HOMELESSNESS IN AMERICA  
(CD 143-05, SOC 149-01, UEP 181-01)  
SPRING 2016

Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:30-2:45  
Lane Hall 100A

Instructor: Laurie Goldman, Ph.D.  
laurie.goldman@tufts.edu (617) 627-5053  
Department of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning, Tufts University  
72 Professors Row, 2nd Floor  
Office Hours: Mondays 2:45-4:00pm and by appointment (strongly encouraged)

Course Assistant: Ashley Clark– ashley.clark@tufts.edu (For assistance with volunteer  
placements and other course related logistics.)

COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

This course explores the social, economic, and political phenomenon of homelessness in the United States. It is designed to develop your capacity for meaningful inquiry about social  
problems and what can be done to address them. The complexity of homelessness makes it  
conducive to generating and pursuing challenging questions for several reasons:

➢ The meaning of homelessness is ambiguous and socially constructed.

➢ Policy interventions rest on contentious theories about the causes of homelessness,  
conflicting priorities about who most needs help and which needs are most pressing, and  
inconclusive evidence about what works.

➢ The accumulated knowledge for investigating these questions spans academic disciplines.  
Interventions span levels of government and engage a variety of actors across policy  
domains.

➢ The issue of homelessness has significant social, economic, physical, and moral  
implications for the individuals and families who experience it directly as well as for  
those who live in their midst and for society as a whole.

➢ Homelessness and our responses to homelessness are implicated in our country’s legacy  
of racial, ethnic, gender, and class-based discrimination and conflict.

➢ Intensifying inequality, paradigm shifts in policy, and new approaches to civic  
engagement raise questions about the potential for doing something different.

COURSE STRUCTURE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

We begin by investigating our preconceptions and assumptions about homelessness in the United States. We’ll read about and meet people who have experienced homelessness and consider our  
observations in relation to prominent ideas about the causes and consequences of homelessness.
among scholars and policymakers. The second section of the course situates the problem in its social, economic, and political context. We explore market, policy, and societal failures that precipitate and perpetuate homelessness. We examine different approaches to addressing the problem of homelessness in the third section.

The course will be run in a discussion format accompanied by brief lectures, individual and group exercises, and guest speakers. In addition, four types of assignments will guide our exploration. Each assignment involves an individualized effort that is supported by the members of a small group of fellow students.

1. **Book Groups: Presentation and Take-Home Essay Exam:**

Each student will join a group to read and discuss an ethnographic account about people experiencing homelessness: adult men, families with children, or homeless youth. Groups will meet both in class and outside of class to discuss the ideas. They will prepare a summary of their gleanings and questions for further inquiry and will present them to the rest of the class. The discussions of the books will form the basis for the Take Home Essay Exam. (Group members may also be responsible for supplementary readings to enhance the understanding and critique of the books.)

The book options include:

- **Gowan, Teresa (2010).** *Hobos, Hustlers, and Backsliders: Homeless in San Francisco.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

We will discuss Book Group assignments and other details after the first few sessions of the class. (These books are available in the campus book store and on reserve at Tisch Library.)

2. **Volunteer Experience or Other Interactive Activity:**

Each of you will engage in an activity that allows you to interact with people who are experiencing homelessness or who are involved in (or potentially involved in) efforts to address homelessness and its causes and consequences. Options include:

- Volunteering in an organization that serves people experiencing homelessness
- Participating in an action or event convened by an advocacy organization
- Attending a hearing or public meeting
- Conducting interviews and/or designing and administering a survey to understand a particular group’s perceptions, attitudes, and opinions about homelessness
- Observing a public space that is frequented by people experiencing homelessness.
A description of volunteer opportunities is in the Resources section of the course Trunk site. Please try to make your volunteer placement arrangements as quickly as possible. The Course Assistant – Ashley Clark – will provide assistance in locating a suitable placement. However, you are responsible for making contact with your supervisor and arranging the actual days and times of participation. Keep in mind that it can take several attempts to make contact and finalize arrangements.

Early preparation is also critical for the other investigation projects. Arranging interviews, designing surveys, and observing activities requires planning and coordination.

You will write a brief description of your volunteer/interactive experience and what you gained from it.

3. Final Exploratory Project:
Each of you will explore a specific question about exploration of a question about the causes, consequences, experiences, and/or ways of addressing homelessness. The scope of the final project will depend on how extensive the volunteer or other interactive experience is. You may opt to collaborate with a few other students on a small group project.

Possible ways to focus the project:
- Examine a specific aspect of the causes and consequences of homelessness for a particular population group and/or context.
- Examine a particular approach to contending with homelessness, its root causes, or consequences.
- Examine perceptions, attitudes, or opinions of the general public or a particular group (e.g., Tufts students, “millennials”, the Boston area, your home town) about homelessness and the necessity to address it.
- Design a project that aims to influence the perceptions, attitudes, or opinions of a particular audience about a particular facet of the homelessness issue

Possible formats for the project:
- Literature review on a specific topic
- Critique of the portrayal of homelessness in a book, film, or other media
- Analysis of a program or organization
- Critique, endorsement of a policy, proposed legislation or ordinance, development project, or specific campaign (or propose a new policy)
- Interviews, focus groups, and/or a survey to understand perceptions, attitudes, and opinions of a particular population (This could be a good group project)
- Observation and analysis of a public space that people experiencing homelessness frequent
- Create a portrayal of the issue to help a particular audience understand the issue (e.g., a short story, play, series of photographs, short video…)

Every project will include a written component with the following elements:
- A description of the problem, solution, perceptions and attitudes, or other phenomenon
- Critical analysis that explains and assesses the underlying assumptions of the primary argument/s and the evidence that supports or refutes the argument/s
- Persuasion to convince your specified audience to adopt your critique
4. Reflections on the Readings, Experiences, and Emerging Questions and Ideas:
In addition to the Take-Home Essay Exam and Final Exploratory Project, students will write brief reflections on the readings, their volunteering/interactive experiences, and their emerging questions and ideas.

a. Reading Reflections on Trunk: All students are expected to read purposefully rather than passively. It is more important to engage the readings so that you learn from the experience of reading than to be able to summarize every theme or nuance. Questions to guide your active reading will be posted on the Trunk site in the folder for the session.

Each student will post brief reflections (no more than 150 words) on the readings by 11:30 am before our Monday afternoon class. These reflections can respond to the questions for active reading. You may also post questions for clarification or raise topics you’d like to explore in greater depth. By 12:30 pm on Wednesday afternoons, each student will comment briefly on at least one prior post of another student. Any of these posts can reference the readings assigned for Monday’s as well as Wednesday’s class session.

The timeliness and quality of these posts will inform the assessment of your grade for class participation. Quality posts are those that are inquisitive, insightful, provocative, and curious. You may also pose questions for clarification (even if you think you should already know the answer). Do not summarize the readings.

b. Reflections about Your Volunteer/Interactive Experience, Questions and Ideas
This year, we’re experimenting with blogs as a means to organize and share your reflections about your volunteer or other interactive experience and the questions and ideas that emerge over the course of the semester. Each student will have their own Wordpress site for this purpose. (Instructions for using and designing the site will be distributed.)

We’d like you to post on the Blog at least five times over the course of the semester. We’ll also give you some specific prompts, such as following guest speakers. You are encouraged to share your postings with members of your Book Group, the group’s we’ll be forming to support your Final Exploratory Projects, and the rest of the class.

c. Personal reflective essay:
At the end of the semester, you will write a brief reflective essay that includes about one paragraph on each of the following themes:
- Reflection on how your ideas and opinions have changed or were reinforced over the course of the semester.
- Assessment of how you achieved the goals you outlined in your Individual Learning and Aspirations Plan (described below).
- Thoughts about your future plans for study, work, and/or civic engagement.
**Class Participation:**
Active participation in all aspects of the class is critical to the success of the course – both for each individual and for our collective inquiry. Your questions and thoughts and challenges to the readings, lectures, and other observations will steer the progression of the course. Expressing your thoughts and questions is one part of active participation. Encourage your classmates to express their questions and ideas is equally important.

**Naïve Question Pledge:** To reinforce the adage that there are no stupid questions, you are each required to ask at least 5 questions you feel might be considered naïve or embarrassing over the course of the semester.

**“Individual Learning Aspirations Plan” (ILAP)**
To help you keep track of all of these elements and make the most of these learning opportunities, we will use a common approach to tailor social programs to individual participants’ specific needs and interests. You will each delineate your personal learning objectives with respect to the course as a whole and each of the assignments detailed above. You will meet with Laurie to discuss these goals and your plans for achieving them. We will consider how you can build on what you have learned in previous courses and life experiences and how we might supplement readings in relation to your specific interests and curiosities.

The “Homelessness In America Intake Form,” to be distributed in class, will guide our thinking about your goals together. (The form is also on the Trunk site towards the top of the Resources section.) Sign up for a meeting with Laurie and upload the completed form to Trunk Assignments or bring it to class by **Wednesday, 2/27. Meet with Laurie by 2/10.**

**Reading Assignments:**
We will be reading a wide range of types of publications. In addition to the Book Group ethnographies, assigned readings include scholarly publications from books and academic journals. Government, advocates, and program reports as well as excerpts from legislation, policy documents, and organizational web-sites also inform our inquiry.

The reading assignments will be adjusted in response to the themes that emerge from our discussions in class and in the Book Groups. The Trunk site (and announcements in class and by e-mail) will facilitate communication about these changes. **You are responsible for making sure that you follow the changes that occur.**

All of these resources (apart from the ethnographic accounts for the Book Groups) will be available on the Trunk site for the course. As with any on-line resource, it is your choice whether to read on-line or print a copy for your personal use. **One caution:** If you choose to print materials **PLEASE download before printing and print only what you need** -- often the assigned reading is only a portion of a voluminous document, and you will only need to print a few pages.

Students are also urged to read *The Boston Globe* and/or *The New York Times* to keep up with current events pertaining to homelessness. A list of additional resources is posted on the Trunk site. You are encouraged to share any articles or sources of interest to the rest of the class.
# Schedule of Assignments and Due Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>% of Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Individual Learning Aspirations Plan”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Intake Form” with personal learning goals and choices for book groups</td>
<td>Wed. 1/27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule meeting with Laurie.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet with Laurie about your “Individual Learning Aspirations Plan”</td>
<td>By Wed. 2/10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of an Ethnography</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book group notes.</td>
<td>Friday 2/26</td>
<td>feedback only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book group presentations</td>
<td>Wed. 3/16</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take-Home Essay Exam</td>
<td>Friday 3/18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering or Other Interactive Experience:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign up for volunteering or start planning other interactive experience</td>
<td>As soon as possible</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief description and reflection on what you learned</td>
<td>Wed 4/20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exploratory Project</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Idea</td>
<td>Friday 2/26</td>
<td>feedback only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Project Proposal</td>
<td>Friday 4/1</td>
<td>feedback only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Project Presentation</td>
<td>4/27 or 5/2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Project Report</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflections and Participation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly comments on the readings</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog posts</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Reflective Essay</td>
<td>Essay due 5/6</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active participation in class discussions and exercises</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All work should be submitted electronically to the Trunk site (Assignment Section) by uploading the documents in Word format. Please use 12 point font, 1.5 line spacing, and 1 inch margins. **Please include page numbers and your name!**

**All work must be submitted on the due date.** If you expect to have difficulty meeting a deadline, you must request an extension at least 48 hours in advance of the deadline (except in case of emergency). Work submitted late (without a previously approved extension) will receive a reduction in the grade.
READING ASSIGNMENTS & SCHEDULE

The required readings will be posted on the Trunk site for the course, either as links to electronic sources or as downloadable “pdf” files. Additional references on each of the course themes will also be posted on the site.

Note: These readings are subject to change in response to the topics that emerge in the class discussions and to adapt to different learning and reading styles as they develop. Be sure to check the Trunk site each week for updates and additional reading and preparation guidance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mon 1/25</th>
<th>Introduction to the Course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questions:</strong> How do we see people experiencing homelessness? What do we want to know about homelessness? Why do we want to know more?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Due by Wednesday, 1/27:</strong> “Homelessness in America Intake Form” (upload to Trunk or give Laurie a hard copy in class or 97 Talbot Ave mailbox.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign up for a meeting with Laurie.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wed 1/27</th>
<th>The Scope of the Problem and the Goals for Addressing It</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questions:</strong> Who experiences homelessness in the United States? Is homelessness a growing problem? What are the stated goals for addressing it in the reports?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Read at least one of the profiles in the Trunk folder for this day.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>Explore</strong> the following reports to think about these questions: In what ways does the story of person or family in the profile reflect the trends depicted in the reports? Is anything missing?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not read every word (or even every page). Excavate the documents to ascertain what the report compilers stress is important. Consider your reactions to the numbers and the articulated goals. What is confusing? What are you curious about?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Note:</strong> These documents are quite long. Peruse them <strong>online</strong> before considering whether and how much to print.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Homelessness In America

**Spring 2016 (1/24 version)**

#### Visit to the Somerville Homelessness Coalition Adult Shelter on Monday.

**We will meet at 14 Chapel St. at 1:30.**

Before the visit, peruse the Somerville Homelessness Coalition website:


#### Defining and Framing “Homelessness”

**Questions:** How have social scientists, policymakers, and the public conceptualized what homelessness is and what should be done about it? How has the understanding of the issue changed over time? Is there a window of opportunity for really ending homelessness once and for all?

**Read for Monday (preferably before the visit to the shelter):**


**Read for Wednesday**


#### Homelessness and the Broader Picture of Poverty and Social Exclusion

**Questions:** What is the relationship between poverty and homelessness? What roles do race and racism play in poverty and homelessness.


#### Meeting people who have experienced homelessness
**Wed 2/10**

**Questions:** What questions do you have for our guests?

Speakers from the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance’s Homeless Faces Speakers Bureau will join us for Monday’s class.

*Spare Change.* Buy a copy of the current issue of this “street newspaper” that was founded by homeless people and is written, produced, and sold largely by homeless people. You’ll find people selling it ($1.00) in Davis, Porter, Harvard, and Central Squares, near Whole Foods, and many other locations. (We will be talking about your experience of buying your copy on 3/7.)

Make sure you’ve met with Laurie to develop your “Individual Learning Aspirations Plan.”

**Monday February 15th. No Class; Presidents Day.**

(We’ll meet on Thursday this week instead.)

**Wed 2/17 & Thrs 2/18**

**Exploration of Inter-relationships: Causes and Consequences; Individuals and Systems**

Read your ethnography: Gowan, Gibson, Kozol, or Marr

Nooe, R. A. & Patterson, D.A. (2010). “The Ecology of Homelessness.” *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment.* Vol. 20: 105-52. *(SKIM. Focus on Figure 1.)*

**Book Group discussions.**

**PART II: THE CONTEXT OF HOMELESSNESS: MARKET, POLICY, & SOCIETAL FAILURES**

**Mon 2/22 & Wed 2/24**

**Affordable Housing?**

**Questions:** How does the housing market influence homelessness? Why does the system for subsidizing housing leave people without access to safe and affordable housing? Who is most affected and why?


Research Note on worsening affordability gap for lowest income households. (4 pages)
### Holes in the Safety Net and the Challenges of Accessing Limited Resources

**Questions:** What resources does the social welfare system provide to help people make ends meet? What prevents people from accessing these resources to survive, overcome, or prevent homelessness? Who are the targets of the social welfare system and how do patterns of racism, sexism, and classism influence who receives assistance in our society?


### Moral Responses in Encounters with People Experiencing Homelessness

**Questions:** Should rights to use city streets be restricted and protected? Do we have an obligation to give to those who ask for help?

http://www.npr.org/2015/11/03/454249044/tide-starts-to-turn-against-the-crime-of-being-homeless


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mon 3/14</th>
<th>Book Groups discussions and preparation for presentations on gleanings.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wed 3/16</td>
<td>Book Group presentations on gleanings to the class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take Home Essay Exam due Friday 3/18.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Spring Break</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PART III: APPROACHES TO CONTENDING WITH HOMELESSNESS

Mon 3/28

Housing First: A New Paradigm

*Questions:* What are the costs associated with homelessness? What are the alternatives to temporary shelters? What are the benefits of preventing homelessness or shortening stays in temporary shelters?

Guest Speaker (on Monday): Joe Finn, President and Executive Director of the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance that operates a “Home & Healthy for Good,” a housing first program.

http://www.mhsa.net/matriarch/MultiPiecePage.asp_Q_PageID_E_57_A_PageName_E_Whatwe doHomeandHealthyforGood


Mon 4/4

Supporting Support People’s Journey Out of Homelessness and Evaluating the Programs

*Questions:* What supports do people and families need? How do we know if the programs are working?


Additional resources on a programs for different groups of homeless people and families will be distributed to small groups of students in preparation for this week’s sessions. These resources will include (a) readings about mental health, substance abuse, or other needs and (b) an evaluation of a program that provides both housing and supports.

Mon 4/11

Challenging Relationships Between Programs & Neighbors: NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard)

*Questions:* Why do people oppose shelter or housing for poor people and people with disabilities? What evidence is there to substantiate concerns? How can neighbors’ concerns be alleviated?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wed 4/13</th>
<th>Foreclosures and Displacement: Individual and Systemic Solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(The readings and/or topic of this session may change.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Questions:</strong> How are income flows, spending patterns, and lending practices influencing family economic stability? What are organizations doing to help individuals and change systems?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eviction (Without) Notice: Renters and the Foreclosure Crisis: A Report by the National Law Center on Homelessness &amp; Poverty December 2012 (Executive Summary)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Mon 4/18 | No Class: Patriots’ Day |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wed 4/20 &amp; Mon 4/25</th>
<th>Volunteerism, Civic Engagement, and Movement Building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Questions:</strong> The call to service and the call for change: How do they fit together?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Browse the website of one of the organizations listed in the table in the google doc and follow the instructions for learning about its vision, mission, and strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 4/27</td>
<td>Final Project presentations and reflections on the course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon 5/2</td>
<td>Final projects and reflective essay due</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>