

## UGS S302: Poverty In America in (Non)Fiction and Film

**Course Number:** UGS S302

**Instructor:** Miguel Ferguson

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**Unique Number:** 92355

**Office Number:** SSW 3.122b

**Semester:** Summer 2015

**Office Phone:** 232-5914

**Meeting Time/Place:** T-W-Th 11:30-2:00

**Office Hours:** T-W-Th 10:30-11:20,  
after class, or by apt.

SSW 2.122/Utopia Theatre

**TAs:**

### I. Course Description

This course introduces students to the critical issue of poverty in the United States, past and present. Using literature, novels, investigative journalism, and film (not textbooks!), the course explores an array of issues associated with poverty in America. From turn of the century “orphan trains” to contemporary depictions of poverty in the aftermath of The Great Recession, mass home foreclosures, and multi-billion dollar bank bailouts, this course examines works of film and writing that describe and investigate what it means to live in poverty. In the process, we will also learn about the causes of poverty, trends in poverty over time and with regard to specific vulnerable groups, and what we can do to end poverty as we know it.

### Writing Flag

This course carries the Writing Flag. Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. In this class, you can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from your instructor to help you improve your writing. You will also have the opportunity to revise one or more assignments, and you may be asked to read and discuss your peers’ work. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from your written work. Writing Flag classes meet the Core Communications objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication, Teamwork, and Personal Responsibility, established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

## II. Books

1. Bread Givers by Anzia Yeziarska
2. 12 Million Black Voices by Richard Wright
3. The Unknown Americans: A Novel by Cristina Henriquez
4. Caught in the Storm by Miguel Ferguson et al

## III. Films

1. King of the Hill
2. Norma Rae
3. Trouble the Water
4. The Overnighters
5. The Girl

## IV. Course Requirements

This is a writing-intensive course, so students will be expected to complete multiple writing assignments in a short period of time. To help accomplish this, students are encouraged to use the Undergraduate Writing Center to receive writing assistance (471-6222 for appointments). In addition, since this is a relatively small class, contributions from each student will be needed to advance the learning process. Students will be expected to come to class prepared to participate in class learning.

The class will meet on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 11:30-2:00 to discuss a book or particular poverty-related topic, watch a film, or listen to a lecture. Over the course of the session we will read four books and watch five films.

### ► Film/Book Responses

Students will need to complete three (3) book and/or film responses. The responses should be 3-4 pages in length (12 point font, 1.5 spaced). **At least two of the responses must be to a book.** Book responses will be due on the day the book is discussed in class. Film responses will be due on the Tuesday following the film viewing. Each response will be worth 15% of the overall grade (or 45%, cumulatively). The response papers should provide your reaction to, rather than a review of, the book or film. The reaction should discuss the main poverty-related themes of the book/film, what you learned about poverty, and important strengths and weaknesses. You should consider the following (or similar sorts of ideas) in your response paper:

1. What do you think is the main point the author/film seeks to make about poverty?

2. What examples, facts, evidence, events, theories, and viewpoints does the author/film express? Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not? Did it change your opinion about a certain aspect of poverty?
3. What did you learn from the book/film? Was it enjoyable? What would you consider the “best” or most important parts? What audience do you think would benefit from reading/viewing the book/film?

Finally, students must resubmit the first response paper in a way that reflects comments made on the paper by the instructor or TA. Students will have one week from the date in which the paper is returned to submit the revised paper. Students who do not submit a revised paper will have 20 points taken from the original grade.

#### ► **Film/Book Quizzes**

Students will be given two (2) quizzes on a random basis throughout the session. The quizzes will cover information about the books and film/lecture material covered the previous day in class, so it will be important for students to be thoroughly familiar with the book and film/lecture material discussed in class the previous day. Each quiz will be worth 10% of the overall grade.

#### ► **Bus Experience**

The bus experience is designed to introduce students to the rigors of relying on a bus to complete essential transportation needs. Students must take a bus to three locations: 1) a DSHS office, 2) a post office/supermarket and 3) a child care center. In one to two paragraphs, please post a discussion response to document your experience. What bus or busses did you take? What locations did you visit? How long did it take you to complete the trips? Did you see or experience anything interesting on the way? Based on your experience, how easy/difficult would it be for a low-income person to rely on a bus as a primary means of transportation? The post will be considered part of the participation grade and is due Tuesday, June 30.

#### ► **Food Stamps Paper**

It is important for students to have personal experience with issues that affect low-income populations. You may elect to fulfill one of the following two options:

**Option 1** – submit a 5-7 page report on what it was like to live within the budget and rules of the food stamps (renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP) program for one week; or

**Option 2** – submit a 5-7 page report that provides a detailed accounting of your food purchases/expenditures for one week. The report should examine and compare your purchases in light of food stamp budget allowances and regulations. Both options are intended to familiarize students with the SNAP, a program that serves more than forty million Americans, and to demonstrate your knowledge of program strengths and weaknesses. The reports may be submitted anytime between June 17 and July 8.

Whatever option you choose, the paper should include the following:

1. Be clear about which option you have chosen (and why)
2. Demonstrate an awareness of the rules that apply to the food stamps program
3. Provide information about what it takes to apply for and receive food stamps in Texas
4. Describe an appropriate food stamps budget for your household, and defend the level you have chosen (e.g. is it the monthly maximum? The average?)
5. Provide an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the program (conceptually and based on your experience) and recommendations to improve the program based on your analysis
6. Clearly and accurately document your purchases during the one-week period
7. Summarize your experience (Was it valuable? What did you learn?)

#### **Basic Information on SNAP**

1. Health and Human Services Policy Handbook (searchable):  
<http://www.dads.state.tx.us/handbooks/TexasWorks/>
2. SNAP Information: <http://www.benefits.gov/benefits/benefit-details/1348>
3. Benefits Calculator: <http://www.snap-step1.usda.gov/fns/>
4. On-line Application and Eligibility Screener (in English and Spanish) if you click the link under “Should I Apply?”:  
<https://www.yourtexasbenefits.com/ssp/SSPHome/ssphome.jsp>
5. Direct Link to Printable Application for Assistance for TANF, Medicaid, and SNAP (scroll to bottom of page, click on “get a paper form”):  
<https://www.yourtexasbenefits.com/ssp/SSPHome/ssphome.jsp>
6. Monthly Statistical Data (w/county totals):  
[http://www.hhsc.state.tx.us/research/TANF\\_FS.asp](http://www.hhsc.state.tx.us/research/TANF_FS.asp)

7. Local Office Locator (click on “Find an Office”):  
<https://www.yourtexasbenefits.com/ssp/SSPHome/ssphome.jsp#>

► **Class Participation**

Students will be graded on the quality of their contribution to the collective learning pursuits of the class, including participation in class, e-mail discussions, and office visits with the instructor. Since attendance is a key condition of participation, more than one absence will result in a letter grade *at least* one grade below an “A”. Each subsequent absence will reduce the overall participation grade by one letter grade. Students will also be expected to take the lead in class discussion on one short poverty-related article during the semester. This expectation will be discussed in greater detail on the second day of class.

Extra Credit: Students who work for four (4) hours at a local farm and submit a 1-2 page summary of their experience will be given two credit points on their final grade. Information on the extra credit project will be discussed in class.

**Grade Formula**

Class Participation	(15%)
Book/Film Response papers (3)	(45%)
Food Stamps Paper	(20%)
Pop Quiz (2)	(20%)

**Grades**

Grades will be determined as follows:

100 - 94 =	A	93 - 90 =	A-	
89 - 87 =	B+	86 - 84 =	B	83 - 80 =B-
79 - 77 =	C+	76 - 74 =	C	73 - 70 =C-

**V. Course Schedule (Books in bold, films underlined)**

**Topic of Study, Readings, and Assignment Due Dates**

June 4	Syllabus; overview of the course
June 9	<p><u>King of the Hill</u></p> <p>A young boy struggles on his own in a run-down motel after his parents and younger brother are separated from him in Depression-era St. Louis.</p>
June 10	<p>Poverty quiz; definitions of poverty</p> <p>Question and answer session</p>
June 11	<p><u>Norma Rae</u></p> <p>Under the guidance of a New York unionizer and with increasing courage and determination, Norma Rae organizes her fellow factory workers to fight for better conditions and wages. Based on a true story.</p>
June 16	<p><b>Bread Givers</b></p> <p>Poverty and American History</p>
June 17	<p>Basic Budget Exercise</p> <p>Persistent partners: Poverty and the African-American experience</p>
June 18	<p><u>Trouble the Water</u></p> <p>Filmmakers Tia Lessin and Carl Deal recount a surprising tale of heroism amid tragedy in New Orleans, where a wannabe rapper and her husband brave the floodwaters of Hurricane Katrina to rescue their neighbors. Featuring live video diary footage from the couple, the Oscar-nominated documentary is both a poignant portrait of a family's will to survive and a startling portrayal of Katrina's devastating power.</p>
June 23	<p><b>12 Million Black Voices</b></p> <p>The Great Depression and the New Deal</p> <p>Hard Times for an American Girl</p>

June 24	Bus Experience
June 25	<p><u>The Overnighers</u></p> <p>An intimate portrait of job-seekers desperately chasing the broken American Dream to the tiny oil boom town of Williston, North Dakota. With the town lacking the infrastructure to house the overflow of job seekers, a local pastor starts the controversial overnighers program, allowing down-and-out workers a place to sleep at the church. His well-meaning project immediately runs into resistance with his community, forcing the clergyman to make a decision which leads to profound consequences that he never imagined.</p>
June 30	<p><b>The Unknown Americans</b></p> <p>Poverty and the Hispanic Family</p>
July 1	<p><u>The Girl</u></p> <p>A young Texan mother who loses her child to foster care begins smuggling Mexicans across the border.</p>
July 2	Poverty, the Great Recession and bailout economics
July 7	<p><b>Caught in the Storm</b></p> <p>What can we do to end poverty in America?</p>
July 8	<p>SNAP</p> <p>*Food Stamp Papers Due*</p>
July 9	Course evaluation

**THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS HONOR CODE.** The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each

member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

**PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT IN CLASS.** The professor expects students to act as professionals in class. This means students should arrive on time for class, be prepared to participate in the class discussion, and show respect for one another's opinions. We will not, nor should we, always agree with one another. In this environment we should be exposed to diverse ideas and opinions, and sometime we will not agree with the ideas expressed by others. However, the professor does require that students engage one another with respect and professionalism.

**POLICY ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION.** Public social networks are not private. Even when open only to approved or invited members, users cannot be certain that privacy will exist among the general membership of sites. If social work students choose to participate in such forums, please assume that anything posted can be seen, read, and critiqued. What is said, posted, linked to, commented on, uploaded, subscribed to, etc., can be accessed and archived, posing potential harm to professional reputations and prospective careers.

Social work students who use social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and other forms of electronic communication (i.e. blogs, etc.) must be mindful of how their communication may be perceived by clients, colleagues, faculty, and others. Social work students are expected to make every effort to minimize material which could be considered inappropriate for a professional social worker in training. Because of this, social work students are advised to manage security settings at their most private levels and avoid posting information/photos or using any language that could jeopardize their professional image. Students are asked to consider the amount of personal information posted on these sites and are obliged to block any client access to involvement in the students' social networks. Client material should not be referred to in any form of electronic media, including **any** information that might lead to the identification of a client or compromise client confidentiality in **any** way. Additionally, students must critically evaluate any material that is posted regarding community agencies and professional relationships, as certain material could violate the standards set by the School of Social Work, the Texas Code of Conduct for Social Workers, and/or the NASW Code of Ethics.

Social work students should consider that they will be representing professional social work practice as well as the University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work program while in the classroom, the university community, and the broader area communities.

**POLICY ON SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY.** Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, the student may refer to the Web Site of the Student Judicial Services, Office of the Dean of Students (<http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/>).



**USE OF CLASS MATERIALS.** The materials used in this class, including, but not limited to, exams, quizzes, and homework assignments are copyright protected works. Any unauthorized copying of the class materials is a violation of federal law and may result in disciplinary actions being taken against the student. Additionally, the sharing of class materials without the specific, express approval of the instructor may be a violation of the University's Student Honor Code and an act of academic dishonesty, which could result in further disciplinary action. This includes, among other things, uploading class materials to websites for the purpose of sharing those materials with other current or future students.

**DOCUMENTED DISABILITY STATEMENT.** Any student who requires special accommodations must obtain a letter that documents the disability from the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (471- 6259 voice or 471-4641 TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing). Present the letter to the professor at the beginning of the semester so that needed accommodations can be discussed. The student should remind the professor of any testing accommodations no later than five business days before an exam. For more information, visit <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>.

**RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS.** By UT Austin policy, students must notify the professor of a pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If the student must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day,

**USE OF E-MAIL FOR OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE TO STUDENTS.** Email is recognized as an official mode of university correspondence; therefore, students are responsible for reading their email for university and course-related information and announcements. Students are responsible to keep the university informed about changes to their e-mail address. Students should check their e-mail regularly and frequently—daily, but at minimum twice a week—to stay current with university-related communications, some of which may be time- sensitive. Students can find UT Austin’s policies and instructions for updating their e-mail address at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.php>.

**SAFETY.** As part of professional social work education, students may have assignments that involve working in agency settings and/or the community. As such, these assignments may present some risks. Sound choices and caution may lower risks inherent to the profession. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of and adhere to policies and practices related to agency and/or community safety. Students should notify the professor regarding any safety concerns.

**BEHAVIOR CONCERNS ADVICE LINE (BCAL).** If students are worried about someone who is acting differently, they may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone their concerns about another individual’s behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC),

the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

**EMERGENCY EVACUATION POLICY.** Occupants of buildings on the UT Austin campus are required to evacuate and assemble outside when a fire alarm is activated or an announcement is made. Please be aware of the following policies regarding evacuation:

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of the classroom and the building. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when you entered the building.
- If you require assistance to evacuate, inform the professor in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow the professor's instructions.
- Do not re-enter a building unless you are given instructions by the Austin police or fire dept.

### **Web-Based Information Sources on Poverty and Family & Child Policy**

#### Government Agencies

##### **U.S. Department of Health & Human Services:**

Administration for Children and Youth

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/>

##### **Assistant Secretary for Planning & Evaluation (ASPE)**

[http://aspe.hhs.gov/\\_/index.cfm](http://aspe.hhs.gov/_/index.cfm)

##### **NICHAHD National Children's Study**

<http://www.nationalchildrensstudy.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

##### **U.S. Department of Commerce**

Bureau of the Census

<http://www.census.gov/>

##### **U.S. Department of Labor**

Bureau of Labor Statistics

<http://www.bls.gov/>

##### **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development**

Policy Development & Research  
Information Service

<http://www.huduser.org/>

### Think Tanks and Advocacy Groups on Children's Issues

- Alliance for Children and Families <http://www.alliance1.org/>
- Annie E. Casey Foundation <http://www.aecf.org/>
- Center for Law and Social Policy <http://www.clasp.org/>
- Chapin Hall Center for Children (Chicago) <http://www.chapinhall.org/>
- Child Care and Early Education Research Connection <http://www.childcareresearch.org>
- Children's Defense Fund <http://www.childrensdefense.org>
- Child Welfare League of America <http://www.cwla.org/>
- Child Trends <http://www.childtrends.org/>
- Institute for Child and Family Policy (Columbia) <http://www.childpolicy.org/>
- National Center for Children in Poverty (Columbia) <http://www.nccp.org/>

### Think Tanks and Advocacy Groups on Social Policy in General

- Brookings Institution <http://www.brookings.edu/>
- Center for Budget and Policy Priorities <http://www.cbpp.org/>
- Center for the Study of Social Policy <http://www.cssp.org/>
- Institute for Women's Policy Research <http://iwpr.org/>
- Food Research and Action Center <http://www.frac.org/>
- Heritage Foundation <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Welfare/>
- Hudson Institute Welfare Policy Center <http://www.hudson.org/wpc/>
- National Law Center for Homelessness and Poverty <http://www.nlchp.org/>
- Urban Institute <http://www.urban.org/>
- (Texas) Center for Public Policy Priorities <http://www.cppp.org/>
- (Texas) Public Policy Foundation <http://www.texaspolicy.com/>

## University-based Research Centers

National Poverty Center, Univ. of Michigan	<a href="http://www.npc.umich.edu/">http://www.npc.umich.edu/</a>
Institute for Research on Poverty, U of Wisconsin	<a href="http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp/">http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp/</a>
Kentucky Center for Poverty Research, U of Kentucky	<a href="http://www.ukcpr.org/">http://www.ukcpr.org/</a>
Rural Poverty Research Center, Univ. of Missouri	<a href="http://www.rupri.org/">http://www.rupri.org/</a>
Joint Center for Poverty Research, University of Chicago/Northwestern Univ.	<a href="http://www.jcpr.org/">http://www.jcpr.org/</a>
Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern Univ.	<a href="http://www.ipr.northwestern.edu">www.ipr.northwestern.edu</a>
Center for the Study of Urban Poverty, UCLA	<a href="http://www.csup.ucla.edu/">http://www.csup.ucla.edu/</a>
Center on Urban Poverty and Social Change, Case Western Reserve University	<a href="http://povertycenter.cwru.edu/">http://povertycenter.cwru.edu/</a>
Institute on Race and Poverty, Univ. of Minnesota	<a href="http://www1.umn.edu/irp/">http://www1.umn.edu/irp/</a>
National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia U.	<a href="http://www.nccp.org/">http://www.nccp.org/</a>
University of Maryland, Casey Journalism Center on Children and Families	<a href="http://www.journalismcenter.org">http://www.journalismcenter.org</a>