Homelessness in the United States – how is it possible?

This course will explore both the human tragedy of homelessness as well as the political, economic and social causes of this problem. In addition to readings drawn from a variety of disciplines, lectures, guest speakers, and films, students will gain a first-hand understanding of homelessness through a service experience. Each student will spend at least 15 hours over the course of the semester “volunteering” in a homeless shelter, soup kitchen or other setting working directly with homeless persons. The TA will provide assistance in locating a suitable placement. For most students who have taken this class, this is an important and memorable experience. It should also facilitate making connections between the readings, class discussions, and the real world of homelessness.

Goals

1) To enable students to gain substantive, in-depth knowledge of homelessness, particularly in urban areas
2) To provide a vehicle for students to become more conscious of a key social problem and to assist them in developing a thoughtful, personal response to the issue
3) To enable students to gain a greater appreciation for the political, economic, and social structure of American society, through an exploration of homelessness
4) To familiarize students with the many dimensions of social policy-making, including policy analysis, political realities and difficulties of program implementation

Organization

The course is divided into four sections:

I. Background – Multiple profiles of homeless people; scope and history of homelessness; definitions and numbers; connections to poverty and urban problems.
II. Causes – Focus on housing and welfare policies, economic and social change, issues of race and gender, mental health policy and substance abuse
III. Connections – How homelessness is related to a number of key issues, such as welfare of children, health care, and homelessness in a non-urban, non-US context
IV. Solutions – Policy options that have been proposed; issues of implementation
**Key Questions to be Addressed**

**Homeless People**
What is homelessness?
Who are “the homeless”?
How many homeless are there? Why is it important to know?
Which groups of the population are disproportionately represented among the homeless population (e.g., people of color, women, children, people with mental/physical disabilities, substance abusers, veterans, etc.)?
How does homelessness contribute to health problems? How do health problems contribute to homelessness?
What is the nature of homelessness in non-urban areas and in other countries?

**The Context**
How does the state of our cities relate to homelessness?
How do our views of homelessness relate to our historical and contemporary views of the poor?

**The Causes**
Why do we have homelessness?
To what extent is homelessness due to political, economic and social factors, on the one hand, or individual shortcomings, on the other? How do substance abuse, mental illness and mental health policy contribute to homelessness?
Are the current causes of homelessness similar to/different from the causes in prior periods during which we had homelessness?

**What Has Been Done**
How has the government responded? To what extent has the McKinney Act alleviated the problem?
To what extent is our shelter system meeting the need?
Why haven’t federal housing and welfare policies solved the problem?
To what extent are federal programs and subsidies aimed at those in the greatest need?
To what extent have governmental programs exacerbated existing problems or created new ones?

**What Should Be Done**
Could there be/should there be – a right to housing for all?
What else could/should be done?

**You – The Students**
How do you feel about homelessness and homeless people? How do these feelings change throughout the semester?
What do you want to do about the problem?
How have you responded in the past? How will you respond in the future?
Readings
A wealth of literature is available on homelessness, as well as related issues, such as poverty, welfare reform and housing policy. For this course, we will draw from a variety of sources, including the following:

A. Books. Three required books are available for purchase at the book store and are also available at Tisch Library:


B. Supplemental Materials. Supplemental materials drawn from government reports, books, journals, and Internet resources will broaden the scope of our readings while providing up-to-date information. You will need to download many required readings from Blackboard; because course packet costs have increased significantly, this course utilizes electronic resources to the greatest extent possible. **PLEASE download before printing** -- often the assigned reading is only a portion of a voluminous document, and you will only need to print a few pages. Page numbers in the syllabus refer to the page numbers printed in the document itself, not including tables of contents, separately numbered introductions, etc. In addition, a brief course packet of required readings, identified on the syllabus by (S), will be available for purchase through Gnomon Copy; the books will also be on reserve at Tisch Library.

Students are also urged to read *The Boston Globe* and/or *The New York Times* on a daily basis to keep up with current events pertaining to homelessness. In addition, there are a host of Internet sources that you may want to consult (see attached web addresses). We will be discussing news articles from time to time in class – you are encouraged to circulate, post on Blackboard, or mention in class any relevant articles you read.

Finally, for perspectives on the life experiences of homeless individuals and families, students are urged to read at least one of the books in section A on the following list:

Selected Recommended Books

A. Personal Perspectives


B. Additional Recommended Readings


Assignments and Grading

There are four short written assignments. In addition, as noted on p. 1, all students are required to perform at least 15 hours of service in a shelter during the semester. Assignment #3, below, is a paper (either in journal or essay format) describing what you did and your feelings about your service experience. Two of the papers are take-home essay exams; there will not be a final in-class exam during exam week.

Please type all submissions, in 11 point or larger type, double-spaced, 1” margins.

Page limits below are intended as a guide, not an absolute mandatory limit. However, please make an effort to stay reasonably close to the recommended page limits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment #1:</th>
<th>Suggested Length</th>
<th>% of Grade</th>
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<tr>
<th>Assignment #2:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Due Fri., March 14 - Take-home essay exam (posted by Fri. Mar. 7)</td>
<td>(8-9 pages)</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<th>Assignment #3:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Due Wed., April 16 – Description of your volunteer service experience; analysis of your reactions, thoughts, how your ideas have changed, etc.</td>
<td>(5 pages)</td>
<td>15%*</td>
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<th>Assignment #4:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Due Mon., May 5 -- Take-home essay exam (posted by Mon. Apr. 28)</td>
<td>(8-9 pages)</td>
<td>30%</td>
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Class Participation

5%**

* While this written assignment constitutes only 15% of your grade, the volunteer service is a requirement of the course. You must submit a form evidencing completion of the minimum hours of service, signed by your supervisor, in order to receive a passing grade for the course.

** Participation and class attendance count for 5% of your final grade. If you have been an engaged participant, you will receive a boost in close grading situations; if you have chosen to remain a silent observer throughout the course, that too may affect your final grade.
### Selected Sources on the Internet Related to Homelessness, Poverty, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Center on Budget and Policy Priorities</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cbpp.org/">http://www.cbpp.org/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Center for Community Change</td>
<td><a href="http://www.communitychange.org/">http://www.communitychange.org/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Center for Social Policy Research, John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies, University of Massachusetts-Boston</td>
<td><a href="http://www.mccormack.umb.edu/csp/index.jsp">http://www.mccormack.umb.edu/csp/index.jsp</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens Housing and Planning Association</td>
<td><a href="http://www.chapa.org/">http://www.chapa.org/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Coalition on Human Needs</td>
<td><a href="http://www.chn.org/">http://www.chn.org/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institute for Research on Poverty</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp/">http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless</td>
<td><a href="http://www.mhsa.net/">http://www.mhsa.net/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE</td>
<td><a href="http://www.serve.org/nche">http://www.serve.org/nche</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Alliance to End Homelessness</td>
<td><a href="http://www.endhomelessness.org/">http://www.endhomelessness.org/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth</td>
<td><a href="http://www.naehcy.org">http://www.naehcy.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>National Coalition for the Homeless</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nch.ari.net/">http://www.nch.ari.net/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>National Coalition for Homeless Veterans</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nchv.org/">http://www.nchv.org/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>National Health Care for the Homeless Council</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nhche.org/">http://www.nhche.org/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nlchp.org/">http://www.nlchp.org/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>National Low Income Housing Coalition</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nlihc.org/">http://www.nlihc.org/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Resource Center on Homelessness and Mental Illness</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nrchmi.samhsa.gov/">http://www.nrchmi.samhsa.gov/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some Important Information About Your Voluntary Service

The actual time commitment for the service requirement may be substantially greater than 15 hours, when you take into account commuting time (depending on where your placement is located) and any required training/orientation time. Unfortunately, there is often an inverse correlation between convenience and quality of service experience. Some of the placements located close to campus may involve more food preparation than client interaction, while some of the less convenient placements give students the greatest potential for personal interaction with homeless clients.

Please be as flexible as possible when considering service opportunities. Students whose schedules limit them one particular afternoon or evening will have far fewer options than those who were able to be more flexible in scheduling. In the past, students who took the initiative to plan special activities for homeless clients, ranging from arts and crafts programs to discussions about current events, generally have had extremely positive experiences – but they often spent extra time in planning and preparation. Overnight placements are not for everyone, but some students have found that they offered excellent opportunities for meaningful interactions with homeless individuals. In general, the students who have been most flexible, and put the most effort and energy into their placements, have had the best experiences.

If transportation is an issue, it may be possible to group together students who do not have access to a car with those who do, to facilitate access to more distant placements.

Please try to make your placement arrangements as quickly as possible. Kamaria Carrington, the course TA, will provide initial placement information matching your interests and schedule as closely as possible, but you are responsible for making contact with your supervisor and arranging the actual days and times of participation. Often, it can take several attempts to make contact and finalize arrangements, so please do not delay - if you do not start your placement until March, you will have difficulty completing the requirement by the end of the semester.
Outline of Classes and Readings

Part I  Background

Wed., Jan. 16  What is Homelessness and Who are “the Homeless”?  
Introductions, course objectives & organization.

NO CLASS MON., JAN. 21 – MARTIN LUTHER KING HOLIDAY

Wed., Jan. 23  Profiles of Homeless people

READINGS:
   http://www.huduser.org/publications/homeless/homelessness/contents.html
   *(note: you will need to download the various sections of Chapter 2 from the table of contents)*

Mon., Jan. 28  Poverty in America/The “deserving” and “undeserving” poor

READINGS:
1) Iceland, pp. 1-4, 38-52
2) Wright *et al.*, pp. 65-78
3) Wilson, pp. 149-182

Wed., Jan. 30  Film: *Outriders*

READINGS:
   http://www.fanniemaefoundation.org/programs/hpd/pdf/hpd_0902_hartman.pdf,  
   and  
Mon. Feb. 4
The context of the urban environment

READINGS:
2) Iceland, pp. 52-59 (“Concentrated Poverty”), 70-78
3) Wilson, pp. 25-50

Wed. Feb. 6
Definitions and Demographics: What is “poverty” and who is poor”? How do we define and count “the homeless”?

READINGS:
1) Iceland, pp. 1-37 (Chapters 1-3)

Mon. Feb. 11
Definitions and Demographics: How do we define and count “the homeless”? (cont.)
2) Wright et al., pp. 31-63.

Wed., Feb. 13
Homelessness and Social Policy: A Framework for Understanding and Addressing Homelessness

READINGS:
1) Wright et al., pp. 1-30.
(Note: Available on reserve at Tisch Library)

NO CLASSES MONDAY, FEB. 18

Wed., Feb. 20
Current U.S. Policy Agenda: Focus on Chronic Homelessness
Part II Structural Causes Of Homelessness

A. Housing Programs and Homelessness: Why the Gap?

Thurs., Feb. 21 U.S. Housing Policy: Historical Context

READINGS:

Assignment #1 Due Thursday, February 21, 2008

Mon., Feb. 25 U.S. Housing Policy: Conflicting Views

READINGS:
1) Wright et al., pp. 79-92.

Wed., Feb. 27 Housing Trends, Housing Subsidies

READINGS:
1) Joint Center for Housing Studies, State of the Nation’s Housing, 2007. Harvard University, sections entitled
“Executive Summary” and “Housing Challenges” only, available on-line at


Mon., Mar. 3 Not in My Backyard: Barriers to Housing Development and Homeless Services

READINGS:

B. Racism, Sexism and “Equal Opportunity”

Wed., Mar. 5 Race – Discrimination in Housing
Film: True Colors

READINGS:
Mon., Mar.10  Race and Gender – Multiple Dimensions of Discrimination

READINGS:
2) Wilson, pp. 111-146
3) Iceland, pp. 80-94.

C. The Impact of Social Change

Wed., Mar. 12  Social change: changes in family structure, welfare reform

READINGS:
1) Wilson, pp. 87-110.
   [http://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/focus/pdfs/foc212.pdf](http://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/focus/pdfs/foc212.pdf)
3) Donna Haig Friedman, Tatjana Meschede and Michelle Hayes, “Surviving Against the Odds: Families’ Journeys Off Welfare and Out of Homelessness,” pp. 187-203, *Cityscape*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2003 (if link doesn’t work, type or paste address in web browser – article is available at this address)
   [http://www.huduser.org/periodicals/cityscpe/vol6num2/3surviv.pdf](http://www.huduser.org/periodicals/cityscpe/vol6num2/3surviv.pdf)
   [http://www.brookings.edu/views/testimony/sawhill/19990629.htm](http://www.brookings.edu/views/testimony/sawhill/19990629.htm)

Assignment #2 due Friday, March 14, 2006 by electronic submission to rrubin@kleinbornig.com or hard copy at UEP, 97 Talbot Ave.

NO CLASSES WEEK OF MARCH 17 – SPRING BREAK

Mon., Mar. 24  A Nation at War: Homeless Veterans
Guest Speaker (TO BE CONFIRMED)
READINGS:

E. Substance Abuse, Mental Illness And Mental Health Policy

Wed., Mar. 26 Mental Illness and Substance Abuse: Cause and Effect of Homelessness?

READINGS:
2) Wright *et al.* pp. 105-111; 137-145

Part. III. Connections

Mon., Mar. 31 Ex-Offenders

READINGS:
2) “Coordinating Community Services for Mentally ill Offenders: Maryland’s Community Criminal Justice Treatment Program”, April 1999, pp. 1-15,
Wed., Apr. 2  Health & Safety

READINGS:
1) Wright, pp. 147-176
2) GAO report: “Homelessness: Barriers to Using Mainstream Programs, RCED-00-184, July 6, 2000, pp. 3-17
3) Tatjana Meschede, “Bridges and Barriers to Housing for Chronically Homeless Street Dwellers: The Effects of Medical and Substance Abuse Services on Housing Attainment,” Center for Social Policy, John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston, October, 2004, pp. 16-23 only, available on-line at http://www.mccormack.umb.edu/csp/publications/bridgesandbarriers.pdf

Mon., Apr. 7  Children, Youth and Homelessness

READINGS:

Wed., Apr. 9  Youth Homelessness – Guest Speaker

Alice Rouse, former director of Starlight Youth Outreach and author of city-wide needs assessment and profile of homeless youth in the Greater Boston area.

READINGS:

Mon., Apr. 14  Rural Homelessness

**READINGS:**
1) Wright, pp. 177-193.

Assignment #3 due Wednesday, April 16, 2006

Wed., Apr. 16  Homelessness Outside the United States

**READINGS:**

NO CLASS MONDAY, APRIL 21 – PATRIOTS DAY HOLIDAY
Part IV Solutions

Wed., Apr. 23 McKinney-Vento Act – The Answer to Homelessness?

READINGS:
2) CRS Report for Congress: Homelessness, Recent Statistics, Targeted Federal Programs and Recent Legislation, pp. CRS-4 through CRS-16 (note: CRS 1-3 prev. assigned – see 1/24)

Mon., Apr. 28 Ending Homelessness - Policy Agendas and Political Activism

READINGS:

Mon., May 7 Assignment #4 due, 3:00 pm, 97 Talbot Ave or by electronic submission to rrubin@kleinhornig.com.