



## **COURSE: Poverty and the Individual (2007) - Thomas Farmer**

*Required Texts:* Course Packet

Ehrenreich, B. (2001). *Nickel and Dimed*. Henry Holt and Company, LLC:  
New York.

"No country, however rich, can afford the waste of its human resources. Demoralization caused by vast unemployment is our greatest extravagance. Morally, it is the greatest menace to our social order." - FDR, 1934

**Course Overview and Description:** Poverty and the Individual is a three-credit course in which you participate in a community service placement for a total of 12 hours during the semester. Volunteer activity must occur in an approved and organized setting, such as in an elementary school classroom, a homeless shelter, an after-school or YMCA program, or a health center. In addition, you will complete readings and written assignments during the semester that connect the course material with your experiences at the site.

When Franklin Roosevelt was elected president he pledged to involve the federal government in helping the country climb out of the Depression. He was determined to develop "...a new deal for the American people." That promise still resonates in the ears of many people throughout this country. Franklin Roosevelt made it popular to talk about social justice. Roosevelt University has made an effort to continue his legacy of social justice. The mission statement describes the goal of "making higher education available to academically qualified students from all social, racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds." My contention is that one important, underlying variable confounds the efforts to create a more socially just world: poverty. Even such issues as prejudice and racism have an underlying component of poverty. A commonly cited origin of prejudice and racism is that it legitimizes unequal economic treatment.

This class will examine issues facing those living in poverty. The issues will be presented through discussion as well as exploration. The class will look at poverty from both a micro and macro perspective, both locally and globally. We will investigate how institutions such as education, health, and the law operate with respect to those living in poverty. Furthermore, we will scrutinize the impact of poverty on mental health, physical health, and housing. All of this will be achieved through your own experiences, the readings presented in class, and class discussion.

### **Course Goals:**

- To fill unmet needs in the community through direct service.
- To increase your desire to work as an advocate for those less fortunate.
- Increase your understanding of a complex sociological phenomena as it relates to the real world.
- To expose you to societal inequalities and empower you to make a difference.
- To increase the responsibility you take in your own education.
- To do something, to do anything.

**Objectives:**

- Students will seek out information from a variety of sources (personal meetings with people in poverty or a charitable organization, the internet, research articles, books, etc.) in order to gain a multitude of perspectives on the issues.
- Students will become more capable of discussing issues relevant to social justice as it applies to the individual in poverty through frequent class discussion, individual presentations, and the final group project.
- To improve students' abilities to research and critically think about issues relevant to society.
- To improve your ability to write on difficult topics in a concise and clear manner.

**Requirements:**

1. Volunteer 12 hours in the context of an approved site placement. (More hours are highly encouraged.)

The Field Placement must involve interacting with people living in poverty so that you can learn about the issues facing them in society. Placements that allow you to get to know a smaller number of people in greater depth are generally better than those with rotating populations.

Certain tasks at the site do *not* count towards your contact hours, such as clerical tasks, administrative work, and any training that the site requires. In addition, you cannot “double count” hours that you work at the site with any other college-related experience (e.g., students enrolled in teacher preparation programs cannot simultaneously apply their volunteer work for PSYC 383 towards the College of Education’s field observation or student teaching courses) or paid employment.

The Field Placement can only be completed in organized settings, such as a school, social service agency, homeless shelter, or hospital. Informal arrangements (such as babysitting) are not permitted. In addition, the Field Placement must be supervised by an appropriate staff member at the site. The supervisor must be available to provide training when applicable, answer questions, and provide you with appropriate feedback. Supervisors must be sufficiently knowledgeable about your performance so that they can complete the required evaluation forms.

*Your 12 hours at the site only begin to count after you obtain my signature on the Site Approval and Contract Form that you received prior to the beginning of this semester.*

Your supervisor will complete a final evaluation of your work at the site; this is due during Week 12, as specified on the course calendar at the end of the syllabus. You will be responsible for providing your supervisor with the forms (which will be supplied by me) and verifying that they have been mailed to me. In addition, you will complete a form that relates your own perceptions of the site at the end of the semester. *You must fulfill your 12-hour commitment to your site to receive credit for the class. If your site requires more than 12 hours of commitment, you must abide by their requirements.*

2. Complete the assigned text readings each week.

Readings from your course packet are the primary source of information in this course. Additional readings may be assigned throughout the semester. Students are expected to come to class prepared and ready to discuss the material assigned for that day.

Students will be responsible for writing five response papers covering specific readings from the course packet. Each response paper should be about one to two pages in length and must be composed using Microsoft Word (double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12-point font with 1-inch margins on all sides). These assignments will account for 20% of your final grade.

### 3. Response paper about your volunteer work.

During the course of your service, you will write two response papers about your volunteer work. One paper should come about half way through your service and the other should come near the end of your service. The minimum length for each paper is two to three pages. Papers must be composed using Microsoft Word (double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12-point font with 1-inch margins on all sides) and will contain the following parts:

- (a) The date(s) and the start and stop time(s) of your volunteer work for that time period;
- (b) A summary of your activities and interactions at the site. Focus on describing the issues facing the population you are working with.
- (c) Concrete connections between your volunteer work and the readings. Note that these connections must be detailed and specific. They may relate to any part of the readings rather than only to the topic of the week. Select specific topics from the course and explain how they helped you understand children at your site. Conversely, choose some experiences at your site and explain how these interactions clarified the reading material.
- (d) A commentary on what you learned, found interesting, and your emotional reactions.

### 4. “Nickel and Dimed” Paper.

On March 7<sup>th</sup>, a paper covering the reading of Barbara Ehrenreich’s book, “Nickel and Dimed,” will be due. The paper should include themes you have observed from your volunteer work as well as the themes discussed in class as they relate to Ehrenreich’s experiences. The paper should be between three to four pages in length and must be composed using Microsoft Word (double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12-point font with 1-inch margins on all sides).

### 5. Final Group Presentation.

Students will be placed in groups where they will research a specific topic either discussed in class or not covered in class. During future classes, students will have time to meet and discuss their research topic. The presentations should examine one specific issue facing someone living in poverty. The presentation may use a topic already discussed, but then should go into greater detail. If students want to investigate a topic outside of what the class has covered, they need to first clear it with me.

Each presentation should take approximately 30 minutes. Use of a visual medium such as PowerPoint is required. In addition to my grading of the presentations, each student will also be responsible for grading their peers within their own group.

## 6. Final Research Paper.

Each individual will be responsible for writing their own research paper on a specific issue confronted by those living in poverty. The topic will be the same as the one presented on; however, I reiterate, students will write their own research paper. The minimum length for each paper is 6-8 pages (double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12-point font with 1-inch margins on all sides). Specific requirements of both the paper and the presentation will be discussed at length later in the semester.

## 7. Class Discussion.

I promise that by the end of the class I will get to know your face and your name. I will remember who speaks and who does not. Class discussion is essential for a high quality learning experience, particularly with the complex issue that we are studying. I truly hope to learn just as much from you as you learn from me. If you have a problem speaking in front of others, let me know immediately. Apathy will not be rewarded! Additionally, you will formulate and turn in one intelligent question for each reading or a question that is relevant to the topic that was not discussed in the reading. These questions should be typed. Questions should be complex and well-devised. These questions will be due at the beginning of each class.

### Course Calendar

<b>DATE:</b>	<b>TOPIC:</b>	<b>ASSIGNMENT:</b>
Jan 22	Introduction to the Course	
Jan 24	Living in poverty	
Jan 29	No Class	-APA Resolution on Poverty -Self-help and Hard Times, -The Siege
Jan 31	History of Poverty in U.S.	-Social Reproduction Theory
Feb 5	Resources	-Leveled Aspirations -The Brothers: Dreams Deferred
Feb 7	Social Reproduction Theory	-Reproduction Theory Reconsidered -Conclusion
Feb 12	No Class	GROUP MEETINGS
Feb 14	Gender	-The Upperclass and Mothers -N the Hood -The Wage Gap
Feb 19	Marriage	-Women, Children, and Poverty
Feb 21	Parenting	-What Makes the Perfect Parent?
Feb 26	Childhood Poverty	-How much does poverty affect life chances of children?

Feb 28	Race	-Latino Population -AUDIO- "Katrina"
Mar 5	Segregation	-The invisible Knapsack -The Perpetuation of the Underclass
Mar 7	Reflection Day	- <b><u>"Nickel and Dimed" Paper Due</u></b>
Mar 12	<b>SPRING BREAK</b>	
Mar 14		
Mar 19	Housing	-Work -What's it like living in hell?
Mar 21	Drugs & Alcohol	-Why drug dealers still live with their mothers. <b><u>1<sup>st</sup> RESPONSE PAPER DUE</u></b>
Mar 26	Education	-Other People's Children
Mar 28	Law	-A heaping serving of Justice -Practicing Law for Poor People
Apr 2	Mental Health	-Psychotherapy, Classism, and the Poor
Apr 4	Mental Health	-Clinical Foundations of MST
Apr 9	Globalization	-The Spread of Economic Prosperity -Voiceless Dying
Apr 11	Globalization	-The United States and the "Challenge of Relativity" -Myths and Magic Bullets -AUDIO- Sachs
Apr 16	Welfare	-Welfare to work success -Can Welfare Reform Work?
Apr 18	Presentations	
Apr 23	Presentations	
Apr 25	Presentations	
Apr 30	Presentations	<b><u>2<sup>nd</sup> RESPONSE PAPER DUE</u></b>

May 2          Presentations

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May 7          Presentations          **FINAL PAPER DUE**