

SYLLABUS, SPRING 2014

ECONOMICS 480: POVERTY AND INCOME DISTRIBUTION

Tuesday, Thursday; 5:00-6:15pm

Instructor: Dr. Laura Crispin

Location: 303 Barbelin Hall

CONTACT INFORMATION

E-mail: lcrispin@sju.edu

Telephone: 610-660-1594

Office Address: 107B Barbelin Hall

Office Hours:

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:00 - 11:00am and 3:30-4:30pm;

Wednesdays at Starbucks, 10:00 - 11:15am;

and by appointment. Supplementary office hours will be announced in class

Email policy: I try to return emails as quickly as possible (usually within 24 hours), but during peak times, it may take me longer to respond.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- *Poverty and Income Distribution*, Edward N. Wolff, 2nd Ed., Wiley-Blackwell Publishing
- *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future*, Joseph E. Stiglitz, Norton Publishing

Many additional course materials will be posted on blackboard, so please login frequently.

Additionally, students with iPhones, iPads, or Android phones are strongly encouraged to download the "Socrative" app for use during class (it's free!).

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the semester, we will be studying several facets of income distribution and inequality in the United States through the lens of economic theory. Initially, we will discuss the basics of income and wealth distribution (definitions and measurement), and will study trends and patterns in income, wealth, and well-being, followed by a similar discussion with respect to poverty.

The second portion of the course will focus on causes and explanations of poverty and income inequality. This section will rely heavily on the foundation of labor economic theory, with discussion of labor force participation, unemployment, and human capital.

Finally, we will focus on policies that may cause or alleviate poverty and income inequality - both current policy and proposed policy - followed with a discussion of

societal goals. If time permits, we will also cover labor market discrimination and wage gaps, specifically with respect to race/ethnicity.

This course is an upper-division Economics elective that also meets Faith-Justice course studies criteria. Prerequisite: ECN101 (Principles of Microeconomics) or equivalent.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester, students must be able to:

- Understand the similar, but differing concepts of income and wealth, their measurement, and trends in both
- Understand the concepts of poverty and income inequality, how to measure and identify both, and understand the economic and political forces that generate and/or reduce both
- Understand and analyze policies that are currently in place that help or hinder goals of ending poverty

The in-class discussion and presentations, writing assignments, and final exam will test to see that these objectives have been met.

FAITH-JUSTICE CRITERIA

- Students will engage with the "sufferings of the poor" and stand in solidarity with them through written assignments and in-class discussions, and through Faith-Justice events such as lectures and volunteer work.
- Students will analyze institutions and social structure during lecture, through written work, through course readings, and through class discussion.
- Students will be encouraged to question the prevailing economic and political systems, and will voice their questions in reflective journals based on readings in *The Price of Inequality* and in-class discussion.
- Students will use the tools and approaches of economics to discuss problems of poverty and income inequality, and provide potential solutions to the problem via end of semester presentations and written research assignments throughout the semester. There will be specific emphasis on finding academic materials as supportive evidence.

GRADING

Your grade for this course will be based on class attendance and participation, one group presentation, two writing assignments, response journals, and a final exam. Attendance is mandatory, and will account for 5% of your grade, with four "unexcused" absences allowed. Only documented, university-approved absences will be considered "excused" absences. Course participation (participation in class discussion) will account for an additional 5%. Students are expected to participate in dialogue with the professor and with classmates on a daily basis. Please note that extra credit is not given.

Grade Breakdown	
Attendance/Participation	10%
Writing assignments (15% each)	30%
In-Class Group Presentation	20%
Weekly Response Journals	10%
Final Exam	30%

You are responsible for all material in the classes and book. The final exam will be comprehensive with an emphasis on materials covered during lecture. The exam may contain multiple choice and written questions.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Each writing assignment will be a four to six page research paper in which students research a specific topic related to the course and provide a synopsis of the issue/policy. Such topics may be related to (but are not limited to) welfare policies, other "safety net" social programs, inequality in other countries, and tax policy. The first paper will be due one-third of the way through the semester, the other two-thirds of the way through. Late papers will lose 10 points of their grade for each business day after the due date (ex. a paper that is a 85/100 will drop to 75/100 if handed in one day late). Further details of the paper requirements and a grading rubric will be provided later in the semester.

IN-CLASS GROUP PRESENTATIONS

Students will form groups of 2 - 4 members and will select issues related to poverty and income distribution. The students will use materials from lecture, the textbook, and their own research to create a 20-25 minute presentation on their chosen topic. A successful presentation will use some form of multimedia to convey the materials to the class, and presenters will be required to answer questions during and at the end of the presentation. Students are encouraged to analyze current policy and to use economic analysis/theory to provide suggestions for policy improvements that would help to meet our societal goals. Topics may be chosen by the groups, but must differ from topics chosen for written assignments. It is strongly suggested, though not required, that you meet with Dr. Crispin to discuss your presentation (preferably a week or so before your presentation). Further details are TBD.

RESPONSE JOURNALS

Students will keep a response journal on Bb, and provide a weekly response to the chapter of *The Price of Inequality* that is assigned for the week. Responses may be self-reflective, thinking about how the chapter relates to their own experiences, or may be comments or criticisms of the reading. Students are encouraged to agree or disagree with the readings, and are encouraged to find their own data/sources that support their response (especially when they disagree with the reading). A schedule of reading deadlines is provided at the end of the syllabus, and journal entries must be posted before

class on the Thursday of the week they are due. Late assignments receive a grade of zero.

MAKE UP POLICY

Students missing the final for unavoidable and formally verifiable reasons will be given a makeup exam. Exams missed for avoidable or for unverifiable reasons will be assigned a grade of 0. I cannot change the date/time of an exam to accommodate students' travel plans. Students must plan their end of quarter travel arrangements accordingly.

TECHNOLOGY POLICY

Texting, cell phone, and laptop use during class is distracting to your peers and your professor, and therefore, the use of laptops and cell phones is not permitted during class EXCEPT when instructed to do so by your professor. Should you need to make a phone call or send a text message, please do so before or after class. If your texting during class becomes a distraction, Dr. Crispin reserves the right to ask you to leave the classroom for the remainder of the lecture.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Students are expected to be familiar with the **SJU Academic Honesty Policy**, published in the Student Handbook and University Catalog (<http://hawkcentral.sju.edu/link/portal/16125/16171/Article/95/Academic-Honesty-Policy>), and to adhere to it at all times. Unauthorized use of notes or assistance during an exam will result in failure of the assignment.

Several aspects of academic honesty, from the SJU Academic Honesty Policy, are outlined below:

" 1. Acts of dishonesty in formal courses

In all courses, except for assignments where the instructor has explicitly directed otherwise, each student has the responsibility to submit work that is uniquely his or her own. All of this work must be done in accordance with established principles of academic integrity. Specific violations of this responsibility include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a.** cheating, copying, or the offering or receiving of unauthorized assistance or information in examinations, tests, quizzes, reports, assigned papers, or special assignments, as in computer programming, studio work, and the like;
- b.** the fabrication or falsification of data, results, or sources for papers or reports, as in laboratory reports;
- c.** any action which destroys or alters the work of another student;
- d.** the multiple submission of the same paper or report for assignments in more than one course without the prior written permission of each instructor;

e. plagiarism, the appropriation of information, ideas, or the language of other persons or writers and the submission of them as one's own to satisfy the requirements of a course. Plagiarism thus constitutes both theft and deceit. Compositions, term papers, or computer programs acquired, either in part or in whole, from commercial sources or from other students and submitted as one's own original work shall be considered plagiarism.

All students are directed to the standard manuals of style or reference guides for discussions of plagiarism and the means by which sources are legitimately acknowledged, cited, quoted, paraphrased, and footnoted, whether presented in an oral report or in writing.

f. unauthorized collaboration.

g. soliciting or aiding another person or persons to engage in specific conduct which would constitute a violation or an attempt to commit a violation under this policy."

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

In accordance with state and federal laws, the University will make reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. For those who have or think that you may have a disability requiring an accommodation (learning, physical, psychological) should contact Services for Students with Disabilities, Room G10, Bellarmine, 610-660-1774 (voice) or 610-660-1620 (TTY) as early as possible in the semester for additional information and so that an accommodation, if appropriate, can be made in a timely manner. You will be required to provide current (within 3 years) documentation of the disability.

For a more detailed explanation of the University's accommodation process, as well as the programs and services offered to students with disabilities, please go to www.sju.edu/studentlife/studentresources/sess/ssd. If you have any difficulty accessing the information on-line, please contact Services for Students with Disabilities at the telephone numbers above.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Week One (1/16/14):

- Introduction; In-class reading assignment and discussion; Graphical overview of income distribution

Week Two (1/21, 1/23):

- Measuring Income and Trends in Income, Standard of Living (Chapter 2)
- Measuring Wealth and Trends in Wealth and Well-Being (Chapter 5)
- Chapter 1 Journal Due

Week Three (1/28, 1/30):

- What is Poverty? What are the trends in poverty? (Chapter 4)

- What is Income Inequality? How do we measure it and what are the trends? (Chapter 3)
- What is Wealth Inequality? Trends and Comparison to Income Inequality (Chapter 5)
- Chapter 2 Journal Due; **Paper Topics due**

Week Four (2/4, 2/6):

- Another Dimension of Inequality: Mobility (Chapter 6)
- Causes/Explanations of Poverty and Inequality: Labor Market Patterns (Chapter 7)
- Chapter 3 Journal Due

Week Five (2/11, 2/13):

- Causes/Explanations of Poverty and Inequality: Labor Market Patterns (Chapter 7)
- Causes/Explanations of Poverty and Inequality: Human Capital (Chapter 8)
- **First Paper due**

Week Six (2/18, 2/20):

- Causes/Explanations of Poverty and Inequality: Human Capital (Chapter 8)
- Causes/Explanations of Poverty and Inequality: Industrial and Occupational Wage Gaps (Chapter 9)
- Chapter 4 Journal due

SPECIAL EVENT: Screening of "Inequality for All" on 2/20/14 with live webcast by Dr. Robert Reich following the film. Attendance is mandatory (see Dr. Crispin for alternatives if you have a class conflict).

Week Seven (2/25, 2/27):

- Causes/Explanations of Poverty and Inequality: Savings and Transfers (Chapter 10)
- Causes/Explanations of Poverty and Inequality: Savings and Transfers (Chapter 10)
- Skill-Biased Technological Change (Chapter 11)
- Chapter 5 Journal due; **Presentation Topics and Group Selection due**

Week Eight (3/4, 3/6):

- Policies to alleviate poverty: Social programs and Social Security (Chapter 15)
- Policies to alleviate poverty: Welfare (Chapter 15)
- Chapter 6 Journal due

SPRING BREAK: 3/10 - 3/16

Week Nine (3/18, 3/20):

- Policies to alleviate poverty: Welfare (cont'd) (Chapter 15)

- Policies (cont'd): Minimum wage (Chapter 15); Other policies
- Chapter 7 journal due

Week Ten (3/25, 3/27):

- Public Policy and Social Goals: Taxation, Redistribution (Chapter 16)
- **Second Paper due**

Week Eleven (4/1, 4/3):

- Public Policy and Social Goals (cont'd)
- Chapter 8 Journal Due

Week Twelve (4/8, 4/10):

- Discrimination and Wage Gaps
- Chapter 9 Journal Due

Week Thirteen (4/15, 4/17):

- Group Presentations
- Chapter 10 Journal due

Week Fourteen (4/22, 4/23):

- Group Presentations continued
- Education Policy Discussion

Week Fifteen (4/29)

- Review, Discussion, and Reflection

Construction Day: May 1, 2014 (Monday classes meet on Thursday)

Reading Day: May 6, 2014

Final Exam Week: May 7 - May 13, 2014