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& by appointment

## **Department of City and Regional Planning**

### **PLAN 574 Political Economy of Poverty and Inequality Spring 2024**

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00am – 12:15pm  
Classroom: Phillips 222 (from 1/16)

#### **Course Description**

This course introduces students to the political economy of poverty alleviation programs, policies, and processes. Using a mix of theory and comparative case studies, we explore what types of projects, tasks, sequences, and environments lead to relatively more effective and equitable outcomes and why.

#### **Context**

Even as absolute levels of poverty have fallen worldwide over the past thirty years, recent studies have shown that inequality has worsened. Following the COVID 19 pandemic, the World Bank estimates that extreme poverty increased for the first time in 25 years and recoveries were extremely unequal across different classes and communities around the country and the world. The richest 1% of the world, who had captured 54% of all wealth created over the last decade, amassed even more, nearly two thirds (64%) of all the wealth created since 2020.

In the aftermath of the pandemic a variety of complex factors such as global political and economic uncertainties, rising costs of land, interest rates, housing, healthcare, education, and inequities in the distribution of basic services such as food, water, and transportation as well as unequal, poor quality jobs and perplexing labor markets are making recovery even harder for the poorest. These tensions, along with disappearing Covid-era federal supports are jeopardizing pathways of upward mobility for millions, drawing many back into poverty. This precarity is compounded by new expressions of power and exclusion, forced migrations, wars and rising climate-induced extreme weather destabilizations that have created new fault-lines, divisions, and risks in communities especially where the poorest live. Who then acts on behalf of the poor? How? And why and under what conditions is their work effective, sustainable and of lasting worth?

In this course we will examine who acts on behalf of the poor and with what outcomes. We will

begin by exploring dominant existing narratives about causes, measures and frameworks and then complicate them, questioning some standard assumptions about what works and why. While we explore a plurality of institutions at the forefront of poverty alleviation efforts, our central focus is on the workings of government agencies and their relationship with the vulnerable as well as with other social actors – non-governmental organizations, civic and community actors, firms and the market in the delivery of public goods and poverty alleviation programs. We will see that public sector policies and programs have had by far the most significant and singular impact on the outcomes of anti-poverty efforts historically, and in shaping the broader political economy within which such programs are implemented. Despite their disproportionate role, government agencies and especially local government actors are understudied and often misunderstood. Government is often dismissed as broken, weak, burdensome, and indeed, a key part of the problem. Their bureaucratic behavior is seen as onerous, inefficient, pedantic, unimaginative, mediocre, and often corrupt. Understanding what they do and why, and how they partner with other social actors, and the conditions under which they succeed is crucial to understanding how to make their work more effective regarding poverty, inequality, and upward mobility. These insights can help planners devise more effective poverty alleviation plans, policies and interventions that are more likely to be implemented.

This course draws on cases from the US and countries around the world. It draws upon and is inspired by Judith Tendler and Salo Coslovsky's approaches to similar themes.

### **Assignments and Evaluation**

Grades will be based on class participation (30%) including brief reading reflections for any 6 weeks of class), a semester-long interview-based exercise that cumulatively adds up to a case study of an effective intervention by any organization (public or private that you choose to focus on (40%), and a base-line + final reflection exercise (30%), and an optional book review exercise.

All written assignments should be double-spaced, with 1 inch margins, and 12 font.

- The baseline reflection (10%) consists of a short and informal document (about 1 page, and no more than two pages) in which students examine their encounters with (or impressions of) any aspect of poverty and personal understanding of inequality and articulate their personal theories explaining these phenomena. Students also reflect on what they might have encountered about institutions – non-profits, government agencies, cooperatives that work to alleviate poverty or mitigate inequality. Reflect on what these agencies do, why they operate the way they do. Include 1 or 2 questions that come up for you that you might want to explore through the semester. The reflection is supposed to draw from personal experience and it does not require additional research. Please come to class on 1/16 prepared to discuss your thoughts. You can come to class with bullet points if you wish and then complete them and post our baseline reflection in the discussion section of Canvas.

- The final reflection (20%) consists of a longer document (about four pages) in which students re-examine their impressions of poverty, inequality and the processes and structures that perpetuate them, the processes and institutional arrangements that might help alleviate them, reflecting, in particular, on the role of public sector or other organizations that implement pro-poor programs—what they do that works and why, or does not and why not. For this reflection students revisit their baseline narrative and now draw on the materials covered in class to reflect on how their ideas and insights evolved over time. This paper is due on Tuesday, 4/23 – and must be posted on the discussion section of Canvas.
- Class participation (30%) hinges on regular attendance, active engagement in class discussion over the entire course, participating in other in-class activities as assigned, and short two-three paragraph reflections on class readings for any 6 weeks of class (both sessions of that week). These paragraphs must be posted in the discussion section latest by the morning of the designated class. They will help structure the corresponding classroom discussion. These assignments will be graded on a pass-fail basis.

Note: A reflection is a first-person narrative where you articulate the main point/s of the reading that stood out for you and say why these points struck you, giving examples where needed and staying concrete (and not abstract or generic). Where relevant, compare and contrast the points with previous readings or your own prior reflections. Making 1-2 clear points that are fully developed points is better than a long list more cursory points.
- Semester long interview-based case study (40%) is a group project, where students pick an innovative/good performing/effective project or program implemented by a organization (government agency (e.g., local government), or non-profit organization, or cooperative, or union, or a collaboration between the public and private sector) and explore the program – what it is, how it works, how it reached the low income population it was meant to support, what challenges were faced and how they were overcome. Examples of potential programs include: the Covid-era extended child tax credit program, head start, a school lunch program, Table, any effective pro-poor local foods project, a land bank, tenant’s union, training or apprenticeship program, the successful fight for 15, worker owned small businesses and other institutions of the Industrial Commons in Morganton, NC, water affordability support programs, innovative schools or education program, climate resilient efforts in low income neighborhoods, minority entrepreneurship program, Latino credit union, or any other program of your choice.

Students will conduct interviews over the course of the semester to build out the case study. More formal instruction will be provided later. Ideally, the paper is anchored on a compelling, open-ended question or puzzle, which is then answered through interviews and analysis of the group’s findings in light of the concepts studied in class. The paper should be no more than 10-12 pages long, including title, bibliography, footnote and a one page memo/cover letter to the local mayor advocating the program

and arguing why the program could be replicated or disseminated more widely to benefit more low income households. Student groups will present the paper in class in 20 minute presentations on 4/23 and 4/25 and the final version of the case is due one week after the last class. You can use Slidedocs or other visual options in lieu of a traditional written report.

Each group will submit a note to the instructor by 2/08 describing the case you will be studying.

- OPTIONAL BONUS POINTS

A list of books is offered at the end of the syllabus. If, in any group wishes to pick a book and read it in the group over the semester and write a short book review of about 3 pages. Extra points can be earned for this exercise and we can debate this in class. The book review summarizes the argument put forth by the author(s) and examines how the concepts and theories examined in class can explain the facts described in the book (if the book was going to be assigned in the course, where would it go and what point would it illustrate?). The review can also go the opposite direction and draw from the book to refine, extend, or challenge the themes discussed in class (i.e., how should the course be modified so this book could be included, and why?). Students interested in writing the book review must submit the title of the book to the instructor by the first week of February.

## Course Outline

0. 1/11 R: Personal frames and narratives – Baseline Reflections
1. 1/16 T: Setting the Stage
2. 1/18 R: Who is Poor? Measures & Stylized Narratives
3. 1/23 T: Causes: Guest Lecture by Prof. Michal Osterweil – Race and Colonization
4. 1/25 R: Causes: Stratification, Regulation and Law – Color of Law
5. 1/30 T: Causes: Culture of Poverty? Or the Bandwidth Tax of Scarcity? Sendhil. + game
6. 2/01 R: Causes: Spatialities and Contested Economic Mobilities – Rural, Urban, suburban, + Opportunity Atlas.
7. 2/06 T: Targeting within Universalism: Making the case for government as a key actor in anti-poverty programs

8. 2/08 R: What do Bureaucracies do? Can government be made more responsive?
9. 2/13 T: *No Class (Wellbeing Day)*
10. 2/15 R: Worktime – Interviews
11. 2/20 T: Responsiveness, Guest Lecture by Prof. Alexander Sahn
12. 2/22 R: Class debrief on government responsiveness, interview findings proposed case study group projects. + Satisficing
13. 2/27 T: Discretion and public action. What keeps bureaucracy accountable in pro-poor projects and programs?
14. 2/29 R: Assets: Housing – Community Land Trusts – Marion Cheek Johnson Center – Northside, Chapel Hill. NGO
15. 3/05 T: Assets – Housing – Innovations in Policy Exclusionary Zoning vs Up-Zoning – Tas Lagoo, City of Chapel Hill.
16. 3/07 R: Class Discussion on assets: Hernando De Soto, A field of her own, Self-Help + Land Tenure under the New Deal and the Making of the Black Elite during the Civil Rights Movement.
17. 3/12 T: *No Class - Spring Break*
18. 3/14 R: *No Class - Spring Break*
19. 3/19 T: Finance and Debt, Personal finance
20. 3/21 R: Unions, training and good jobs
21. 3/26 T: City After Property
22. 3/28 R: *No Class - Wellbeing Day*
23. 4/02 T: Success, on whose terms? Miriam Wells.
24. 4/04 R: NGOs, Participation and Accountability – Articles of Faith?
25. 4/09 T: The provision of public goods to the poor – What works and why? Water

26. 4/11 R: Public Services: Local Food Systems, food deserts and cooperatives
27. 4/16 T: Clientelism, Corruption and Elite Capture
28. 4/18 R: Who bears the brunt of climate pressure? Some frontline innovations.
29. 4/23 T: Worktime
30. 4/25 R: Class presentations
31. 4/30 T: Class presentations

Final grades will be assigned as follows:

Undergraduate Grade				Graduate Grade
A	94%	to	100%	High Pass
A-	90%	to	93%	
B+	87%	to	89%	Pass
B	84%	to	86%	
B-	80%	to	83%	
C+	77%	to	79%	
C	74%	to	76%	
C-	70%	to	73%	Low Pass
D+	67%	to	69%	
D	60%	to	66%	
F	0%	to	59%	Fail

### Late Assignments and Absences

A half-letter grade will be deducted for each day of a late assignment. Accommodations will be made if you are sick or there is a documented medical or family emergencies, especially in the face of Covid. Please contact me as soon as you know there will be conflict with a deadline. One absence is allowed, but you must inform me ahead of time. Other unauthorized absences without medical or other justifications will lead to a half letter grade reduction.

**Any request for an approved class absence must be approved by the University** Approved Absence Office [attendance.unc.edu](http://attendance.unc.edu). No right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings, except for these University Approved Absences:

- ▶ Authorized University activities

- ▶ Disability/religious observance/pregnancy, as required by law and approved by Accessibility Resources and Service and/or the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (EOC)
- ▶ Significant health condition and/or personal/family emergency as approved by the Office of the Dean of Students, Gender Violence Service Coordinators, and/or the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (EOC).

Covid related issues need not be routed through the University's Approved Absence Office but can be routed directly to me.

### **Honor Code**

Students are bound by the Honor Code when making a request for a University Approved Absence.

Plagiarism is unacceptable and can lead to a failing grade.

In all written and presented work, you must cite or otherwise fully attribute all ideas, data, and other information that are not your own. This includes information presented in tables, graphs, appendices, etc.

The Honor Code of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill states:

“It shall be the responsibility of every student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to obey and to support the enforcement of the honor code, which prohibits lying, cheating, or stealing when these actions involve academic processes or University, student, or academic personnel acting in an official capacity.”

I will report any honor code violation to the [Office of Student Conduct](#).

For this course:

- ▶ You are permitted and encouraged to work in groups (assigned), seek advice and suggestions from other class members on the written assignments, unless specifically instructed otherwise. This may include exchanging drafts for feedback and/or proofreading, or, if it is a group assignment, working collaboratively.
- ▶ All group members must carry their weight. There will be a peer evaluation at the end.

### **Safety at Carolina**

I care about your safety and recognize that you cannot fully commit to this course if you do not feel safe.

If you are impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking, I encourage you to seek resources on campus or in the community.

Please contact the following campus resources to discuss your specific needs:

- ▶ Director of Title IX Compliance (Adrienne Allison – [Adrienne.allison@unc.edu](mailto:Adrienne.allison@unc.edu))
- ▶ Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office ([reportandresponse@unc.edu](mailto:reportandresponse@unc.edu))
- ▶ Counseling and Psychological Services ([caps@unc.edu](mailto:caps@unc.edu); confidential)
- ▶ Gender Violence Services Coordinators ([gvinc@unc.edu](mailto:gvinc@unc.edu); confidential)
- ▶ Additional resources are available at [safe.unc.edu](http://safe.unc.edu)

I value the perspectives of individuals from all backgrounds reflecting the diversity of our students and my goal is to create a **safe space for everyone in this class**. I broadly define diversity to include race, gender identity, national origin, ethnicity, religion, social class, age, sexual orientation, political background, and physical and learning ability. **Please let me know if there is anything I can do to improve, I appreciate suggestions.**

### Accessibility

The University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities. All accommodations are coordinated through the Accessibility Resources and Service Office. **If you need accommodations, please contact ARS as early in the semester as possible.**

- ▶ Visit [accessibility.unc.edu](http://accessibility.unc.edu)
- ▶ Call 919-962-8300
- ▶ Email [accessibility@unc.edu](mailto:accessibility@unc.edu)

### Resources

My purpose is to help you to excel in this learning environment. Should you need further assistance beyond the help of the professor, please consult the following on-campus resources:

- ▶ **The Writing Center** provides one-on-one assistance to students. To make an appointment, browse the Writing Center's online resources, or submit a draft online. They have additional useful information, such as handouts on how to cite online. [writingcenter.unc.edu](http://writingcenter.unc.edu)
- ▶ **The Learning Center** offers individual consultations, peer tutoring, academic coaching, test prep programming, study skills workshops, and peer study groups. [learningcenter.unc.edu](http://learningcenter.unc.edu)
- ▶ **Campus Health** provides ambulatory primary medical care, mental health services and wellness programs along with selected specialty services. [campushealth.unc.edu](http://campushealth.unc.edu)

**Data Resources for the Class** – Partial List. For more, contact Phil McDaniel at Davis Library: [pmmcdani@email.unc.edu](mailto:pmmcdani@email.unc.edu)

- Carolina Tracker: <https://carolinatracker.unc.edu/tracker/>



- [COVID-19 Impact Tracker](#) – housing, employment – compares Feb/Aug 2020 at state and county level
- [McKinsey & Co. Interactives](#)
  - [Unemployment through COVID-19 Crisis](#) – county or state level over time
  - [Community Movement During Pandemic](#) – where do people spend their time
  - [Small Business Vulnerability](#)
  - [Market Valuation of Sectors throughout 2020](#)
  - [Vulnerable Jobs by Demographic Group](#) – race, gender, age, education
  - [Vulnerable Populations Dashboard](#)
    - [COVID and Food Insecurity](#)
    - [COVID and Mental Health](#)
- [Opportunity Insights Track the Recovery](#) – can look at spending, business, employment, education, and public health impacts of COVID at state, county, or metropolitan level
- Brookings, World Bank, Atlantic city, City Lab have international data
- <https://www.brookings.edu/interactives/visualizing-vulnerable-jobs-across-america/>
- <https://guides.lib.unc.edu/census/maps>
- <https://www.opportunityatlas.org/>
- <https://tracktherecovery.org/>
- <https://www.cityhealthdashboard.com/>
- <https://evictionlab.org/map/#/2016?geography=states&type=er>

Resources, readings and the schedule are shared directly on the class Canvas site.