

PSC 2240: Poverty, Welfare, and Work

Course Information

George Washington University
Summer 2020, Session II
June 29th to August 8th

Instructor

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General Format

- Due to GW's sustained instructional continuity status, we will not meet in-person during the semester, as I'm sure you all are aware. ***The course will be entirely online. Most course content will be self-guided. All lectures and assignments (besides the final exam) are available for students to complete at their own pace. Each week, students should complete all assigned lectures, readings, and assignments before 5:00pm EDT on Wednesday.*** At 7:00pm on Wednesdays, we will have our weekly synchronous discussion sessions online via Blackboard Collaborate Ultra.
- With the stress of coronavirus and with online classes more generally, I realize that students might not be able to complete all assignments on time or to attend every discussion session—due to technical or personal difficulties. If such difficulties arise, let me know ASAP (before the due date) and we will work out an acceptable solution.
- All weekly course content, including lectures, readings, and assignments, are accessible under the “Learning Modules” tab on Blackboard. Resist the urge to procrastinate! I recommend completing all weekly material before my Monday evening office hours so that you can ask questions before assignments and quizzes are due.

Discussion sessions via Blackboard Collaborate Ultra: Wednesdays 7:00-8:15pm EDT

- We'll begin promptly at 7:00pm; the session will become accessible at 6:45pm. Students are expected to prepare responses to discussion questions before we meet.
- Join by clicking on “Synchronous Discussion Sessions” in the course menu. (If the Collaborate Ultra page won't load in Chrome, you might need to [allow cookies](#).)
- Discussion recordings will be available under the Recordings tab in Blackboard Collaborate Ultra (“Synchronous Discussion Sessions”).
- If you cannot attend discussion sessions, contact me in advance of the course starting and we can work out a solution.

Office hours via Webex: Mondays from 6:00-7:30pm EDT or by appointment (email me to schedule a time)

- Please take advantage of office hours if you have any comments, questions, or concerns!
- *Join via browser or by downloading the Webex application:*
<https://gwu.webex.com/meet/cmaks>
- *Call in by phone:* (855) 282-6330 and use access code: 736 675 041
- When joining office hours, you will be placed in the “lobby” and I will have to admit you to the meeting when I'm ready. (This allows me to have confidential conversations with students if need be.)
- Email me if you have any technical difficulties accessing my office hours.

Course Overview and Description

What is welfare? Why are welfare programs designed the way that they are? Are welfare programs effective? These are the central questions guiding this course; and there are contrasting perspectives on how to answer these questions. Whatever your answer may be, students should walk away from this course with *their own* answer to these questions. Centrally, this course will provide students with an overview of social policy in the United States. We'll pay close attention to the historical development of the U.S. welfare state and compare it to the welfare states of other industrialized countries. We'll learn about various kinds of social policy programs: *social assistance* (programs for the poor), *social insurance* (like Social Security), and *tax expenditures* (tax exemptions, deductions, and credits). In addition to learning about the details of these programs, we'll discuss the experience of poverty in the U.S. and pay special attention to the liberal vs. conservative arguments about welfare.

The course schedule provides details on each lesson and its assigned readings. In brief, this class will proceed as follows. During the first section of this course, "Poverty and Economics," we will place the U.S. welfare state in a comparative perspective, trying to understand what explains differences in poverty and social spending across countries. In addition, we will discuss economic and psychological perspectives on whether rational decision-making is possible for the impoverished. During the second part of this course, "Social Policy Programs," we will discuss the *upper tier* of the U.S. welfare state, Social Security and Medicare, as well as the *lower tier* of the U.S. welfare state, traditional welfare programs like Food Stamps and cash assistance. We'll also be discussing how the tax code is used as a social policy tool. During the final part of this course, "Politics of Social Policy," we'll assess the comprehensiveness of the U.S. welfare state and the correlates of public support for social programs.

Course Learning Objectives

1. Understand the causes, consequences, and extent of poverty in the United States.
2. Compare social policy regimes across industrialized nations.
3. Explain the difference between social insurance and social assistance ("welfare"). Assess whether there is a meaningful distinction between these two concepts.
4. Describe the eligibility and benefits for major social policy programs and assess their effectiveness at reducing poverty.
5. Evaluate and compare proposals to reform the welfare state.
6. Explain why social policymaking in the U.S. is so difficult.
7. Explain the determinants of policy preferences for welfare spending.
8. Assess the comprehensiveness of the U.S. welfare state.

Required Texts & Readings

There are NO course texts that students are required to purchase for this course. Listed in the "Course Schedule" section of this syllabus, all required readings will be posted to Blackboard. Read each set of readings *before* lecture. Readings are listed in the order in which they are intended to be read.

Assessments and Grading

Final grades will be assessed based upon students' performance in six categories of assignments. There are 100 total points that each student can earn in the course. Do not plan on me "curving" assignments or your final course grade. Written assignments will be processed through SafeAssign's plagiarism checker. If you are in a different time zone, please be aware that all due dates are in Eastern Time.

1. **Discussion Session Attendance and Participation (5 points / 5%):** There will be six discussion sessions. Students are expected to come to the discussion sessions prepared to participate by thinking about the discussion questions in advance of our meetings. Discussion grade will be judged holistically. Students should be polite and courteous to other students and not try to dominate the conversation. If you cannot attend discussion sessions, contact me in advance of the course starting and we can work out a solution.
2. **Weekly Assignments (15 points / 15%):** Weekly assignments consist of an activity related to the week's material. There will only be five weekly assignments (with none due during the last week of class). Each assignment is worth 3 points. Some will be graded for completion while others will be graded for accuracy. *No credit will be awarded for late assignments.*
3. **Weekly Quizzes (25 points / 25%):** Each quiz is worth 5 points. There will be six quizzes, but your lowest quiz score will be dropped. Quizzes will usually be about ten to fifteen questions and include some combination of multiple choice, check-all-that-apply, fill-in-the-blank, short answer, and true-or-false. Quizzes will be open note since it's an online course, but they will also be timed. Students will not have access to quiz answers until after the due date. *No credit will be awarded for late quizzes.*
4. **Proposal Memo (10 points / 10%):** Each student will write a one-and-a-half to two-page report/memo summarizing a welfare-related policy proposal. Reports should be single-spaced using a standard 12-point font and one-inch margins. Memos are due on Saturday, August 1 at 11:59pm. Refer to rubric on Blackboard for more details. *One-half of a point will be deducted for each day the memo is late.* (This is not a large penalty; take extra time if you absolutely need it.)
5. **Essay (20 points / 20%):** In five or six pages, argue whether Social Security (OASI) and Medicare are "welfare" programs. Essays are due on Wednesday, July 22 at 11:59pm. Essays should be double-spaced using a 12-point font and one-inch margins. Refer to rubric on Blackboard for more details. *One-half of a point will be deducted for each day the essay is late.* (This is not a large penalty; take the extra time if you absolutely need it.)
6. **Final Exam (25 points / 25%):** The final exam will be an open-note exam with short answer and long answer questions. Most of the questions will be opinion questions, where students will need to demonstrate their knowledge of the material to receive full credit. The final exam will become available after discussion on Wednesday, August 5 and is due 11:59pm on Sunday, August 9. The exam is not timed. Speak with me ahead of time if you need a special accommodation—due to some foreseen extenuating circumstance—to complete the final exam before the deadline. *No credit will be awarded for late final exams.*

Independent Learning Expectations

Summer courses are twice as intensive as those held during the normal academic year. Students should expect to spend about 15-20 hours per week on course material—whether that be readings, assignments, or discussion. Over 6 weeks, students who receive a decent final grade will have spent about 100 hours on course material throughout the length of the course.

University Policies

University policy on observance of religious holidays

In accordance with University policy, students should notify faculty during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance. For details and policy, see: students.gwu.edu/accommodations-religious-holidays

Academic integrity code

Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information. For details and complete code, see: studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity

Support for Students Outside the Classroom

Disability Support Services (DSS)

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in the Rome Hall, Suite 102, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information, see: disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/

Mental Health Services: 202-994-5300

The University's Mental Health Services offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include: crisis and emergency mental health consultations confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals. For additional information, see: counselingcenter.gwu.edu/

Course Schedule

All required video lectures, readings, and assignments are listed below and are available in the “Learning Modules” section within Blackboard. Students should come prepared to discussion sessions ready to answer and converse about the discussion topics. ***Complete course content in the order in which it is listed on Blackboard.*** Yes, this means that most of the time, you should view the video lectures before completing the readings (unless ordered otherwise). I also recommend completing weekly assignments before weekly quizzes.

PART 1: POVERTY AND ECONOMICS

WEEK OF JUNE 28 → *complete all content before 5:00pm on July 1*

Discussion topics: What makes someone poor? How should we define poverty? What are some of the pros and cons of the liberal, conservative, and social democratic welfare states? Which other countries should we compare the United States to (e.g., liberal welfare states, Europe, OECD, all counties, etc.)? What is the appropriate/fair point of comparison?

Introduction

- Lecture: Course Overview (8 min.)
- Lecture: Introduction: Poverty and Social Policy (20 min.)
- Reading: Béland, Howard, and Morgan, “The Fragmented Welfare State” in *Oxford Handbook on U.S. Social Policy*.
- Optional Reading: U.S. Census Bureau, “Income and Poverty in the United States: 2018”

U.S. Social Policymaking in a Comparative Perspective

- Lecture: Comparative Social Policy 1: Categorizing Welfare States (23 min.)
- Reading: Lynch, “A Cross-National Perspective on the American Welfare State” in *Oxford Handbook on U.S. Social Policy*.
- Optional Reading: Smeeding, “Poor People in Rich Nations.”
- Lecture: Comparative Social Policy 2: U.S. Social Policymaking (15 min.)
- Reading: Miler, *Poor Representation*. Chapter 4.
- Assignment: Familiarize yourself with U.S. Census data and OECD data by answering a few questions on income and poverty in the U.S. and abroad.
- Quiz on introduction and comparative social policy

WEEK OF JULY 5 → complete all content before 5:00pm on July 8

Discussion topics: Murray dislikes that working people receive benefits; is it good or bad for working people to receive welfare benefits? Are poor people rational? Is anyone rational? Whose arguments were more convincing Murray or M&S? Do some people not want to work? Do some people want to work but can't? How do we make social policy that helps both of these groups of people (the "rationally" lazy and the stressed)? We'll discuss Assignment 2 and your ideal welfare program design during discussion.

The Economics of Poverty

- Lecture: The Economics of Poverty 1: Theory (22 min.)
- Reading: Murray, *Losing Ground*. Chapter 12.
- Reading: Murray, *Losing Ground*. Chapter 16.
- Lecture: The Economics of Poverty 2: Applications (24 min.)
- Reading: Murray, *Losing Ground*. Chapter 11.
- Optional Reading: Moffitt, "The US Safety Net and Work Incentives."
- Assignment: Economics of work and welfare worksheet/handout

The Psychology of Poverty

- Reading: Mullainathan and Shafir, *Scarcity*. Introduction.
- Reading: Mani et al., "Poverty Impedes Cognitive Function."
- Lecture: The Psychology of Poverty 1: Bandwidth (18 min.)
- Lecture: The Psychology of Poverty 2: Child Development (15 min.)

Introduction to U.S. Social Policy Programs

- Lecture: Overview of the Welfare State (13 min.)
- Lecture: History of Social Security (25 min.)
- Reading: Martin and Weaver, "Social Security: A Program and Policy History."
- Quiz on the psychology and economics of poverty and history of Social Security

PART 2: SOCIAL POLICY PROGRAMS

WEEK OF JULY 12 → *complete all content before 5:00pm on July 15*

Discussion topics: Does granny get welfare? Be prepared to share your arguments for whether Social Security and/or Medicare are welfare programs (the essay prompt).

Social Security

- Lecture: Old Age & Survivors Insurance (27 min.)
- Reading: Nuschler, “Social Security Primer.” (CRS Report)
- Lecture: Disability Insurance (22 min.)
- Reading: Moulta-Ali, “Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI).” (CRS Report)
- Assignment: Answer these two questions on Blackboard: (1) Explain the Social Security trust fund with an analogy; (2) Explain the disability determination process in detail using an example from the Listing of Impairments. Students may attempt this assignment twice (before the due date) and I will regrade, taking the highest score of the two attempts.

Theories of Social Policy

- Reading: “Social Policy Change Explainer” (summary of key terms)
- Lecture: Social Policy Change (17 min.)

Medicare

- Lecture: Medicare (33 min.)
- Reading: Davis et al., “Medicare Primer.” (CRS Report)
- Lecture: Medicare for All (15 min.)
- Quiz on Social Security, Medicare, and social policy change
- ***Start working on your essay!***

WEEK OF JULY 19 → complete all content before 5:00pm on July 22

Discussion topics: What are the pros and cons to state discretion and block grants? Should all programs be block grants? What are the pros and cons of work requirements? Should more (or less) programs have work requirements? How does Medicaid affect political participation (an example of policy feedback)? How does federalism affect the Medicaid program, and how does federalism affect Medicaid beneficiaries?

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

- Lecture: TANF 1: PRWORA and Welfare Reform (32 min.)
- Reading: Falk, “The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant.” (CRS Report)
- Lecture: TANF 2: State TANF Programs Today (12 min.)

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

- Lecture: SNAP (24 min.)
- Reading: Aussenberg, “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).” (CRS Report)
- Assignment: Use a grocery delivery service to plan a week’s worth of groceries for a family of four on a SNAP budget. Sketch out a meal plan that is a roughly balanced diet. Include screenshots of your online “shopping cart.” React to the assignment and tell me what was easy or difficult about it. Refer to the directions posted to Blackboard for more details.

Supplemental Security Income

- Lecture: SSI (17 min.)
- Reading: Morton, “Supplemental Security Income (SSI).” (CRS Report)

Medicaid & CHIP

- Lectures: Medicaid & CHIP 1 (15 min.)
- Lectures: Medicaid & CHIP 2 (12 min.)
- Reading: Kaiser Family Foundation, “10 Things to Know about Medicaid.”
- Reading: Michener, *Fragmented Democracy: Medicaid, Federalism, and Unequal Politics*. Chapter 1.
- Quiz covering TANF, SNAP, SSI, Medicaid, and CHIP

Housing

- Reading: Schwartz, “Public Housing and Vouchers” in *Oxford Handbook on U.S. Social Policy*.
- ***Guest speaker will discuss housing assistance during Wednesday’s discussion session. Prepare questions for her about housing assistance, especially the role of the private sector. Because of this, this virtual discussion session will last longer than usual.***

*****Essay due on Wednesday, July 22nd at 11:59pm on Blackboard*****

WEEK OF JULY 26 → complete all content before 5:00pm on July 29

Discussion topics: Are tax credits welfare programs? (Does it matter who benefits from them or their purpose?) Are student loans welfare? Is the Home Mortgage Interest Deduction welfare? Give examples of the Law of Imperfect Selection and the Law of Unintended Rewards from the social programs we studied in class. Be prepared to share some details about the programs you researched for the weekly assignment.

Taxes

- Lecture: Taxes 1: Introduction to Income Taxes (34 min.)
- Lecture: Taxes 2: Programs for the Working Class (26 min.)
- Reading: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “Chart Book: The Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit.” (Note that CTC benefit info is outdated since CTC was expanded in 2018. However, the reading is still useful to understand the basic eligibility rules and consequences of the CTC.)
- Lecture: Taxes 3: Programs for the Affluent (13 min.)
- Reading: Faricy, *Welfare for the Wealthy*. Chapter 1.

The Submerged State

- Lecture: Submerged State 1: What is the Submerged State? (19 min.)
- Reading: Mettler, *The Submerged State*. Intro.
- Lecture: Submerged State 2: The Affordable Care Act (19 min.)
- Lecture: Submerged State 3: Student Loans (14 min.)
- Reading: Mettler, *The Submerged State*. Chapter 4.

Other Social Programs

- Lecture: Other Social Programs (12 min.)
- Assignment: Research a social program not covered during lecture. Describe its benefits, eligibility rules, and funding details.
- Quiz on housing, taxes, the submerged state, and other social programs

*****Memos due on Saturday, August 1st at 11:59pm on Blackboard*****

PART 3: THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL POLICY

WEEK OF AUGUST 2 → complete all content before 5:00pm on August 5

Discussion topics: Be prepared to share details from your memo, and whether the policy proposal is an example of revision, drift, conversion, or layering. Do U.S. social programs sufficiently protect against poverty and privation? Is the U.S. welfare state comprehensive (i.e., are there certain groups of needy people left out of the safety net)? What were your key takeaways from the course? What surprised you?

Assessing the Welfare State & Recessions

- Lecture: Is the U.S. Welfare State Comprehensive? (21 min.)
- Reading: Stoker and Wilson, *When Work is Not Enough*. Chapter 1.
- Lecture: The Great Recession (10 min.)
- Reading: Maks-Solomon and Stoker, “Weathering the Storm.” pp. S119-S125 only.
- Lecture: Social Policy and Coronavirus (14 min.)
- Reading: Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, “Policy Basics: Unemployment Insurance.”

Public Opinion

- Lecture: Public Opinion 1: Economic Class and Partisanship (21 min.)
- Reading: Rehm, Hacker, and Schlesinger, “Insecure Alliances.”
- Lecture: Public Opinion 2: Race (21 min.)
- Reading: Kohler-Hausmann, “Welfare Crises, Penal Solutions, and the Origins of the ‘Welfare Queen.’”
- Lecture: Public Opinion 3: Immigration (13 min.)
- Reading: Garand, Xu, and Davis, “Immigration Attitudes and Support for the Welfare State in the American Mass Public.”
- Quiz on assessing the welfare state, recessions and social policy, and public opinion
- *Note that there is no weekly assignment during this last week of class.*

Course Review

- Reading: Final Exam Study Guide

****Final exam available Wednesday, August 5th at 8:15pm (after discussion)
Due on Sunday, August 9th at 11:59pm****