

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR SOCIAL CHANGE
(PSYC 461/427)
SPRING 2012**

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Office Hours:	TR 10:30-11:30 or by appt		
Class Time & Location:	TR 12-1:15, Robinson A105		

Course Description

This class explores influences on social problems and approaches to addressing them by drawing from the perspectives of multiple disciplines. By definition, a social problem is a problem that affects many people, but such issues are often viewed primarily as individual-level problems that require individual-level solutions. In this class, students will learn to understand social problems and approaches to addressing them at both the individual level (typically the focus of fields such as Clinical Psychology) and the social level (typically the focus of fields such as Community Psychology, Sociology, and Public Affairs). Students will learn to develop a logic model, a tool that is employed across fields to describe what programs do and what they hope to achieve by doing it. The class will achieve its goals through a semester-long case example of the social problem of poverty. We will explore this social problem through students' service to community organizations, readings, class exercises and both written and oral projects.

Goals

In this course, students will:

- Identify and understand the individual and social levels of a social problem, drawing from the perspectives of multiple disciplines.
- Identify and understand approaches toward targeting different aspects of a social problem.
- Be able to use logic models to analyze how organizations try to affect change, and understand how they might apply this skill in a variety of contexts.
- Apply the above skills (multi-level analysis of social problems and logic modeling) in oral and written products.
- Complete a minimum of 20 hours of service to a community organization coordinated by the instructor and in the context of this service:
 - Deepen understanding of a social problem through contact with both people it affects and people trying to do something about it
 - Provide concrete value to the community organization
 - Connect course concepts to concrete experiences

Requirements:

Participation (10%). Students are required to participate in in-class discussions and exercises throughout the semester.

Reflection Papers (15%). Students will be required to write a total of six 1 to 2 page double-spaced reflection papers in response to prompts from the instructor throughout the course of the semester. These papers will require the ongoing use of Blackboard, both for the posting of prompts (by the instructor) and responses (from students). Through the course, the focus of the reflection papers will move from the intrapersonal level, to the interpersonal, to the sociocultural, and will link students' experiences in their placements to course content.

Midterm Report (30%). Students will use case material provided by the instructor to describe in a 5-page double-spaced paper a) individual and social aspects of poverty that are evident in this person's situation; b) how this person's situation compares to the population using their service placement.

Final presentation and annotated bibliography (30%): Students will choose a social problem they view as relevant for the population using their service placement. They will give a presentation using a logic model to describe the work of an organization that targets that social problem. The organization can be the one where they are doing their service, or can be another organization that targets the issue in a different way. In the presentation, students will a) describe the multiple aspects of the social problem they have chosen; b) describe how the organization (or program within the organization) goes about addressing the problem; c) choose an aspect of the problem that is NOT addressed by the program/organization, and d) will suggest a method for addressing that aspect. Students will hand in to the instructor an annotated bibliography of sources consulted for their presentation.

Service (15%): A fundamental goal and requirement of this class is to provide concrete value to our partner organizations in exchange for the experience we are gaining. These partnerships have been developed by the instructor, and students will choose from available placements at the outset of the course. Students must fulfill their service obligation **as described at the outset of their placement**. As long as you meet those obligations according to supervisor report, you will receive full credit for this part of your grade. Across placements, the minimum number of hours you will total over the course of the semester is 20, plus a maximum of two hours of orientation. (One exception to this maximum is CentroNia, which requires tutors to learn a tutoring curriculum in a 4 hour orientation.) The academic (readings, exams) workload in this class is relatively light, because the service is meant to be the core of the substance of the course. Your reliable engagement in your service placement is essential.

Grading:

I will calculate your final grade on your point total as follows:

93-100 = A; 90-92 = A-; 87-89 = B+; 83-86 = B; 80-82 = B-; 77-79 = C+; 73-76 = C; 70-72=C-; 65-69 = D; below 65 = F.

Honor code:

The Honor Code of George Mason University deals specifically with cheating and attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing. Students should be familiar with the code and connected policies, set out at <http://www.gmu.edu/catalog/apolicies>. This course will be conducted in accordance with those policies.

Accommodations for students with disabilities:

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703-993-2474. All accommodations must be arranged through that office, and must be initiated immediately, prior to any anticipated need.

Required Text:

Cress, C., Collier, P.J., Reitenauer, V.L. and Associates (2005). *Learning through serving: A student guidebook for service-learning across the disciplines*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Other readings provided through Blackboard.

Course Outline and Tentative Reading List: (instructor will notify you of changes in advance)

Jan 24-26: What is service learning? Launching placements and connections to course content.

Cress chapter 1: What is service learning?

Cress chapter 2: Building and maintaining community partnerships

Jan 31- Feb 2: Understanding social issues through multi-level analysis

Ryan, W. (1971). *Blaming the victim*. New York: Vintage Books. Introduction & chapter 1.

Cress chapter 5: Creating cultural connections

Feb 7-9: Poverty as a case study – what is it?

Economic Policy Institute. (September 4, 2011). A lost decade: Poverty and income trends continue to paint a bleak picture for working families.

<http://www.epi.org/publication/lost-decade-poverty-income-trends-continue/>

Smith, Laura (2010). *Psychology, Poverty and the End of Social Exclusion*. New York: Teacher's College Press. Chapter 2: "Classism."

Feb 14-16: Poverty as a case study – how do we understand the individual-level aspects?

Smith, Laura (2010). *Psychology, Poverty and the End of Social Exclusion*. New York:

Teacher's College Press. Chapter 4: "In their own words: Qualitative expressions of life in poverty."

Cress chapter 8: Expanding horizons (new views of course concepts)

Feb 21-23: Poverty as a case study- how do we understand the interpersonal aspects?

Simon, D. & Burns, E. (1997). *The Corner: A year in the life of an inner-city neighborhood*. New York: Broadway Books. (pp. 57-74, 86-99)

Boo, K. (2006, February 6). Swamp Nurse. *The New Yorker*, 54-65.

Feb 28-March 1: Poverty as a case study – how do we understand the social context?

Ehrenreich, B. (2008). *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America*. New York: Holt Paperbacks. Introduction and chapter 1.

Pager, D. (2008). The dynamics of discrimination. In A. Chih Lin and D.R. Harris (Eds.) *The Colors of Poverty: Why Racial and Ethnic Disparities Persist*. New York: Russell Sage, Chapter 2.

March 6-8: Poverty as a case study – identifying multiple aspects

Power, A., Willmot, H. & Davidson, R. (2011). *Family futures: Childhood and poverty in urban neighbourhoods (CASE Studies on Poverty, Place and Policy)*. Policy Press. Introduction and chapter 1.

Smeeding, T.M., Garfinkel, I. & Mincy, R.B. (2011). Young disadvantaged men: Fathers, families, poverty, and policy. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 635(1), 6-21.

SPRING BREAK

March 20-22: MIDTERM REPORTS DUE and discussed in class

March 27-29: How organizations address multiple aspects of problems: Speaker from FACETS

Cress chapter 6: Reflection in action (the learning-doing relationship)

Cress chapter 7: Failure with the best of intentions

April 3-5: Poverty as a case study – the use of logic models

W.W. Kellogg Foundation. (2004, January). *Logic model development guide* (Item #1209). Battle Creek, MI: Author. <http://www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub3669.pdf>

April 10-12: Applying logic models to social issues across contexts - workshopping

April 17-19: Applying logic models to social issues across contexts - workshopping

April 24-26: final presentations

Cress chapter 9: Beyond a grade (Are we making a difference? The benefits & challenges of evaluating learning and serving)

May 1-3: final presentations & wrap up

Cress chapter 10: Looking back, looking forward (where do you go from here?)

* *Last day to add classes is Tuesday Jan 31, last day to drop is Friday Feb 24*