

# **PSYC 319: Poverty & Child Development**

Whitman College

Spring 2010

Meeting time: Tuesday 6-9pm

Room: Maxey 302

Instructor: Professor Clearfield

Office hours: M 11-12, W 2:30-4 or by appointment

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## **Course Description**

This course will review psychological research on the impact of poverty on infant and child development, and apply a holistic theory of change (Dynamic Systems Theory) in order to understand how the contributing factors interact. Major areas addressed in this class will include prenatal care; early neuromotor, cognitive, emotional, and social development; academic achievement; and the outcome of these regarding adolescent and adult achievement, attachment and health. We will also explore the effectiveness of intervention programs, and the interplay between child development research and social policy.

## **Readings**

All readings will be available on the course CLEo site.

## **Course Structure and Requirements**

This course is designed to be a deep and open-ended exploration of the impact of poverty on child development. By deep, I mean that we must move beyond simple explanations (like poverty is just bad nurture) in our attempt to understand the mechanism(s) by which poverty imparts such deep and long-lasting decrements in all aspects of development. By open-ended, I mean that we, as a class, will create the topics as we go along. I will certainly start us off with some key definitions, a theoretical orientation for the complexity of the issues, and some basic early developmental starting points. But I would like to retain some flexibility in the topics and structure to allow you to follow ideas that you find particularly interesting. To facilitate this, the course requirements are:

1. Class participation (20% of your grade)

The heart of the class is the readings and class discussion. It is everyone's responsibility to read the assigned materials closely and thoughtfully before each weekly meeting, and come to class prepared to ask questions, raise issues, and contribute to the discussion. My criteria for evaluating class participation are at the back of the syllabus.

Included in class participation is finding new articles to discuss in class. On the first day of class, we will divide the class into small groups (3-5 students), loosely based on interests. Each week, one member of the group will be responsible for finding an additional article not on the syllabus but relevant to the day's topic and your group's interest. You will read the article and distribute summary notes to the rest of your group in class (you will also send me a copy of the article and summary along with your weekly essay, see below). You will then teach your group the content of your article in class, and

we will build class discussion around it. You will rotate throughout the semester which one of you is in charge of finding the additional resource.

## 2. Weekly Essays (12 for the semester; 60% total)

To facilitate deep reflection and discussion, you will write a short essay each week where you chronicle your thoughts on the readings. Your essay should begin with brief summaries of each of the articles, followed by any questions you have (each article summary should be 2-3 sentences maximum). The heart of the essay will be your thoughts about the readings, beginning with specifics about each article (only needed if/when you can raise substantive issues, such as methodological issues or questions of validity; NOT whether you liked the piece or not). The bulk of the essay will be your attempt to make links among the different readings for the week, then links back through the previous weeks' readings, and finally, if relevant, links to other courses you are taking or have taken, or current issues in the news. These can be rather informal in tone – they are meant to be a record of your thoughts to help you pull them together, and a dialogue with me on how you are thinking about the material. They will range in length – some topics may inspire more thoughts than others – but I would expect the reflections/links to be about 2-3 pages total.

You will e-mail me your essays each week by **noon on Sunday** preceding the class discussion. I will not accept late entries, with no exceptions. Entries will be graded on a  $\sqrt{}$ ,  $\sqrt{+}$ ,  $\sqrt{-}$  basis, based on the following criteria:

- $\sqrt{+}$ : A truly original, creative and awesome thought that really adds a unique insight
- $\sqrt{}$ : A good entry that shows evidence of effort and serious thought, but one that communicates less original thought, or indicates difficulty in integrating concepts.
- $\sqrt{-}$ : An entry that reflects little genuine thought; may be based on a cliché, or simple regurgitation of classroom discussions or readings.

All  $\sqrt{}$ 's on every essay will result in a B for the weekly essays. Each  $\sqrt{+}$  will boost your grade one notch (from a B to a B+) and each  $\sqrt{-}$  will lower your grade one notch (from a B to a B-). Thus, you only need 3  $\sqrt{+}$ 's over the course of the semester to earn an A on the weekly essays. Note that difficulty understanding the material does not preclude you from earning a  $\sqrt{}$ , as long as you show evidence of effort and thought in trying to work through the material.

## 3. Final paper (20% of your grade)

Your final will be an integrative research paper, where you apply the theories we work with to a new area. The final will be due **Friday, May 14 by noon**. You will also give a brief, informal presentation to the class on the last day of class. More details will be given later in the semester.

| Date | Topic   | Reading Due  |
|------|---|--|
| 1/19 | What is poverty?                                      | Readings in class from D. Beegle (2007)  |
| 1/26 | General Theoretical Frameworks                        | Spencer et al (2009)<br>Van Gelder & Port (1995; pp.1-30, skip pp.13-17)<br>Yates et al (2003)                 |
| 2/2  | Prenatal malnutrition and the developing brain        | Lewis (2005)<br>Lia-Hoagberg et al. (1990)<br>Chavez et al (1995)<br>Levitsky & Strupp (1995)                  |
| 2/9  | Postnatal nutrition and brain development             | Miller & Korenman (1994)<br>Wachs (1995; 2008)<br>Tanner & Finn-Stevenson (2002)                               |
| 2/16 | Early Social Interactions/Maternal Factors            | Valenzuela (1997)<br>Murray (1992)<br>Luster et al<br>Camras et al (2005)                                      |
| 2/23 | The Home Environment                                  | Evans (2004)<br>Bradley et al (2001)<br>Zill et al (1995)<br>Chen et al (2009)                                 |
| 3/2  | Early Cognitive Development: Executive Function       | Anderson (2003)<br>Smith et al. (1997)<br>Mackner et al (2003)<br>Klebanov et al (1998)<br>Lipina et al (2005) |
| 3/9  | Cognitive Mechanisms: Attention, Language and Reading | Stevens et al (2009)<br>D'Angiulli et al (2008)<br>Farah et al (2006)<br>Noble et al (2006; 2007)              |
| 3/30 | SPRING BREAK  |  |
| 4/6  | School Achievement                                    | Ludwig & Phillips (2007)<br>Pagani (1997)<br>Alexander et al (1987)<br>Lee & Croninger (1994)                  |
| 4/13 | WCU CONFERENCE  | NO CLASS   |
| 4/20 | TBD*  |  |
| 4/27 | TBD*  |  |
| 5/4  | TBD*  |  |
| 5/11 | Social Policy Implications                            | Greenberg (2007; childcare)<br>Duncan et al (2007; pre-school)<br>Murnane (2007; schools, NCLB)                |

TBD\*: Topics to be determined by the class's interests. Topics may include adolescence and adult social skills (attachment and/or identity), delinquency/criminality, health, global poverty, short-term vs long-term poverty, or any others topic relating to poverty and development.

## Criteria for Evaluating Class Participation

Unsatisfactory participation will be awarded D or F grades:

- Multiple absences
- No contributions
- Hostile verbally and/or nonverbally, Disruptive, negative attitude
- Inattentive, disengaged
- Not prepared; has not done the assigned reading
- Comments do not contribute to the collective learning
- Consistently or deliberately off-topic
- Intentionally domineering

Average participation (C) should meet the following standards:

- Moderate absences
- Occasional contributions, does not talk, but is engaged; good active listener
- Ambivalent; not engaged
- Comes prepared; some grasp of the material
- Reasonably respectful behavior
- Occasionally offers irrelevant comments that move away from topic
- Does the task for the day; follows directions
- Style leaves others out
- Responds when called on
- Makes meaningful comments in ½ the classes
- Offers opinions without support

Above average participation (B) shows all positive characteristics of the foregoing plus:

- Few or no absences
- Thoughtful contributions
- Respectful behavior toward others; encourages others
- Demonstrates preparation and understanding of the material consistently
- Quiet but engaged (taking notes, listening carefully)
- Routinely makes a significant observation, comment, or point
- Generally stays on topic and moves the discussion forward
- Frequently refers to the text
- Occasionally makes comments that are not well supported
- Asks good questions
- Reacts to other students, not just the professor

Superior participation (A) shows all positive characteristics of the foregoing plus:

- Excellent attendance
- Does not dominate the discussion
- Extends discussion beyond the basic level
- Active listening evident by comments
- Comments are reflective, insightful, relevant
- Appreciate the multiple levels of the reading
- Capable of comparing, analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating
- Can synthesize multiple texts
- Works well with other's ideas
- Draws others into the discussion
- Takes intellectual risks
- Displays leadership
- Presents well-supported argument