

Big Ideas: Equality, Opportunity, and Public Policy in America
(HIST 1119; SOC 1119)
Fall 2017

CLASS INFORMATION

Class Sessions: Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:30-4:45pm
Location: 134 Trowbridge Hall

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor: Colin Gordon
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Office Hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays 1:00-2:30 or by appointment
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Instructor: Sarah Bruch
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ABOUT THE COURSE

Equality, Opportunity and Public Policy in America is a “Big Ideas” class. It is not an introductory course in History or Sociology, but an investigation—drawing on the insights of a number of disciplines—of a big problem, or idea, or question. For us, that big question is this:

- **What does the government do, and why?**

Government action ranges widely, from peacekeeping to parking meters, so in order to make that big question more manageable, we organize this course around a more closely focused pair of questions:

- **What does the government do to ensure economic security or well-being?**
- **What does the government do to create or ensure equality of opportunity?**

Our approach draws on a number of academic disciplines. We look to history for an understanding of how policies (and our view of them) have changed over time, and for a sense of the background for current policy debates. We look to the social sciences (sociology, economics, and political science) for an understanding of social problems (their definition and dimensions); for an understanding (through empirical analysis or program evaluation) of policy successes and failures; and for an understanding of the politics of policy (the ways in which political actors, political institutions, and political culture shape policy alternatives).

Over the course of the semester, our broad motivating questions—concerning economic security and equal opportunity—raise a number of other important issues:

- Why, when, and how do private problems become public issues?
- Why, when, and how does government play a role in addressing social issues?
- How do we decide among various policy options?
- How do we evaluate existing policies?

This course is organized into five units, each one lasting about three weeks. Our first unit establishes some of the basic elements of public policy: how we identify problems that need to be addressed, and how we decide what policies might work best. The following four units each look to a particular policy area, and the ways in which each of these address equality of opportunity and economic security.

The second unit, on **education**, turns to our most expansive and universal social policy. What can the government do “at the starting gate” to ensure equality of opportunity? How does educational attainment contribute to economic security?

The third unit, on **work and wages**, focuses on employment, and on the policies that seek to regulate the conditions and terms of employment. What can government do to protect working Americans and ensure that employment yields economic security and opportunity?

The fourth unit, on **poverty**, turns to thresholds of economic security and to the policies that seek to help the very poor. What can the government do to ensure a floor (or “safety net”) for those that struggle to make ends meet? What can government do to ensure equal access to anti-poverty programs?

The final unit, on **unemployment, health care, and retirement**, looks to the challenge posed by common life risks. What can the government do to protect citizens against these risks and their economic consequences? How can the government ensure equal access to these forms of “social insurance” against life risks?

Each unit is organized in a similar manner. Drawing on the insights of history and the social sciences, we begin with activities that define and describe **the problem** and its causes. Next, we investigate **policy solutions** and alternatives. From here, we turn to the **evaluation of policies** and their impact on the core problem: what works and what doesn’t? We look at national policies, at

international comparisons, and at state and local variation—including an examination of lowa-specific policies. Finally, we close each unit with a panel of experts who represent different perspectives and positions and can provide insight as to how the various levels of government, national and local non-profits, advocates, and local service providers work together toward goals like providing equality of opportunity and economic security. These panels are supported by the University’s Public Policy Center (PPC), an interdisciplinary center that supports policy researchers across campus, engages the public by sharing the expertise and resources of the PPC and the University of Iowa, and provides internships for student research. These evening panels are regular class meetings, but they are also public events to which members of the University and Iowa City communities are invited.

This course meets the GER requirement for social sciences. Over the course of the semester:

- Students will learn the process through which social scientists and policy scholars examine social issues and policies.
- Students will learn to evaluate data, identify patterns, and generate hypotheses or expectations.
- Students will learn to synthesize different types of information.
- Students will learn to develop policy positions and support them with evidence and reason.

Equality, Opportunity and Public Policy in America is not a lecture class. Most of our class time will be devoted to hands-on activities and investigations. This is reflected in the layout of the classroom, which is organized into nine-seat tables. We will use this organization—sometimes working as individuals, sometimes in groups of three, sometimes in larger groups, often reporting the results of group investigations back to the whole class—as the basis for most daily instruction. The instructors will use short lectures to provide background, content, and key ideas. They will also direct and explain classroom activities, and work with groups on those activities.

Readings

The readings for this course are drawn from a wide range of books, articles, videos and podcasts. They include scholarly literature, policy briefs, and journalism. There are **three required** texts available at the University Bookstore (ground floor of the Iowa Memorial Union [IMU]).

Kenworthy, Lane. 2015. *Social Democratic America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0190230951

Morduch, Jonathan and Rachel Schneider. 2017. *The Financial Diaries: How American Families Cope in a World of Uncertainty*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. ISBN: 978-0691172989

Campbell, Andrea. 2014. *Trapped in America’s Safety Net: One Family’s Struggle* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. ISBN 978-0226140445

The full schedule of readings, and direct links to readings and other resources, can be found under the topical modules on the Canvas course webpage.

Course Evaluation and Assignments

Grades in the course are determined by two things. The first of these, “Attendance and Participation” is based on your day-to-day engagement with course materials and classroom activities. This portion of your grade also includes the daily worksheets (described below). The rest of your grade is based on the writing assignments completed at the end of the units on education, work and wages, anti-poverty policy, and life risks.

| | |
|------------------------------|-----|
| Attendance and Participation | 40% |
| End-of-Unit Papers (4@15) | 60% |

Grading System and the Use of +/-

Final grades will be assigned on the basis of the following distribution. We reserve the right to modify the distribution at a later date, but we will not do so in a way that lowers anyone’s grade.

| | | | |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| 99-100% = A+ | 83-86% = B | 70-72% = C- | Below 60% = F |
| 93-98% = A | 80-82% = B- | 67-69% = D+ | |
| 90-92% = A- | 77-79% = C+ | 63-66% = D | |
| 87-89% = B+ | 73-76% = C | 60-62% = D- | |

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Course attendance and participation

This class relies heavily on student involvement. We expect regular attendance and regular participation in class activities—which will include discussions, group activities, in-class investigations, and brief reports back to the larger group. It is essential that you come to class having done the readings. By engaging in activities and discussions, you will be able to learn from one another, develop your ability to clearly articulate your ideas, and build your confidence in discussing issues related to social inequality. Accordingly, regular attendance and participation accounts for 40 percent of the final grade. Participation is assessed by observing your engagement in class activities and discussion, as well as through activities and worksheets that will be turned in on a regular basis. We will provide these worksheets for each class meeting. These will serve as guides to each’s days content and activities, and as templates for recording your notes and reactions. These are handed in at the end of the class, and returned to the student to use as references in writing the required paper assignments.

During the course of the semester, we will have four Panels of Experts that conclude each of the units. **The panels will meet from 6:30-8:00pm** on the following dates:

- Tuesday, September 26 at 6:30-8:00pm: Education Panel (**107 EPB**)
- Tuesday, October 17 at 6:30-8:00pm: Work and Wages Panel (Iowa City Public Library)
- Tuesday, November 7 at 6:30-8:00pm: Anti-Poverty Policy Panel (Iowa City Public Library)
- Thursday, November 30 at 6:30-8:00pm: Managing Risk Panel (Iowa City Public Library)

Note that these are class sessions (they replace the regular class meeting for that day) and attendance is required. If you are unable to attend the panel, you must complete a supplemental assignment based on an assigned reading. This assignment will count as your participation grade for that class session.

Writing Assignments and Expectations

You will write four short papers for the course, one at the end of each of the four policy units (education, work and wages, poverty, and risk). These papers should be 1000-1500 words, or 3-5 double-spaced pages. The goal of these papers is to develop, and support with evidence, an argument for a particular policy that addresses a particular problem. Each of these papers should include three important elements:

- First, your paper should open with discussion or outline of the problem to be addressed. The “problem” will usually be a smaller component of the broader policy area: in the education unit, for example, you might focus on school segregation; in the poverty unit, you might focus on child poverty. Your opening discussion should describe the problem (magnitude, dimensions, impact), its development or emergence, and its importance.
- Second, your paper should discuss the current policy environment. What do we currently do about the problem? What (if relevant) do other states or countries do? What are the range of policy options and what do we know about their effectiveness?
- Third, your paper should argue for a solution, a specific policy recommendation. Considering the problem at hand, and the history of policy in this area, what do think would be the most effective and equitable change in public policy? Your policy recommendation could be a new policy, or a change in existing policy. It could be proposed as national policy, or as state policy.

Across all elements of the paper, your argument should incorporate relevant insights and evidence from course readings, from classroom materials and presentations, and from the end-of-unit panel. From these resources, you should assemble empirical evidence to support your argument (a paper addressing child poverty, for example, should cite the rate or incidence of child poverty in order to make the case that it’s a problem, or that it is getting worse); and you should draw on course readings, resources and panels to support and refine your argument (a paper addressing child poverty, for example, might draw on a video used in class, an assigned chapter, or the reflections of a policy advocate at the end-of unit-panel).

Due dates are noted on the course schedule (below). Each end-of-unit paper is worth 15 percent of your final grade.

Late Work Policy, and other Accommodations

Life is complicated and all of us have many obligations and challenges, and we would rather you do the work late than not at all. HOWEVER, we only accept work up to one week late. Work that is more than one week late will not be accepted. Late work receives only ½ credit. In other words, failure to submit work on time will result in an automatic 50% grade before the work is graded (for example, if the assignment is worth 10 points, a late assignment will be worth a

maximum of 5 points. This is a substantial reduction in points, so we would strongly recommend you not use this option very often.

Classroom Dialogue and Dynamics

The issues we deal with in this course are often controversial, and you may be exposed to arguments you do not agree with in the readings, discussions, class activities, or lectures. A great deal of learning occurs in the classroom, and as part of this process you are encouraged to voice your opinion about these issues. This is not a class where we all need to agree at the end of the day. In fact, disagreement is a good way to learn because it requires critical thinking and reflection on one's own position.

Together, we need to create a comfortable environment by sharing ideas, observations, and questions respectfully; such an environment is only possible when instructors and students treat each other with mutual respect and listen without interruption. Therefore, we will not tolerate words or actions that result in hostility in the classroom. The following ideas help us create a positive atmosphere:

- We are all knowledgeable in different ways. We all have something to teach and something to learn. A well-rounded understanding of the social world cannot be achieved without the participation of many different perspectives.
- No one is to be blamed for the circumstances of their existence that have been beyond their control. We cannot be blamed for repeating misinformation we have learned in our social locations, but we can hold each other accountable to not repeat misinformation after we have learned otherwise.
- Learn to appreciate different personalities. Try to draw out those who are quieter than others, but respect people's comfort levels and learn to recognize active listening. Those who are more assertive should try to recognize and refrain from dominating the conversation.
- Everyone should be encouraged to rethink the assumptions and knowledge we bring into the classroom; approach learning with an open mind.
- Respect each person's experience, never demean or trivialize another's life experience. It is possible to voice your point of view without offending and alienating your peers.

Each class is a learning community with a unique dynamic. We welcome and will thoughtfully consider critical feedback and constructive suggestions for changes that may enhance the classroom dynamic.

COURSE SCHEDULE

The following is the course schedule, listing the five course units, daily topics, readings, and key dates. Readings are listed by day and topic, and should be completed *before* the day on which they are assigned. This schedule, including links to readings (other than those from the three course texts) and other resources, is also available on the Canvas course site.

UNIT 1: What Does the State Do, and Why?

August 22: Introductions and Overview

August 24: Defining Equality of Opportunity and Economic Security

- Read: Kenworthy, *Social Democratic America*, chapter 2

August 29: The Role of Government

- Read: Kenworthy, *Social Democratic America*, chapters 3 and 4

August 31: The Policy-Making Process

- Read: Kenworthy, *Social Democratic America*, chapter 5

UNIT 2: Education and Education Policies

September 5: What Shapes Equality of Opportunity?

- Watch: “The Lottery” (2010)
- Dylan Matthews, “The Case Against Equal Opportunity” (2014)

September 7: Inequalities in Education

- Watch: John Oliver segment on School Segregation (2016)
- Watch: “Separate and Unequal” (2014)

September 12: Between School Inequalities

- Read: Nikole Hannah-Jones, “Choosing a School for My Daughter” (2016)
- Listen to: This American Life, “The Problem We All Live With” (2015)

September 14: Within School Inequalities

- Read: Calarco, “Coached in the Classroom” (2014)
- Read: Simone Ipsa-Landa and Jordan Conwell, “Once You Go to a White School” (2015)

September 19: Higher Education

- Read: Broton and Goldrick-Rab, “The Dark Side of College (Un)Affordability” (2016)
- Read: Paul Tough, “Who Gets to Graduate?” (2014)
- Read: Susan Dynarski, “How to Help More College Students Graduate” (2016)

September 21: Education in Iowa

September 26 at 6:30-8:00pm: Education Panel in the Iowa Public Library

End-of-Unit paper due September 28 (Thursday 12:00pm)

UNIT 3: Making Work Pay: Labor Market Policies

September 28: What Shapes Economic Security?

- Read: Morduch and Schneider, *Financial Diaries*, introduction, and chapters 1-3;
- Suggestion: You might also look again at Kenworthy, chapter 2

October 3: A History of Employment

- Read: Morduch and Schneider, *Financial Diaries*, chapters 4-6

- Watch: “Two American Families” (2013)

October 5: The Minimum Wage

- Read: Andrew Stettner, “Federal Wage and Hour Policies in the Twenty-First Century Economy” (2017)
- Read: Arin Dube, “Designing Thoughtful Minimum Wage Policy at the State and Local Levels” (2017)

October 10: Labor Market Inequalities

- Read: Sarah Kliff, “The Truth About the Gender Wage Gap” (2017)
- Read: Sendhil Mulainathan, “Racial Bias, Even When We Have Good Intentions” (2015)
- Watch: “Raising of America” (2015)

October 12: Working in Iowa

October 17 at 6:30-8:00pm: Work and Wages Panel in the Iowa Public Library

End-of-Unit paper due October 19 (Thursday 12:00pm)

UNIT 4: Safety Nets: Anti-Poverty Policies

October 19: Introduction to Poverty

- Watch: American Winter (2013)
- Read: Morduch and Schneider, *Financial Diaries*, chapters 7 and 8

October 24: History of Anti-Poverty Policies

- Read: Alana Semuels, “How Poor Single Moms Survive,” “The Near Impossibility of Moving Up After Welfare,” “The End of Welfare as We Know It,” and “When the Government Tells Poor People How to Live” (2015-6)
- Watch: “Welfare and the Politics of Poverty” (2016)
- Read: Ron Haskins, “Are Conservatives Serious About Fighting Poverty?” (2016)

October 26: Child Poverty

- Watch: “Poor Kids” (2012)
- David Harris and Luke Schaefer, “Fighting Child Poverty With a Universal Child Allowance” (2017)

October 31: Place-Based Policies

- Tim Smeeding, “Class Matters and Place Matters” (2017)
- Joyce Elizabeth Dean, James T. Seymour and Steven Rider, “Neighborhood Approaches to Supporting Families of Young Children” (2017)

November 2: Anti-Poverty Policy in Iowa

November 7 at 6:30-8:00pm: Anti-Poverty Policy Panel in the Iowa Public Library

End-of-Unit paper due November 9 (Thursday 12:00pm)

UNIT 5: Managing Risk: Health, Employment, and Retirement Security

November 9: Managing and Insuring Risks

- Read: Campbell, *Trapped in the Safety Net*, prologue and chapters 1 and 2.

November 14: Health Care

- Read: Campbell, *Trapped in the Safety Net*, chapters 3 and 4

- Watch: “Understanding Medicaid” (2017)

November 16: Unemployment

- Watch: “Unnatural Causes: Not Just a Paycheck” (2008)
- Dean Baker and Kevin Hassett, “The Human Disaster of Unemployment” (2012)
- Campbell, *Trapped in the Safety Net*, prologue and chapters 5 and 6

November 28: Managing Risk in Iowa

November 30 at 6:30-8:00pm: Managing Risk Panel in the Iowa Public Library

End-of-Unit paper due December 4 (Monday 12:00pm).

Wrap-Up

December 5 and December 7: We will use the final two class periods pull together the material covered across the Units, tying them back to our organizing themes of economic opportunity and economic security.

No Final Exam or Classes During Finals Week

Addendum - The Departments of History and Sociology – Fall 2017

Sociology

Department Office: W140 Seashore Hall
Department Director (DEO): Jennifer Glanville
DEO e-mail: jennifer-glanville@uiowa.edu

Department Phone: 319-335-2502
DEO Office: W124 Seashore Hall
DEO Phone: 319-335-2498

History

Department Office: 280 Schaeffer
Department Director (DEO): Elizabeth Heineman
DEO e-mail: elizabeth-heineman@uiowa.edu

Department Phone: 319-335-2299
DEO Office: 280 Schaeffer
DEO Phone: 319-335-2299

Administrative Home

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the administrative home of this course and governs matters such as the add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and other related issues. Different colleges may have different policies. Questions may be addressed to 120 Schaeffer Hall, or see the CLAS Academic Policies Handbook at <http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook>.

Electronic Communication

University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). Faculty and students should use this account for correspondences (Operations Manual, III.15.2, k.11).

Accommodations for Disabilities

The University of Iowa is committed to providing an educational experience that is accessible to all students. A student may request academic accommodations for a disability (which includes but is not limited to mental health, attention, learning, vision, and physical or health-related conditions). A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet with the course instructor privately in the instructor's office to make particular arrangements. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between the student, instructor, and SDS. See <http://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/> for information.

Academic Honesty

All CLAS students or students taking classes offered by CLAS have, in essence, agreed to the College's Code of Academic Honesty: "I pledge to do my own academic work and to excel to the best of my abilities, upholding the IOWA Challenge. I promise not to lie about my academic work, to cheat, or to steal the words or ideas of others; nor will I help fellow students to violate the Code of Academic Honesty." Any student committing academic misconduct is reported to the College and placed on disciplinary probation or may be suspended or expelled (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

CLAS Final Examination Policies

The final examination schedule for each class is announced by the Registrar generally by the fifth week of classes. Final exams are offered only during the official final examination period. No exams of any kind are allowed during the last week of classes. All students should plan on being at the UI through the final examination period. Once the Registrar has announced the date, time, and location of each final exam, the complete schedule will be published on the Registrar's web site and will be shared with instructors and students. It is the student's responsibility to know the date, time, and place of a final exam.

Making a Suggestion or a Complaint

Students with a suggestion or complaint should first visit with the instructor (and the course supervisor), and then with the departmental DEO. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident (CLAS [Academic Policies Handbook](#)).

Understanding Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community have a responsibility to uphold this mission and to contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported immediately. See the UI [Office of the Sexual Misconduct Response Coordinator](#) for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.

Reacting Safely to Severe Weather

In severe weather, class members should seek appropriate shelter immediately, leaving the classroom if necessary. The class will continue if possible when the event is over. For more information on Hawk Alert and the siren warning system, visit the [Department of Public Safety website](#).

Student Classroom Behavior

The ability to learn is lessened when students engage in inappropriate classroom behavior, distracting others; such behaviors are a violation of the [Code of Student Life](#). When disruptive activity occurs, a University instructor has the authority to determine classroom seating patterns and to request that a student exit the classroom, laboratory, or other area used for instruction immediately for the remainder of the period. One-day suspensions are reported to appropriate departmental, collegiate, and Student Services personnel (Office of the Vice President for [Student Services](#) and Dean of Students).

Resources for Students

Students will find the Writing Center and the Speaking Center very useful for this course; the Tutor Iowa site is also very valuable for students seeking extra help:

Writing Center: <http://writingcenter.uiowa.edu/>

Speaking Center: <http://clas.uiowa.edu/rhetoric/for-students/speaking-center>

Tutor Iowa: <http://tutor.uiowa.edu/>