

**PPPA 6085.10**  
**Poverty and Social Policy**  
**Spring 2015\***

Michael Wiseman, Instructor  
Yelena Tsilker, Assistant

Classroom Location: Fungler 207

*Poverty and Social Policy* is a graduate course/seminar in public assistance policy for students interested in policy analysis and public management as a profession. The course offers a comprehensive introduction to analytic and political issues surrounding the ongoing American and British debates on poverty and social policy. The objective is to train students to ask the right questions when evaluating social assistance programs and to appreciate the complementary roles of policy analysis and public management in formulating such questions and in interpreting the answers.

First- and second-year MPA and MPP candidates and persons in the Ph.D. program are welcome to enroll in this course. Students should have completed, or choose to concurrently enroll in, applied statistics (i.e. PPPA 6002, “Research Methods and Applied Statistics”) and microeconomics (i.e. PPPA 6014, “Economics and Policy Analysis”) or the equivalent.

There are three “texts”:

DeParle, Jason. 2004. *American Dream: Three Women, Ten Kids, and a Nation’s Drive to End Welfare*. New York: Viking.

Halpern-Meekin, Sarah, Kathryn Edin, Laura Tach, and Jennifer Sykes. 2015. *It’s Not Like I’m Poor: How Working Families Make Ends Meet in a Post-Welfare World*. Oakland, California: University of California Press

Mullainathan, Sendhil, and Eldar Shafir. 2013. *Scarcity: Why Having Too Little Means So Much*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

All three books are readily available on Amazon or from other booksellers and can be downloaded. Required and recommended readings are listed below by class session; readings for some sessions will be identified in consultation with students and added to later syllabus versions. Full references for the required readings are provided in the separately distributed *Course Bibliography* that is posted in the syllabus section on Blackboard. This list also includes sources for materials discussed and/or distributed in class and details on suggested additional readings. A Reader’s Guide will be distributed for some sections to assist in navigation.

Each student will be responsible for a state’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, a means-tested social assistance program other than TANF, and a research review. These will be selected in consultation with the instructors. All class materials will be posted on the GWU “Blackboard” website. Readings for the four sections devoted to student reports will be determined in consultation with students and will be posted following these discussions.

This is a graduate course, and students concerned about grades might be better served elsewhere. Evaluation will be based on problem sets, class participation, a take-home midterm, and a take-home final examination. Standards will be discussed in more detail in class.

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\* Tyler Rockey (MPP 2015) contributed to the development of the present version of this course.

Michael Wiseman holds office hours immediately before class and by appointment. He is also available via FaceTime or Skype. His office is located in MPA 608. Students are encouraged to contact him by email when appropriate. Yelena Tsilker will be available for technical assistance with problem sets and other matters. Questions regarding the readings or problems will be handled as discussions on Blackboard. This ensures that the information is shared.

### Session Plans

Reading references below are abbreviated. For full citations, see the *Course Bibliography* posted in the syllabus section on Blackboard. Most readings are available as Electronic Reserves on Blackboard. When it is useful for you to be familiar with reference location, we include the URL.

(1) 1/14      **Introduction: Social Policy and Public Assistance**

Topics:      Introductions. Course objectives. The syllabus. Projects and responsibilities. Evaluation of student performance. A primer on public assistance. Means testing. Nomenclature. The panoply of means-tested programs. Using AFDC/TANF as the baseline reference and *American Dream* as the keynote reading. Background for Session 2.

Problems:    Problem 1, “Poverty and Income Distribution,” distributed (due 1/31; last questions in class 1/29).

Readings:    Continue (or begin) DeParle, Jason (2004): *American Dream*. Please finish the book by February 5.

Read the introduction to Shafir and Mullainathan (2013): *Scarcity*.

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(2) 1/21      **Poverty and Income Distribution**

Topics:      The distribution of income and wealth in the United States. Measures of inequality. The meaning of “need” and “poverty.” The official poverty standard and alternatives. The Research Supplemental Poverty Measure. Poverty assessment in Europe. Recent trends.

Readings:    “Reader’s Guide, Session 2: Poverty and Income Distribution,” manuscript.  
The authoritative guide to what lies before you.

*Income Distribution*

Congressional Budget Office (2011): *Trends in the Distribution of Household Income between 1979 and 2007*. Read the summary and pay special attention to materials cited in the RG.

Congressional Budget Office (2013): *The Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes, 2010*. See the RG for reading instructions.

*The Official Standard*

Ver Ploeg, Michele and Constance F. Citro (2008): "Poverty Measurement: Orshansky's Original Measures and the Development of Alternatives."

DeNavas-Walt, Carmen, and Bernadette D. Proctor (2014): *Income and Poverty in the United States: 2013*. (Standard Census Bureau poverty report; read the review materials pp. 1-20.)

*The Supplemental Poverty Measure*

Blank, Rebecca (2011): "The Supplemental Poverty Measure: A New Tool for Understanding U.S. Poverty."

Short, Kathleen (2014): "The Supplemental Poverty Measure: 2013."

Meyer, Bruce D. and James X. Sullivan (2012): "Identifying the Disadvantaged: Official Poverty, Consumption Poverty, and the New Supplemental Poverty Measure."

*International Perspective*

Haveman, Robert (2009): "What does it mean to be poor in a rich society?"

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2011): "Divided We Stand: Why Inequality Keeps Rising"

Rockey, Tyler, and Michael Wiseman (2014): "Child Poverty in the United States and the United Kingdom: Relative Measurement and Relative Achievement".

*Technical*

Förster, Michael (2005): "What Are Equivalence Scales?"

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- (3) 1/28 **Income Support and Household Behavior**
- Topics: Graphical and algebraic representations of income support programs. Income support and labor supply. The negative income tax. The New Jersey Negative Income Tax Experiment. Labor supply and the Earned Income Tax Credit. Behavior and psychology.
- Problems: Problem 2, "State TANF Programs," distributed (part 1 due 2/4; full draft due 2/15; final due shortly thereafter). Problem 1 last queries.
- Readings: "Session 3: Income Support and Household Behavior Readings Guide," manuscript.
- Rees, Albert (1974): "An Overview of the Labor-Supply Results."
- Moffitt, Robert (2003): "The Negative Income Tax and the Evolution of U.S. Welfare Policy."
- Eissa, Nada and Hilary W. Hoynes (2006): "Behavioral Responses to Taxes: Lessons from the EITC and Labor Supply."
- Kassabian, David et al. (2014): *The Welfare Rules Databook: State Policies as of July 2013*.

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(4) 2/4 **Federalism and the Safety Net**

Topics: Modeling TANF. Interstate variation in TANF programs. Federalism: Fiscal and other aspects. Public assistance beyond TANF.

Readings: “Session 4: Federalism and TANF Readings Guide,” manuscript.

Finish DeParle, Jason (2004): *American Dream* by this date.

Falk, Gene (2013): *The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant: An Introduction*.

Falk, Gene (2013): *The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant: A Primer on TANF Financing and Federal Requirements*.

Loprest, Pam (2012): *How Has the TANF Caseload Changed over Time?*

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(5) 2/11 **American Dream: Realities of Welfare Reform, American-Style**

Topics: Wisconsin Works. Wisconsin as welfare policy leader. Milwaukee and the urban poverty challenge. The unique circumstances of Wisconsin’s reform. The experience depicted in *The American Dream*. The Help Factory: How assistance is produced.

Readings: “Session 5: American Dream and the Realities of Welfare Reform Readings Guide,” manuscript.

Turner, Jason (2008): “The Experience of Privatization of Welfare Services in Wisconsin.”

Wiseman, Michael (2002): “Wisconsin Works.”

Wiseman, Michael (2007): “Welfare in Wisconsin.”

Gais, Thomas, and James Fossett (2005): “Federalism and the Executive Branch.”

Recommended

The African-American protagonists of American Dream are in a sense immigrants from the South, first to Chicago and then to Milwaukee. Two other books focus on this part of the story, and the personal and social consequences.

Lemann, Nicholas (1991): *The Promised Land*.

Wilkerson, Isabel (2010): *The Warmth of Other Suns*.

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(6) 2/18 **TANF Aftermath**

Topics: What made TANF, and what TANF made. The history of TANF since welfare reform. Major issues in TANF reauthorization. Why the “success” of welfare reform has become a common myth. The reauthorization boondoggle. Developments under Obama.

- Special: Guest: **Theresa Anderson**, Trachtenberg School Ph.D. candidate, Urban Institute Research Associate (Certified Welfare Inspector, PPPA 6085, Spring 2011)
- Problems: Problem 3, “Program Overview,” distributed. Class presentations will be on 3/19.
- Readings: Anderson, Theresa, Katharine Kairys, and Michael Wiseman (2014): “Activation and Reform in the United States: What Time Has Told.”
- Parolin, Zachary, and Michael Wiseman (2014): “Gutting Welfare Reform.”
- Begin or continue reading Mullainathan and Shafir, *Scarcity*.
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(7) 2/25 **Thinking More about Casework**

Topics: What Social Work is about. Brain Science and Mobility Mentoring. More on contracting.

Special: Guest: **Beth Babcock**, Director, Crittenton Women’s Union, Boston.

Readings: “Session 7: Casework and the Help Factory.

Mullainathan, Sendhill, and Eldar Shafir (2013): *Scarcity: Why Having Too Little Means So Much*.

Birkenmaier, Julie, Marla Berg-Weger, Marty Dewees (2013): “Understanding Social Work Practice.”

Babcock, Elisabeth B. (2014): *Using Brain Science to Design New Pathways Out of Poverty*. Boston: Crittenton Women’s Union, 2014.

Desai, Swati, Lisa Garabedian, and Karl Snyder. 2012. “Performance-Based Contracts in New York City: Lessons Learned from Welfare-to-Work.”

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(8) 3/4 **Learning from Experiments**

Topics: Welfare experimentation. New Hope as an alternative. The U.K. Employment Retention and Advancement Project. The “Evidence-Based Policy” movement. Small-scale initiatives in the U.K. and the U.S.

Readings: “Session 8: Learning from Experiments: Reader’s Guide.”

*Evaluation Issues*

Haynes, Laura et al. (2012): *Test, Learn, Adapt: Developing Public Policy with Randomised Controlled Trials*.

Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy (2010): *Checklist for Reviewing a Randomized Controlled Trial of a Social Program or Project, To Assess Whether It Produced Valid Evidence*.

*New Hope*

Huston, Aletha et al. (2003): “New Hope for Families and Children: Five-

Year Results of a Program to Reduce Poverty and Reform Welfare.”  
Executive Summary.

Gassman-Pines, Anna and Hirokazu Yoshikawa (2006): “Five-Year Effects of an Anti-Poverty Program on Marriage among Never-Married Mothers.”

Bos, Hans et al. (2007): “New Hope: Fulfilling America’s Promise to ‘Make Work Pay.’”

*U.K. Employment Retention and Advancement Project*

Hendra, Richard et al. (2011): “Breaking the Low-Pay, No-Pay Cycle: Final Evidence from the UK Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) Demonstration.” Executive Summary.

Riccio, Jim. 2011. *UK ERA: The UK’s Employment Retention and Advancement Demonstration, Final Impact and Cost-Benefit Results* (PowerPoint).

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3/11      **Spring Break—No class**

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(9)    3/18      **Those Other Programs**

Topics:      Student reports on other means-tested programs and benefits: SSI (for children, adults, and the elderly), Section 8 (voucher and site-based), SNAP, EITC.

Problems:    Take-Home Midterm posted for student access on 3/21 (Problem 4); completion by midnight 3/24.

Readings:    Section 9 Reader’s Guide: Those other programs.  
(Other readings student-selected)

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(10)   3/25      **Welfare Elsewhere: The United Kingdom (1)**

Topics:      Welfare and social security in the United Kingdom. New Labour’s New Deals. Paternalism in the U.K. Borrowing ideas from abroad. The Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition and the “Universal Credit.” Accomplishments and lessons for the U.S.

Special:      Video interview, **Simon McNorton** (Certified Welfare Inspector, PPPA 6085, Spring 2013), Research Officer, Insight and Analysis Division, UK Department for Work and Pensions.

Readings: “Session 10 Reader’s Guide: Welfare Elsewhere: The United Kingdom (1),” manuscript. NOTE: The Reader’s Guide is very important for this session.

Griggs, Julia, Andrew Hammond, and Robert Walker (2014): “Activation for All: Welfare Reform in the UK, 1995 to 2009.”

Department for Work and Pensions (2010): *Universal Credit: Welfare that Works*, Executive Summary and Annex 2.

Whitham, Graham (2012). *Ending Child Poverty: Ensuring Universal Credit supports working mums*.

Reeves, Richard (2014). *Should the US follow the UK to a Universal Credit?*

Boteach, Melissa, Helly Lee, Elizabeth Lower-Basch, and Megan Martin. (2014). *Universal Credit: A Primer*.

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(11) 4/1 **Welfare Elsewhere: The United Kingdom (2)**

Topics: More on the new British regime and the implications for social policy, with a guest speaker. Social inclusion as a policy objective.

Special: Guest: (Name to be Announced), Senior Social Policy Advisor, Politics, Economics and Communication Group, British Embassy, Washington DC.

This session is held jointly with the **Annual PPPA6085 Awards Banquet**. More detail on location and appropriate attire will be provided in class

Readings: “Session 11 Reader’s Guide: Welfare Elsewhere: The United Kingdom (2),” manuscript.

Aldridge, Hannah, Peter Kenway, Tom MacInnes, and Anushree Parekh (2012): *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 2012*.

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(12) 4/8 **Policy Research (1)**

Topics: Student reports on research related to means-tested social assistance (see session 9, above).

Readings: TBA

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(13) 4/15 **Policy Research (2)**

Topics: Conclusion of student reports on policy-related research. Course review. Discussion of student questions.

Readings: TBA

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(14) 4/22 **Conclusion**

Topics: What have we learned?

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5/4-5/12 **Final Examination**