Department of City and Regional Planning

The Political Economy of Poverty and Inequality

Spring 2016

Instructor: Prof. Meenu Tewari
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Office hours: Thursdays, 2 – 5 pm

Class meets: T: 2:00 – 4:30pm, New East, Room 102

Course Description

Oxfam released a report on January 14 this year which found that the richest 1% own more than all the rest of the 99% of the world. The concentration of wealth is now so extreme that just 62 people in the world own as much wealth and income as 50% of the worlds poorest people. Similarly, a handful of cities around the world generate more wealth, attract more talent and investment that drives the global economy. These disparities are not only widening difference, but they are hollowing out entire regions, and as has been widely cited over the past decade, eroding the middle class. Where does this leave low income families and households; and the less connected localities and communities of the world? What economic, social, political and institutional factors must we consider in order to make, and prosper in an increasingly unequal world? What is the lived experience of poverty, inequality and segregation? How can we develop insights, frameworks and tools to build a world of shared prosperity?

This course introduces students to the political economy of poverty, inequality and programs and policies designed to combat them. Grounded within case studies, and current and historical debates about economic growth, inequality, and development, the course covers public, private and non-profit sector policies and programs that target the poor in lagging regions and inner cities. It explores what works well and why in this arena, and draws lessons from examining successful and less successful attempts at designing and implementing employment generation, skill development, capabilities enhancing and development-inducing programs at the local level. The course links these programs to the literature on poverty, economic development, small firms, human capital formation, social networks, informality, housing, race, class and segregation. Drawing upon new insights from this literature, and empirical evidence from case studies from developed and developing countries, the course discusses the types of projects, tasks, and organizational environments that are conducive to effective and equitable outcomes

The objectives of the course are to:

1. Expose you to the many debates on the sources and drivers of poverty and inequality in the US and overseas you critically analyze, unpack and question the assumptions behind various claims;
2. Explore a more grounded conception of global poverty viewed through the lens of particular places, people, institutions, and contexts;
3. Identify the importance of agency – that is, the roles played by different actors – from national and local governments, private businesses, NGOs, citizens and international organizations in poverty alleviation
4. Examine the lived experience of poverty through qualitative and ethnographic approaches to conducting research, including interviews;
5. Appreciate the fact that all perspectives carry their own 'political' frameworks. Owning these frameworks, or at least making them explicit, can pave the way for meaningful dialog and progressive action that can help reconcile or narrow the space between oppositional positions and differences;
6. Demonstrate the importance of going beyond arguments that favor a single 'right' approach to instead ask what works and why, and under what circumstances, and under what conditions;
7. Expose you to comparative economic development, planning, and reflective practice in a global context.

Design of the course:

The course is designed as a seminar. High levels of class participation are mandatory. Every student is expected to come to class prepared – i.e., having completed all assigned readings and any homework exercises that are required. Respectful exchange that is mindful of, and accepting of differences in opinion is critical. The quality of participation is important, not just quantity and being able to ask good questions is as important as being able to answer them.

The class will draw on three key learning traditions: (i) learning through discussion; (ii) learning through group exercises; (iii) learning through good writing. After setting the stage in the first few classes I will refrain from lecturing and will instead look to the class to jointly walk us through the material through guided discussion, debates, reflection and blogging on pre-organized questions. Writing and interviewing skills are two new skills that students can expect to take away from the class, in addition to knowledge and insights into the substance of the course. I strongly encourage you to work with the writing center to turn in good quality work. : http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/

*Course Requirements:

1. Four short interview-based assignments: 25%

2. Class presentations on cases (with a partner):   20%

3. 2 Short (1-2 page) reflections (on assigned Qs):   20%
and a regular blog on the course readings

4. Group term assignment that builds on your interviews
but explores issues in a particular city, or institution or
strategy**:   25%

5. Class participation: 10%

* Assignments will be detailed out and finalized after our first meeting.
** After the first meeting I will determine if it would be better to replace the group assignment by a take home final exam (essay based).

Late Assignments

I will deduct a half-letter grade for each day an assignment is late. Exceptions will be made in the case of documented medical or family emergencies. Contact me as soon as you know there will be a conflict with a deadline.

The Honor Code

"The Honor Code represents UNC-Chapel Hill students' commitment to maintain an environment in which students respect one another and are able to attain their educational goals. As a student at Carolina, you are entering a community in which integrity matters--integrity in the work you submit, and integrity in the manner in which you treat your fellow Carolina community members." http://newstudents.unc.edu/content/view/24/77/

Other Resources on campus

- The Writing Center: http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/
- Academic Success Program: http://www.unc.edu/depts/lds/
- Learning Center: http://www.unc.edu/depts/acadserv/learn.html
- Counseling and Wellness Services: http://campushealth.unc.edu
- UNC's Attendance Policy: http://www.unc.edu/ugradbulletin/procedures1.html#class_attendance

Cellphones and laptops

Please turn off your cellphones before entering class. If you must have your phone on during class because of an extraordinary circumstance, please let me know beforehand.

Laptops are permissible **only** for classroom work and note taking. You must turn off all other programs including web browsers, emails, instant messaging, etc. If laptops are used for anything other than classroom related work, I will politely ask you stop using your laptop during class time.

Schedule of Themes*

*Dates and readings subject to change
All readings for each session are posted on Sakai

INTRODUCTION
(Overview and assumptions)

| 1 | 1/19 T | Overview of the course
Unpacking assumptions
(Interview Assignment 1 handed out) |
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2	1/26 T	Economy and its Transformation

| 3 | 2/2 T | Outsourcing, technology, inequality
Part II: 3:15 – 4:30
Visit to Davis library to learn about the datasets on the economic, social and spatial metrics of analyzing poverty and inequality (Phil McDaniel) |
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| 4 | 2/9 T | Work: in the 'Old' and 'New' Economy: Skills Mismatch; Spatial Mismatch;
The New Informality |
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5	2/16 T	*The changing nature of work: Interviews due in class for discussion*

HOW PLACES AND COMMUNITIES RESPOND TO PRESSURES OF

6	2/23 T	Race, Class and Segregation

| 7 | 3/1 T | 2:00 – 3:15: Affordable Housing
3:30 – 4:30: Making low income neighborhoods resilient (Case Study) |
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8	3/8 T	Health and poverty; Water and Sanitation, and access to services

9	3/15 T	No Class – Spring Break

| 10 | 3/22 T | Immigration: Occupations, Places, and the Precariousness of Work
The Guesworker – Film

Guest Lecture: Hannah Gill |
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| 11 | 3/29 T | 2:00 – 3:15: Training and skill formation
3:30 – 4:30: The Living Wage Initiative |
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12	4/5 T	Social Networks (Allentown vs Youngstown)

13	4/12 T	*Film: A Village Called Versailles*

14	4/19 T	Climate Change and Risk in low income neighborhoods

15   4/26 T   Student Presentations
                        Course Wrap-up: Evaluations