.

9. Experiments

***Reading****:* Bannerjee & Duflo chapters 5-8

On Monday, we’ll ask whether randomized controlled tests are the key to reducing poverty.

10. Spring Break

No classes this week.

11. Relational Poverty

***Reading****:* David Mosse

This week we’ll explore work that understands poverty as relational rather than residual or behavioral.

12. AAG

I’m away at a conference this week, so no classes. Work on your presentations during the usual lecture times.

13. Wages

***Reading****:* Wills

This week we’ll look at fair trade initiatives and “living wage” campaigns

14. Welfare

***Reading****:* Sangtin Writers foreword, Introduction and Chapter 1 and 2

What if we change the way we think about welfare and just give money directly to poor people instead?

15. Social Movements

***Reading****:* Sangtin Writers chapters 3-6 and Conclusion

This week we’ll look at social movements that aim to create new kinds of collaboration and accountability.

16. Final Exam

On Monday, we’ll reflect on what we’ve learned this semester. On Wednesday, you’ll take the Final Exam.