IV. Research Practicum on Inequality, Poverty and Public Policy
Prof. Irwin Garfinkel

Irwin Garfinkel is the Mitchell I. Ginsberg Professor of Contemporary Urban Problems and co-director of the Columbia Population Research Center. A social worker and an economist by training, he has authored or co-authored over 180 scientific articles and twelve books on poverty, income transfers, program evaluation, single parent families and child support, and the welfare state. His research on child support influenced legislation in Wisconsin and other American states, the US Congress, Great Britain, Australia, and Sweden. He is currently the co-principal investigator of the Fragile Families and Child Well being Study. His most recent book is Wealth and Welfare States: Is America Laggard or Leader?

Through lecture and discussion this course will address issues relating to poverty, inequality, and opportunity with special, but not exclusive, emphasis on these phenomena in American society. The course will examine alternative definitions of income poverty and inequality, trends in poverty and inequality, the causes of poverty and inequality, the role of wealth, the perpetuation of inequality across generations, and public policies designed to reduce poverty and inequality and promote opportunity.

The practicum is intended to be a "hands on" endeavor for the student in the formulation and execution of a research study. Therefore, the substantive material will occupy half of the class time of each meeting. The remaining time will be given to constructing and reviewing student term papers. During the 1st meeting, we describe several large data sets which contain information on inequality and poverty issues, and which will be made available for class use (e.g., National Survey of Families and Households; Panel Study of Income Dynamics; Survey of Income and Program Participation, The Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study, and the New York City Social Indicators Survey). Either individually, or in teams, students will formulate research projects and undertake analyses from either one of the supported data sets or another data set that is more appropriate for addressing the research question and is accessible to the students in time to complete coursework. (Approval to use another data set is contingent upon instructor approval.) Substantial class time will be devoted to assisting students with project formulation and to providing advice on analytic procedures. Computer time will be made available for the projects and a teaching assistant, attached to the course, will assist with programming and statistical issues. A written research paper at the end of the semester will be required from each student team.

Prerequisites
One year of prior statistical study and some familiarity with statistical software, such as SPSS, SAS, or STATA.

Assignments
There are short written assignments due every week of the semester beginning in week 2 and continuing through week 12. The assignments are to be sent to classmates as well as to both faculty and the TA. Beginning in week 4, the weekly assignments are team assignments. In addition, one short assignment, which each student will complete individually, is to summarize the readings for the week. The summary should be no more than three single spaced pages. All other short assignments are components of the term paper. A first draft of the term paper is due in either week 13 or 14. The final draft of the term paper is due on the last day of class.
Week 2: identify area of interest, begin work on selecting topic, identify potential co-authors
Week 3: Title, data set, and 1 paragraph description of paper

**Team Assignments**
Week 4: Revised title and description of paper
Week 5: Means, %’s, and minimum and maximum values of dependent and independent variables and write up of results. The write-up should be a paragraph or two that tells the reader between one and three big things she or he should learn from the table.
Week 6: 1st draft of introduction to paper
Week 7: Redo your table of means by adding two more columns, which show means for your sample divided into two groups of your key independent variable. Do tests of statistical significance of differences. This is your first look at data and your hypothesis. Write up results. Tell an interesting story.
Week 8: 1st draft of review of literature. What is known (and not known) theoretically and empirically & how paper adds to knowledge.
Week 9: 1st draft of data section
Week 10: 1st draft of methods section
Week 11: Preliminary regression results for at least 1 dependent variable and write up results
Week 12: Revised or extended regression results, write up results
Week 13: 1st drafts of half class papers
Week 14: 1st draft of 2nd half of class papers
Week 15: Final draft of papers due

**Grades**
The final grade will be based 20% on summary of weekly reading, 70% on the quality of the final paper, and 10% on class participation.

**Topic Selection**
This the most challenging part of paper-writing and week 4 is less than one month away. Make a list of two or three possible topics, discuss them with relevant faculty members in your department, make an appointment to see me if that seems helpful, and do some background reading on each possible topic so you have some idea what has been done. Don’t settle on a topic until you have done some reading, have a question that you think research could help answer, and have some idea what evidence you could find to answer it.

**Required Purchases**

Lawrence C. Hamilton. *Statistics with Stata (Updated for Version 10)* Duxberry. 2008 or
A. Bryman and D. Cramer. *Quantitative Data Analysis with SPSS 10.0 for Windows*. Taylor and Francis. 2000 or more recent version.


**Useful Websites**
Three Cities Study-- [http://www.jhu.edu/~welfare/](http://www.jhu.edu/~welfare/)
The Urban Institute – New Federalism Project [http://newfederalism.urban.org](http://newfederalism.urban.org)
Center for Law and Social Policy- [http://www.clasp.org/](http://www.clasp.org/)
Future of Children: [http://www.futureofchildren.org](http://www.futureofchildren.org)

Effects of Taxes and Transfers on Income and Poverty: 2006
[http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/income.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/income.html)

Tables of Alternative Poverty Estimates: 2006
[www.lisproject.org](http://www.lisproject.org)

**Course Outline and Reading Assignments**
1. Overview of the course; discussion of types of projects that a student might undertake; description of the various data sets prepared for class use; strategies in the formulation of student projects.

2. Measurement issues in the study of income, wealth, poverty, and inequality; The Pen parade, Lorenz curve, and Gini coefficient; Discussion of student projects.


3. Income stratification; Trends in the distribution of income and earnings in the United States; Determinants of income attainment; Racial disparities in income; Discussion of data sets for course projects.


4. Assessing the Costs and Benefits of Economic Inequality in Rich Nations


   Check out Russell Sage Foundation website project on Social Inequality. See for example, under working papers, Larry Bartells “Economic Inequality and Political Representation”

5. Trends in the distribution of household wealth in the United States; The components of wealth. Racial disparities in wealth holdings; Tax policies and wealth inequality; Discussion of projects.

   Edward Wolff, *Top Heavy*


   James B. Davies, “Wealth and Economic Inequality” in *Oxford Handbook of Economic Inequality* on reserve in pdf


7. US Poverty in International Context


8. The relationship of family and poverty

Maria Cancian and Deborah Reed, Ch. 4 in Maria Cancian and Sheldon Danziger, (eds). 2009. Changing Poverty, Changing Policies, Russell Sage Foundation.

Sara McLanahan, Elizabeth Donahue, and Ron Haskins “Introducing the Issue” in Marriage and Child Well-being, The Future of Children, Volume 15, Number 2, Fall, 2005


9. Opportunity and Mobility and other measures of well-being cross nationally


10. **Programs to reduce insecurity and promote human capital**


11. **Programs that prevent and relieve poverty.**


12. **Poverty and Inequality in Poor Countries**


World Bank, *World Development Report and World Development Indicators*, Washington, DC, annual
13. and 14. Presentation of 1st drafts of term papers

15. Politics, history, culture and the role of empirical research in policy making
