This seminar will examine the nature and extent of poverty in the U.S., its causes and consequences, and the antipoverty effects of existing and proposed government programs and policies. The types of questions to be addressed include the following:

What is poverty? Why is poverty so persistent? What roles do increases in inequality, declines in marriage rates, mass incarceration, structural economic changes, skill bias, education, and changing social norms play in generating and reproducing poverty and lack of opportunity?

The first ten weeks of this course (Topics 1-8) focus on social science theory and evidence about the causes, consequences and costs of poverty. The last three weeks of the course (Topics 9-11) examine crime policy, pre-K proposals and college policy.

Short Paper Requirements (All Students)

Students are required to write eight short (2-4 typed pages) papers on the topic areas. All students must write papers on Topics 4, 5, 6, Topic 8-Part I, and Topic 8-Part II (Oct. 4, Oct. 11, Oct. 18, Nov.1 and Nov 8). Seven papers must be on topics 1-8. One paper must be on topics 9-11. Students cannot write any of their required short papers on their group presentation topic. Each paper should cover a single week’s required readings. Papers are due on the days readings are required. No late papers will be accepted. If you wish to do two separate papers on one topic’s set of readings, this is permissible. The second paper can count toward your total number of required papers. The second paper can be turned in one week later than the first paper.

What should these short papers cover? Papers will be graded on the thoughtfulness of the response and are not meant to be reviews of the readings, though they should directly address them. Try to respond to (not summarize) the readings. Papers should both address the readings and show a clear understanding of the readings.

Joint Class Presentation Requirement (Masters and 1st Year PhDs)

Students are also required to make a joint class presentation and lead a discussion group on that presentation once during the last three weeks of the course. Students will be assigned to one of three policy groups on October 4. The students in each group will cover the arguments and evidence for and against a particular set of proposals for crime policy, pre-K policy or college
policy. You can choose to cover all the policy options considered in a week’s readings. Or you can intensively focus on one or two options. Similarly, you could choose a briefing format, debate format, role-playing interactive format, a TV-show format, etc. There are two requirements. There should be an hour put aside for questions/discussion from the class. As part of the presentation students should prepare a *jointly written*, 1-2 page outline of the major issues and arguments as well as a short list of discussion questions for the class. These should be handed out to the class at the beginning of the presentation. Students *cannot* write a short paper on their group presentation topic.

All students are expected to attend their classmates’ presentations (Nov. 15, Nov. 22, and Dec. 6). This is a prerequisite for the class. If you are absent during any presentation without prior approval from Professor Corcoran, your grade will automatically drop one-third of a letter grade.

Research Proposal Requirement (Advanced PhDs)

Students must write a proposal which reviews the literature and proposes a research study on a poverty-related topic. Students considering writing their third-year papers, prelim papers, or thesis in this area should use this proposal to explore a possible topic. Your goal is to design a proposal for a publishable paper. Forty percent of your grade will be based on this proposal. The schedule for this proposal is as follows:

TOMORROW: Start thinking about possible topics. This can be the hardest part of your proposal. Make a list of 2 or 3 possibilities, discuss them with relevant faculty, make an appointment to see Professor Corcoran if that would help, and do some background reading on each topic so you have some idea of what has been done. Don’t settle on a topic until you have done some reading, have a question that research could help answer, and have some idea about how (what evidence) you might go about answering it.

**October 4:** Email Professor Corcoran a brief description of your proposed topic and research question. Hand in a hard copy version in class.

**October 7-9:** Make an appointment with Professor Corcoran to discuss the topic.

**November 8:** Submit a revised research question, and a 5-15 page literature view of research in the area. This review should include a brief discussion of how answering your question will add to what is already known and a brief outline of kinds of evidence you will use to answer the question. Hand in a hard copy in class and email me an electronic copy.

**December 6:** Submit a 10-20 page proposal that includes: (1) a brief statement of problem, (2) a literature review showing how you will add to past research, (3) a brief explanation of the relationship of your work to current theories of poverty, and (4) a research plan. For example, if results of past studies disagree, you should suggest possible reasons for these discrepant results and show how your analysis might resolve this controversy.
Discussion/Attendance Requirements (All Students):
This is a seminar, and all students are expected to arrive on time, to have read the assigned articles prior to the session in which they will be discussed, to attend class regularly, and to participate in class discussion. Students should be prepared to talk on the discussion questions at the end of each topic area. Each student will be asked in class to summarize a week’s readings and to critique particular readings at least once. This seminar meets 13 times this semester and is two hours long. Arriving on time and attending class regularly is required. If students miss more than two classes or are consistently late to class, their grades will automatically drop one-third of a letter grade. Thus, a B+ would become a B.

Laptop Policy: No laptops allowed in class.

Grading (Masters and 1st Year PhDs):
Grades will be based on the short papers (65 percent), class discussion (10 percent) and the class presentation (25 percent).

Grading (Advanced PhDs): Grades will be based on short papers (50 percent), class participation (10 percent) and research proposals (40 percent).

Grading of Class Participation:
Listening is as important as speaking in class participation. Students who are more comfortable listening than talking can receive full credit for class participation.

Readings
Required readings are marked with an *. All required readings on a topic area should be read on the day lectures on that topic begin. Most required papers/articles are available from the web. Required articles not available on the web have either been put on reserve in the 3120 Weill Hall, or in the online course pack at: http://www.ctools.umich.edu

The following books are required for the course. Five of these books are paperbacks.

   K. Edin and M. Kefalas. Promises I Can Keep
   K. Newman, No Shame in My Game
   S.A. Venkatesh, Off The Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor.
   B. Western, Punishment and Inequality in America
   K. Edin and T. Nelson. Doing the Best I Can

Relevant Ford School Events
TOPIC 1. THE MEASURE OF POVERTY, SHORT-RUN VS. LONG-RUN POVERTY, WHO IS POOR, TRENDS IN POVERTY AND INEQUALITY, AND TRENDS IN WAGES AND EMPLOYMENT (SEPTEMBER 6 AND 13)

Part I. Concepts and Measures of Poverty (Sept. 6)
Definitions of poverty/economic disadvantage embody assumptions about what is necessary to insure full participation in a society. These assumptions guide the design of public policies—tax policies, education policies, labor policies, anti-poverty policies. Measures of poverty are used to set criteria for program eligibility (e.g., Food Stamps) and to monitor the effectiveness of anti-poverty interventions. The U.S. measure of poverty is an absolute measure based on family size that is updated annually for inflation. Europeans have a broader conception of economic disadvantage which encompasses social exclusion on multiple dimensions. Sen proposed a capability measure. When analysts compare poverty rates across countries they typically use a relative income-based measure of poverty—e.g., incomes less than half the national median income. Measures of poverty reflect beliefs about why people are poor and about the ramifications of poverty.


Part II: A Rising Tide No Longer Lifts all Boats: Trends in Economic Growth, Economic Inequality, and Poverty (Class Lecture, Sept. 13)

In the Post-War Boom, a rising tide lifted all boats. From 1949-1972, real incomes doubled for all income groups; income inequality narrowed a bit; and poverty rates dropped. Since the 1980’s, the benefits of economic growth are not equally shared; income inequality has grown; and the poverty rate has remained above its 1973 low point. In the Great Recession, poverty rates rose sharply and remained high after 2009.

Part III: Trends in Wealth (Class Lecture Sept. 13)


Discussion Questions – TOPIC 1

1. What happened to poverty rates and employment rates during the Great Recession? Which demographic groups were hardest hit? Which groups benefited from the post-2009 recovery?

2. Can “a rising tide lift all boats?” Does economic growth always reduce poverty? Has the relationship between growth and poverty changed in recent decades?

3. How is the Orshansky measure of poverty constructed? Discuss one, some, or all of the following criticisms of the measure: taxes should be subtracted out; geographic areas vary in living costs; work expenses should be included; the measure should be a relative one; in-kind transfers should be included; it should be updated for changes in
consumption patterns; leisure time should be given some weight; out-of-pocket health care expenditures should be included; position in the life cycle is important. The poverty measure should be consumption-based instead of income-based. How would you design an improved measure? Would changing the poverty measure affect the demographic profile of the poor? (Short, Meyer and Sullivan)

4. There is considerable disagreement over how one should appropriately measure poverty. Three proposed alternatives include: (1) widening the concept to social exclusion or capability and using multiple indicators; or (2) keeping an absolute measure but changing what counts as resources (income), how poverty thresholds (needs) are defined, and/or how inflation is adjusted for or (3) changing from an income-based to a consumption-based measure. Discuss the pros and cons of using one of these alternatives rather then the current poverty measure. (Haveman, Meyer and Sullivan, Short)

5. Social inclusiveness and capability measures focus on the moral and ethical responsibility of government while absolute measures focus on the economic safety net. Which method is preferable? Explain your reasoning. Address both ethical and practical concerns. (Haveman)

**TOPIC 2. TRENDS IN EMPLOYMENT, WAGES AND OCCUPATIONS: ARE MIDDLE-SKILL, MID-PAY OCCUPATIONS DECLINING? (SEPT. 20)**

Since 1980, mean real wages rose for college educated workers and dropped for workers with a high school diploma or less. As a result, the “college wage premium” grew steadily over the past three decades.

Differences in employment rates by education widened for men in the 1980’s, primarily because the incidence of non-work rose among prime age men with a high school diploma or less. Even during the 1993-2000 expansion, substantial minorities of working age low skilled men remained disconnected from work. In the Great Recession employment rates plummeted for low skilled workers and employment rates have remained low for low-skilled men since 2009.


“Between December 2007 and early 2010, 8.7 million jobs were lost. The economy recovered only 6.3 million of these jobs by May 2013.” (CBPR, 2013, p. 4).

**Part 1. Inequality, The Growing Importance of College, Disconnected Men**
Since the late 1980’s, employment growth has been concentrated in high-skill, high-wage jobs and low-skill, low-wage jobs and middle skill jobs have been disappearing.

Part II. The Recession and Work Outcomes


Discussion Questions:


2. Educational attainment has risen steadily in past decades. Yet Autor and Goldin & Katz recommend increasing the number of college graduates. Why? Explain their reasoning and evidence.

TOPIC 3. POVERTY THEORIES (SEPT. 27)
This is an important section. All students must prepare a flow chart outlining Wilson’s model for class.

Part I. Early Cultural Models
It has been argued that the poor (or a subgroup of the poor) differ from mainstream society in some crucial psychological sense. The poor have a distinct, separate culture and this culture keeps them mired in poverty. Further, this culture tends to perpetuate itself both within and across generations.

J. Patterson. America's Struggle Against Poverty, 1900-1985, Chapter 7. (CTools)

M. Katz. The Undeserving Poor, Chapter 1. (CTOOLS)

Part II. More Recent Cultural Models of Wilson’s (2009) and Anderson (1994)


Discussion Questions: Topic 3

1. Read, review and evaluate the model of inner city poverty outlined by Wilson. Pay attention to how political, economic, and cultural forces have affected inner-city men’s employment in the inner-city. What does this model imply for poverty policy?

2. What is the role Wilson assigns to contemporary race-based discrimination in his model? Are Wilson’s arguments about discrimination supported by his evidence and reasoning? Explain.

3. How consistent are Anderson’s model of “street” and decent cultures and John Turner’s story with Wilson’s arguments? Does Turner lack job skills and a work ethic? Can he negotiate with public officials – judges and patrol officers? Does he support his children? Is Turner caught between the “street” and the “decent” cultures? Are Turner’s options limited by discrimination – either in his interactions with the courts or with colleagues at work? Explain.

Topic 4. Has Work Disappeared from the Inner City? Who is Working in the Inner-City? (Oct. 4)

Students will be assigned to presentation groups


**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: TOPIC 4**

1. Discuss *No Shame in My Game*. Evaluate Wilson’s arguments about work in inner cities in light of Newman’s data. How, if at all, might you change or expand Wilson’s model to deal with the Newman findings?

2. Evaluate *No Shame in My Game* in light of the two book reviews. Is Newman too “romantic” in her portrayals of Burger Barn workers?

3. How much upward mobility is there among low-wage workers? Evaluate Newman’s (*Chutes and Ladders*) evidence on this issue. What, if any does Newman identity as key paths to mobility?

**TOPIC 5. THE UNDERGROUND ECONOMY (OCT. 11)**

Residents in Venkatesh’s very poor inner-city neighborhood employ a variety of strategies – both licit and illicit – to “get by”. There are distinct understandings about dispute resolution and distinct reciprocal networks of support. But this support may come at a cost.

*All students must write a paper on Off the Books.*


**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: TOPIC 5**

1. Wilson describes the inner-city poor as socially isolated. Is that true of the community Venkatesh portrays? If yes, explain how Venkatesh’s evidence shows social isolation. If no, explain how his evidence shows connections and networks.

2. Wilson describes the inner-city as disorganized and as having few social mechanisms. Are Venkatesh’s portrayals of dispute settlement and grievance processes consistent with Wilson’s model of “social isolation”?

3. One resident uses a “fish tank” metaphor. What was meant by this?

4. Describe patterns of connection, helping, and reciprocity in Venkatesh’s book. What are the strengths of these? What are the weaknesses?

5. Residents develop a number of survival strategies. Describe. Do these strategies inhibit individual mobility? If yes, how?

**TOPIC 6. PRISONS AND WORK (OCT 18)**

*All students must write a short paper on Punishment and Inequality in America.*

Starting in 1980, incarceration rates have soared in the U.S. In 2008, more than one in every 100 adults and one in every nine black men ages 20-34 were behind bars. The U.S. incarceration rate in 1993 was 5 to 10 times higher than those in Western European countries and the black U.S. incarceration rate was 20 times higher than European incarceration rates. Over 30 percent of black men born in the late 1960’s who had a high school diploma or less had been incarcerated by 1999.
Incarceration has economic and civic costs. On the economic side, prison disrupts careers, can lead to stigma from employers, can break up families, and can result in temporary or permanent loss of eligibility for federal and state government benefits such as Food Stamps, cash welfare, housing subsidies, and education subsidies. On the civic side, inmates lose the right to vote not only while in prison, but also in some states while on probation, on parole or permanently. (Note: Felon disenfranchisement policies vary across states). In 2012, 2.5 percent of voting-age adults were disenfranchised due to a current or previous felony conviction. Nearly 7.7 percent of voting-age African-Americans were disenfranchised. In 31 states and in federal courts, felons are permanently banned from jury service. Over 6% of adults in the U.S. and about 30% of African-American men currently face such bans.

**Part I. Adult Incarceration**

http://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/fac_pubs/1041/


*B. Western. *Punishment and Inequality in America*. Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 6.

http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2831279/

[http://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/focus/pdfs/foc232i.pdf](http://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/focus/pdfs/foc232i.pdf)

**Part II. Juvenile Incarceration**


**Discussion Questions: Topic 6**

1. How have incarceration rates changed? Which groups have been most affected by these changes? How have these changes affected measured inequality? What factors does Western (2006) cite as accounting for trends in incarceration?

2. What does Western mean when he says that the prison boom has led us to underestimate racial inequalities in employment and earnings? Is his reasoning and evidence convincing? Why or why not?
3. What are the consequences of incarceration for men’s long-run employment and earnings? Discuss and assess Western’s, Raphael’s, and Pager’s arguments and evidence on this issue.

4. Many states limit the civic rights (voting, jury service) of felons. What are the broader implications for political representation and democracy? Discuss.

**TOPIC 7. IS THE PLAYING FIELD BECOMING LESS LEVEL? (OCT. 25)**


DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: TOPIC 7

1. The gap in childhood resources between the poorest and the richest children is rising. Review and evaluate arguments and evidence about the implications of this for equal opportunity in the U.S.

2. Since 1980, the college wage premium more than doubled; the “sticker cost” of college tuition rose six-fold, and median income increased very slowly. At the same time, gaps in childhood advantages (income, college-educated parents, living in an intact family, having a parent without a criminal record) widened between rich and poor children. How, if at all, will this affect intergenerational mobility?

3. Equal opportunity is a cherished national norm in the U.S. How do rates of intergenerational mobility in the U.S. compare to those in other western developed nations? (Jantti)

4. Wildeman claims that due to the prison boom, many children now have a parent who has been or will be incarcerated. Review Wildeman’s evidence and arguments. Which children are most at risk? What are the likely impacts of this on equal opportunity?

5. Jencks and Tach (2005) advance the controversial claim that higher rates of intergenerational mobility are not necessarily evidence of increases in equal opportunity. Assess their arguments and evidence.

TOPIC 8. WHY DON’T LOW-INCOME PARENTS MARRY? (NOV. 1, 8)

Over an individual’s lifetime, his or her family alters constantly. Individuals leave home, marry, separate, bear children, move in with relatives—each of these events can alter the family’s economic well-being...especially for women and children. Family structure is strongly related to child poverty.

In 2006, 26.6 percent of all white non-Hispanic births were out-of-wedlock, 49.9 percent of all Hispanic births were out-of-wedlock and 70.7 percent of non-Hispanic African American births were out of wedlock. Six out of ten long-term poor children live in single mother homes. Many blame the growth in single parents as the cause of increased poverty, welfare dependence, crime and drug use. Why don’t these couples marry or postpone child-bearing until after they marry?

NOTE: Everyone should write a paper on Promises I Can Keep for Nov. 1, and everyone should write a paper on Doing the Best I Can for Nov. 8.
Part I. Women’s Perspectives


Part II. Men’s Perspectives


http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/doublex/2013/06/doing_the_best_i_can_a_new_book_debunking_a_stereotype_about_the_deadbeat.html


Part III. Consequences for Children


Discussion Questions: Topic 8


2. Compare the views of men and women as presented in Edin and Kefalas and in Edin and Nelson.

TOPIC 9. SENTENCING REFORMS AND PRISONER REENTRY PROGRAMS (NOV 15)

Part I. Adult Sentencing and Prisoner Reentry Programs

Reshaping the states’ sentencing policies and designing effective re-entry programs for ex-prisoners raises multiple questions. Do changing mandatory sentencing policies lead to less crime? How much does maintaining prisons cost per year? What are all the costs – economic and civic – borne by prisoners? How can one best design policies to deal with both economic and civic costs? Is there a cost to society when a sizeable minority of citizens are unable to vote, serve on juries, barred from receiving public benefits even after leaving prison? Has the prison boom created a lobby of stakeholders (private prisons, prison employee unions) who resist re-forms?


[www.prospect.org/magazine/issue/state-union](http://www.prospect.org/magazine/issue/state-union)


**Part II. Youth Incarceration Reforms**


**TOPIC 10. PRE-K PROGRAMS (NOV. 22)**


[http://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/jep.27.2.109](http://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/jep.27.2.109)


*C. Brown et al. *Investing in Our Children: A Plan to Expand Access to Preschool and Child Care.* 


http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/312/5782/1900

**TOPIC 11. COLLEGE (DEC. 6)**


http://www.nber.org/papers/w19053.pdf?new_window=1


http://futureofchildren.org/futureofchildren/publications/docs/23_01_04.pdf

http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2013/06/26%20expanding%20college%20opportunity%20hoxby%20turner/thp_hoxbyturner_brief_final.pdf

http://www.brookings.edu/~media/projects/bpea/spring%202013/2013a_hoxby.pdf

http://www.brookings.edu/~media/projects/bpea/spring%202013/2013a_hoxby.pdf


**TOPIC 12. HEALTH CARE POLICY (DEC. 13) (OPTIONAL)**
The Engelberg Center for Health Care, Brookings, the Health Care Policy workgroup at Hoover, the Health Care Reform Special Topic at American Enterprise, the Health Care Initiative at the Heritage Foundation, the Health Policy Center at Urban, and the Health Area of Research at Center for Budget and Policy Studies all are good sources of research/blogs/press releases on health care reform.


*J.C. Capretta and R.E. Moffit. “How to Replace Obamacare.”
http://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/how-to-replace-obamacare

**TOPIC 13 K-12 EDUCATION (OPTIONAL) (DEC. 13)**


