

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR SOCIAL CHANGE (PSYC 427)
Fall 2014

This syllabus may change.

This syllabus has been updated as of 9/3/2014

Instructor: Rachel Shor
Office: David King Hall 1004G
E-mail: rshor@gmu.edu
Office Hours: R 1-2, or by appointment
Class Time & Location: TR 10:30-11:45am, Enterprise Hall 277

Teaching Assistant: Kris Gebhard
Office: David King Hall 1004G
E-mail: kgebhard@gmu.edu
Office Hours: email for appointment

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, interpersonal and social context 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 effect 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 (25%). Students are required to participate in in-class discussions and exercises throughout the semester, including some exercises that require preparation before class (10%). Students are also required to be prepared for class, as evaluated by in-class and at-home quizzes/exercises (15%). The two lowest scores on these activities will be dropped, and there will be no make-ups.

Reflection Papers (30%). Students will be required to write a total of 3 three-page double-spaced reflection papers in response to prompts from the instructor throughout the course of the semester. Prompts and papers will be posted on Blackboard. Due dates are: 9/16, 10/14 and 11/4.

Final project (30%): The final project consists of a paper, a logic model, and an in-class presentation. Students will work in groups throughout the semester to analyze a social issue that is relevant for the population using their service placement, other than poverty. Students will *each* write a 4-6 page paper using scholarly sources to conduct a multilevel analysis of the social problem, similar to the one we conducted in class. As a group, students will then identify a program or organization that targets that problem. They *each* will create a logic model of the program. As a group, students will give a short presentation in class to describe importance of the social problem and the strengths and weaknesses of the organization they identified.

Policy for late assignments: Assignments handed in up to 24 hours past the deadline will be downgraded by 15%; up to 48 hours they will be downgraded by 50%. No papers will be accepted 48 hours after the deadline.

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 will be provided with information about the requirements of the placement in order to guide their choice. **Students who do not complete the requirements they agree to when they choose a placement will receive a failing grade for the course.** Across placements, the minimum number of hours you will total over the course of the semester is 20, plus approximately two hours of orientation. (Placements involving tutoring may require more training, as they involve curriculum.) 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. Your grade for this requirement will be assessed at 2 points and then averaged:

1. At mid-term check-in (Oct 15), at which time you must have:
 - a. Chosen a placement and documented your understanding of the requirements on the class Google spreadsheet.
 - b. Completed orientation and/or training at your placement, and documented this on the Google spreadsheet.

- c. Met expectations according to supervisor report.
 - d. Completed at least 5 hours of service, as documented on the spreadsheet (if you do not document it, it did not happen).
2. At final grade submission, at which time you must have:
 - a. Completed the minimum of 20 hours, as documented on the spreadsheet (by 12/10/14).
 - b. Met expectations according to supervisor report.

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.

Official Communications via GMU E-mail: Mason uses electronic mail to provide official information to students. Examples include communications from course instructors, notices from the library, notices about academic standing, financial aid information, class materials, assignments, questions, and instructor feedback. Students are responsible for the content of university communication sent to their mason e-mail account, and are required to activate that account and check it regularly.

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.

*READINGS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE THROUGHOUT THE SEMESTER

Course Outline and Reading List: (*readings available through Blackboard*)

Aug 26-28: What is service learning? Launching placements and connections to course content.

*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. **Ch 1 & 2.**

Sept 2-4: Who are our partners? Using logic models to understand organizations.

*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> . **Ch 1 & 2.**

Sept 9-11: Understanding social issues through multi-level analysis

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

*Dalton, J.H., Elias, M.J. & Wandersman, A. (2007). *Community psychology: Linking individuals and communities* (2nd edition). Thompson Wadsworth: Belmont, CA (p.17-21).

Sept 16-18: Setting the stage for our case study: wealth and power in the US

*Watch this TED talk: http://www.ted.com/talks/richard_wilkinson.html

Sept 23-25: Poverty as a case study – what is it?

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

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

Substitute is teaching on 9/25/2014

Sept 30-Oct 2: Poverty as a case study – how do we understand the individual-level aspects?

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

Oct 7-9: Poverty as a case study- how do we understand the individual (ctd) & interpersonal aspects?

* Excerpt from Goodman, L.A., Smyth, K.F., Borges, A.M. & Singer, R. (2009). When crises collide: How intimate partner violence and poverty intersect to shape women's mental health and coping. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse, 10*, 306-328. **Handout.**

*Brooks-Gunn, J., & Duncan, G. J. (1997). The effects of poverty on children. *The Future of Children, 55-71*.

Oct 13 NO CLASS – MONDAY CLASSES MEET ON TUES THIS WEEK

Oct 16: Poverty as a case study- how do we understand the interpersonal aspects (continued)?

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

Oct 21-23: Poverty as a case study – how do we understand interpersonal aspects (ctd)/social context?

*Belle, D. & Doucet, J. (2003). Poverty, inequality, and discrimination as sources of depression among U.S. women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 27*, 101-113.

*Simon, D. & Burns, E. (1997). The Corner: A year in the life of an inner-city neighborhood. New York: Broadway Books. (pp. 57-70, 74-75, 88-99).

Guest Speakers: The National Coalition for the Homeless (10/21)

Oct 28- 30: Poverty as a case study – how do we understand the social context?

*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, **Ch 2**.

Guest Speaker: Amanda Andere, President and CEO of Wider Opportunities for Women (10/28)

Nov 4-6: Social context (ctd)/Identifying and addressing multiple aspects of social problems

*Gorski, P. (2008, April). The myth of the “culture of poverty.” *Educational Leadership*, 32-36.

*Boo, K. (2001, April 9). Working two jobs, Elizabeth Jones does her best for her family. But is it enough? *The New Yorker*.

Nov 11-13: Identifying and addressing multiple aspects of social problems

* Listen to *Back to School*, an episode from the radio show *This American Life*. Accessible at: <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/474/back-to-school>.

Nov 18-19 Extending our analysis to other social problems

*Farmworker Justice. Weeding out abuses: Recommendations for a law-abiding farm labor system, (p.1-13).

Workshopping for final projects

Nov 25

Extending our analysis to other social problems, continued

(NO CLASS NOV 26 – HAPPY THANKSGIVING)

Dec 2-4

Final presentations group work

Dec 11

Wrap up and final presentations

* *Last day to add classes is September 2, last day to drop is September 26.*