Professor Michael L. Lahr  
484 Civic Square Building  
lahr@rutgers.edu  
Office hours: By appointment

Course Description and Goals
This class examines the nature and extent of poverty in the United States. Students will gain familiarity with poverty issues such as people’s views of poverty, poverty measurement, the characteristics of the poverty population, international comparisons, underlying causes of poverty, and government programs and policies that address poverty.

The types of questions we focus on include the following: How have views of poverty evolved? What different methods do people use to measure and understand poverty? Who are the poor? Why does poverty remain so pervasive? How do economic processes contribute to poverty? Why does it seem like people from particular racial and ethnic backgrounds or family types inevitably more likely to be poor? What are the goals and purposes of social welfare programs? What are the limits of poverty policy?

Students will write a paper on a poverty-related topic. Students will also be expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings and participate in classroom discussion. A major objective of the course is to encourage you to gain analytic skills and to use and improve your abilities to think independently and critically.

Specific course goals (what you should be able to do on completion of the course) are to:
1. Describe and synthesize concepts, principles, and theories used to study poverty.
2. Analyze and discuss contemporary poverty issues and information.
3. Communicate the above effectively, both orally and in writing.

Reading Materials: There are two required books for this class that are available at the Rutgers University Book Store, although I encourage you to buy from other sources if they are less expensive.


I recommend a third book, which is listed below. It parallels the format of the course better, but the information presented in it is a bit dated (based on the 2003 edition) and its prose is not nearly so good as that in the other two.


Other readings listed in the syllabus will be made available via SAKAI.

Course Requirements: I’m still pondering the possibilities since this is a course that is just 1.5 months long. But at present this is what I envision:

1. Midterm (June 11): 20%
2. Final exam (July, time and location to be announced): 25%
3. Research paper (~10-12 pages): 40%
   a. Proposal (June 7): 10%
   b. Final paper (July 5): 25%
   c. Presentations (July 3 and 4): 5%
4. Class participation: 10%
The purpose of the final paper is for students to gain experience writing a well-organized research paper that analyzes a poverty-related issue.

Class participation and discussion are a vital part of this class. Students will be expected to actively participate every week, as it is through the open exchange of ideas during class that important learning takes place.

Students will submit assignments on SAKAI. All assignments are due on the date specified above. No late work will be accepted without penalty. Exceptions can be made if you are ill (with physician's certification), have a family emergency (also with written proof), or are excused beforehand due to an officially documented conflicting activity for which your presence is essential.

**Policy on Academic Integrity** [http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/policy-on-academic-integrity](http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/policy-on-academic-integrity)

“Students are responsible for understanding the principles of academic integrity and abiding by them in all aspects of their work at the University. Students are also encouraged to help educate fellow students about academic integrity and to bring all alleged violations of academic integrity they encounter to the attention of the appropriate authorities.”

Specifically read the University’s policy on the issue of academic integrity:
and its code on student conduct

**Class Outline**

May 28: Introduction and views of poverty in history
May 29-30: Measurement and meaning of poverty
May 31 & June 3: Characteristics of the poor population and the dynamics of poverty
June 4-5: Causes of poverty: economic processes
June 6-7: The working poor
June 10: Midterm Exam
June 11-12: Social stratification and race issues
June 13: Gender and poverty
June 14 & 17: Family structure and culture
June 18: Immigration issues
June 19-20: Concentrated poverty
June 21 & 24: Past and current welfare programs
June 24-25: Effects of welfare reform and anti-poverty policy
June 25-26: Policy: current focus and future directions
July 27-28: Conclusion and review
July 1-2: Paper presentations

The point of the reading is to have expose you to core material via textbooks and some ancillary works, some newsy pieces, and occasionally to some state-of-the-art research.

**May 28: Introduction and putting poverty in perspective**

Seefeldt & Graham, Introduction and Chapter 1. (~16 pages)
Edelman, Chapter 1. (~ 5 pages)

**May 29-30: Measurement and meaning of poverty**

Seefeldt & Graham, pp. 17-22. (~6 pages)

Edelman, pp. 25-32. (~5 pages)


**May 31 & June 3: Characteristics of the poor population and the dynamics of poverty**

Seefeldt & Graham, pp. 22-32. (~10 pages)

Edelman, pp. 32-46. (~15 pages)


**June 4-5: Causes of poverty: economic processes**

**paper proposal due June 7**

Edelman, pp. 47-79.


Iceland, John. Chapter 5, pp. 70-79.


**June 6-7: The working poor**

**Midterm on June 12.**


**June 10-11: Social stratification and race issues**


**June 13: Gender & poverty**

Iceland, John. Chapter 5, pp. 87-94.


**June 14 & 17: Family structure & culture**

Iceland, Chapters 5 and 6, pp. 94-117.


**June 18: Immigration and poverty**


**June 19 & 20: Concentrated poverty**


**June 21-24: A history of U.S. poverty programs**

Edelman, Chapter s 2 & 5, pp. 7-23, 83-100.

Seefeldt & Graham, pp. 58-83.

Iceland, pp. 118-132.


**June 25-26: Policy: current focus and future directions**


Seefeldt & Graham, Chapters 5 & 6, pp. 84-132.


June 27-28: Conclusion and review
Final paper due July 5


July 1-2: Paper presentations
10 minute oral presentations

Final exam: time and location to be announced