

Econ 144

The Economics of Poverty and Discrimination

Summer Session: May 27, 2025 – June 30, 2025

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Office Hours: Mondays 9:00 am – 11:00 am, Thursdays 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Online Office Hours: By appointment via email, all hours are on Zoom
(<https://binghamton.zoom.us/my/jijee>)

Services for Students with Disabilities Email: ssd@binghamton.edu

1 Course Description:

This course aims to familiarize students with the different aspects of the dual phenomena of poverty and discrimination through the framework of traditional economic models of human behavior. This familiarization is achieved by the students working through the materials in different formats. One of those formats is a daily pre-class reading/assignment to help you get used to the topics we will discuss in class. Each topic concludes with students participating in Brightspace discussions and homework assignments. These are important to work toward the students interacting with each other and encourage critical analysis of the reading material. The goal is for students to broaden their perspectives on the issues described in the course, even if they do not settle on a particular viewpoint.

The course material (book listed below) focuses on the causes of and policy options for mitigating poverty and discrimination. Students will be expected to engage with several perspectives on these issues critically. This class is not meant to bring the students to a “side” of the debate. The class wants to encourage them to think about these ideas and challenge their thinking. Each topic will have corresponding required reading assignments.

Also, I will post supplementary readings to encourage students to delve more into the topic. I will also post some notes and review questions to help students explore the material, but they are not substitutes for doing the required reading.

2 Learning Goals:

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

1. Measure inequality and poverty using standard tools; interpret and communicate these measures clearly.
2. Explain economic models of labor supply, human capital, and discrimination and apply them to current topics.
3. Evaluate policy proposals using evidence and cost-benefit reasoning.
4. Collaborate productively using structured roles, giving and receiving constructive feedback.
5. Reflect on assumptions and ethics in economic analysis, recognizing how policies can differentially affect groups and how economic models may not be one-size-fits-all.

3 Textbook:

The Economics of Poverty and Discrimination, (10th Edition)

Author(s): Bradley Schiller

Please make sure that you have the 10th edition of the textbook. Older editions might not have all the chapters that are going to be covered in the course.

The examples in this book are a bit dated, but the major themes and principles still hold while still being affordable. I will post the chapters on Brightspace for the first week so that you have time to get the book (up to Chapter 4) but it's your responsibility to obtain the book after that.

Note: Articles and brief data notes will be posted on Brightspace (PDFs will be provided).

4 Grading system:

Grade Distribution:

Participation & Engagement	14%
Brightspace Discussions	10%

Problem Sets	14%
In-Class quizzes	9%
Midterm Exam	15%
Final Exam (comprehensive)	20%
Team Policy Project	18%

Grading Scale:

A: 93% and above; A-: 90-92%; B+: 87-89%; B: 83-86%; B-: 80-82%; C+: 77-79%; C: 73-76%; C-: 70-72%; D+: 67-69%; D: 63-66%; D-: 60-62%; F: below 60%

Detail:

1. Participation & Engagement

You earn points by showing up ready, jumping into discussions, taking your turn in team roles, and doing quick end-of-class check-ins. We're rewarding prep, curiosity, and respect and not how much you talk.

How we'll work in class:

- Think-pair-share + quick case sprints: short conversations in pairs/small groups so more voices get heard.
- Rotating roles (weekly): Facilitator (keeps us moving), Notetaker (captures key points), Evidence Lead (finds/quotes data), Presenter (shares out). Everyone does each role at least once.

If you miss an in class activity, you can submit a "make up brief" (1-2 pages or a 3 minute audio) using the day's concept on a new example, no questions asked.

2. Brightspace Discussions

The discussion boards aim to create a conversation about the ideas presented in the articles and the other course materials. You have to first submit an *initial post* answering the question. You then respond to *at least two other posts* (Discussion reply). This means that you will have to post at least three times.

The post should not just say "I agree/disagree" or repeat what the reading or others have said. The post should express precisely why you agree/disagree with some specific argument. The posts should **cite** the main text/posted slides and at least one outside source. Cite articles, books, or even personal experience, but make sure that any sources you use are properly cited.

Discussion netiquette: All posting will be conducted civilly and respectfully. You

are encouraged to disagree and to state your point of view. However, this must be done without being disrespectful and in a civilized way. Discussion posts that do not take this into account will get **zero points**.

Students will be evaluated individually based on their contribution to the discussion and the clarity of their arguments. **The posts should add value to the discussion. Posts that do not add any additional value to the discussion will not receive credit.** The student's main post is worth 60% of the discussion grade. The other 40% will be based on the replies to other students' answers. Please refer to the **Discussions Rubric** document for further details.

3. Problem Sets

There will be 3 Problem Sets, and an extra credit assignment. This assignment will consist of one or two short answer questions covering the previous chapter's material and any related material. These help you to practice the concepts we have learned recently. Please refer to the class schedule for the post/due dates. The homework has to be submitted via Brightspace. To ensure you've actually read this syllabus, your extra credit assignment is to email me a meme depicting how you will be spending this summer.

The grading is based on 1) whether the questions were addressed (completeness); 2) grammar and clarity. Heavily copied answers from the textbook or the posted material will receive **zero points**. Any answer copied directly from ChatGPT will also receive **zero points**. **Please submit your homework as one pdf file**, any submissions in picture formats (jpg, jpeg, HEIC) will not be graded.

4. Quiz

There will be four brief check-ins (approximately 10 minutes) that will focus on key concepts. Lowest quiz will be dropped.

5. Midterm Exam

The midterm exam will be mixed format, with a combination of multiple-choice, short problems, and concept explanations. This will not be an open-book exam, but you will be allowed to bring in one page of notes.

6. Final Exam

The final exam will take place Monday, June 30, 2025. It will comprise of short problems, concept explanations, and cumulative concept applications.

The final is an open-book exam. You are allowed to look at the textbook and the

posted notes during the exam. However, responses that are heavily copied from the textbook or the posted notes word-to-word are going to receive no credit. You need to respond to the questions in your own words. Moreover, responses that are similar across students will receive no credit.

7. **Team Policy Project**

You will get into teams of 3–4 and select an anti-poverty or anti-discrimination policy. Deliverables: (a) 4-page evidence memo; (b) **15-minute in-class briefing** with slides; (c) 1-page public-facing summary (op-ed or infographic). Individual contribution will be graded via role artifacts and peer assessments. This is your opportunity to demonstrate your understanding of poverty's causes, analyze policy effectiveness, and apply course concepts in your own voice. Please refer to the Class Schedule to see the post/due dates. The evidence memo has to be submitted via Brightspace along with references.

5 Tentative Course Outline:

The exact pacing may adjust based on learning needs. Readings will list the relevant textbook chapter(s) and supplementary articles.

Week	Content
Week 1	<p>These will be introductory chapters that will cover views of inequality and poverty, measurements of inequality and counting the poor (Chapters 1, 2 & 3)</p> <p>D1: Views of Inequality - course map, poverty simulation, descriptive facts, how economists measure. D2: Views of Inequality - 3 explanations for poverty D3: Inequality - Lorenz/Gini; absolute vs relative poverty; thresholds and critiques. D4: Counting the Poor – defining poverty, in-class activity. Quiz 1.</p>
Week 2	<p>Cover global poverty and inequality and labor force participation of the poor (Chapters 4 and 5)</p> <p>D1: Global Poverty and Inequality - cross-country patterns; growth and distribution. Brightspace Discussion Due. D2: Global Poverty and Inequality – plotting Lorenz curve, Discuss Brightspace posts D3: Labor Force Participation - labor supply/demand; minimum wage debates; informal/contingent work D4: Problem Set 1 Due, discuss solutions D5: Labor Force Participation – in-class activity. Quiz 2.</p>
Week 3	<p>We then begin our second module. This includes discrimination by culture and race, as well as examining education and ability (Chapters 9 & 10)</p> <p>D1: The Underclass: Culture/Race - taste-based vs statistical discrimination; evidence and tests. Brightspace Discussion Due. D2: The Underclass: Culture/Race - Quiz 3. D3: Education and Ability - schooling as investment; returns and barriers; early-life investments. D4: Education and Ability D5: Midterm</p>
Week 4	<p>Continuing with discrimination, these readings will examine discrimination in education and also in the labor market (Chapters 11 & 12)</p> <p>D1: Discrimination in Education - access, tracking, funding; interventions. Brightspace Discussion Due.</p>

	D2: Discrimination in Education + Problem Set 2 Due , discuss solutions D3: Discrimination/Labor Market - hiring, pay gaps, enforcement; audits; DEI debates. D4: Discrimination/Labor Market – Becker, proving discrimination, court cases D5: Policy Project Workshop - peer review; revision clinics. Quiz 4. Draft memo due.
Week 5	We end by discussing policy options, specifically welfare programs and social insurance programs available to the poor (Chapters 13 & 14) D1: Welfare Programs - SNAP, TANF, EITC; take-up and stigma. D2: Welfare Programs - vouchers, rent control, segregation, mobility programs D3: Social Insurance Programs - unemployment insurance, disability, Social Security; incentives vs insurance. D4: Policy Project Workshop – presentations. Problem Set 3 Due. D5: Policy Project Workshop – presentations, course wrap-up. Final memo & public brief due.
Week 6	Final Exam – comprehensive, open book.

6 Course Policy:

6.1 Generative A.I: Chat GPT

A big part of this class is the discussion and the final essay in which you get to apply what you learn about poverty economics to the real world and real problems!

You also get a chance to improve your written communication skills. Therefore the words on your paper and your presentation should be your own, not those from Chat GPT or another AI. I will consider use of Chat GPT on these written assignments as akin to plagiarism.

There are places for Chat GPT in this class. You may ask it to explain concepts or problems, or to generate practice questions. Keep in mind, however, that Chat GPT does hallucinate and the explanation/answers it provides may not be correct. It is up to you as a student to evaluate if the information you find on Chat GPT or the internet in general is correct/credible or not. I am happy to answer questions in

office hours if you are struggling to understand resources on class-material you find outside of class!

6.2 Community Norms:

We debate ideas, not people. Listen actively; ground claims in evidence; invite quieter voices.

6.3 Attendance:

Attendance is expected, but life happens. Use the “alternative pathway” option to keep pace if you miss class. No documentation required for up to **two** missed classes. Please contact me if you need more support.

6.4 Devices:

Laptops/tablets are welcome for learning tasks. However, during brief “screens-down” segments, please pause typing to focus discussion.

6.5 Academic Integrity:

Do your own work, cite sources, and be transparent about collaboration. We follow the University’s Academic Honesty code.

6.6 Disability Accommodation:

I’m committed to Universal Design. There are multiple ways to engage, represent, and express learning. If you have or think you may have a disability, please connect with Service for Students with disabilities (SSD) and with me early. We will make a plan that works.

E-mail: ssd@binghamton.edu

Website:

<https://www.binghamton.edu/ssd/index.html>

6.7 Names & Pronouns:

I will use your preferred name and pronouns. You can share them in person or via Brightspace any time.

6.8 Religious/Cultural Observance:

Please inform me of anticipated observances. We can arrange any alternative assignments will be arranged

6.9 Well-Being:

If you encounter personal or academic stress, reach out. I can connect you with campus resources (counseling, tutoring, advising) and help you stay on track.

7 Campus Resources:

7.1 University Tutoring Service (UTS):

Offer free tutoring for undergraduate students. To access this tutoring, you must schedule appointments online through the my.binghamton.edu portal. If you have any questions about UTS:

Call: 607-777-9235

E-mail: uts@binghamton.edu

Website: <https://www.binghamton.edu/tutoring>

7.2 IT Helpdesk/Brightspace support:

Walk-in: Located in the Computer Center first floor lobby.

Call: 607-777-6420

E-mail: helpdesk@binghamton.edu.

Website: <https://www.binghamton.edu/its/>

7.3 Libraries:

The libraries offer a variety of service that aim to help both The Libraries offer a wide variety and range of services including research assistance, instruction, user-friendly interfaces, digital preservation, digital scanners, and resource sharing.

Text: 607-205-8173

Call: 607-777-2345

E-mail: refquest@binghamton.edu

Website: <http://www.binghamton.edu/libraries>

7.4 Dean of students:

If you are dealing with personal or academic stress at any point during the semester, or you need to talk with someone about a personal problem or situation, I encourage you to seek support as soon as possible. As your professor, I am available to talk with you about stresses related to your work in my class. Additionally, I can assist you in reaching out to any one of a wide range of campus resources, including:

1. Dean of Students Office: 607-777-2804
2. Decker Student Health Services Center: 607-777-2221
3. University Police: On campus emergency, 911
4. University Counseling Center: 607-777-2772
5. Interpersonal Violence Prevention: 607-777-3062
6. Harpur Advising: 607-777-6305
7. Office of International Student and Scholar Services: 607-777-2510

7.5 University Counseling Center:

Students might encounter personal, social, or developmental issues that call for assistance beyond the advice provided by friends and family. In this case, the University Counseling Center (UCC) is here to help you. The UCC provides a variety of free and confidential counseling services delivered by professional counselors. All currently enrolled Binghamton University undergraduate students, graduate students and affiliated entities are eligible to receive these services free of charge. Services and programs available through the center include individual and group counseling, consultation, referral, and psychoeducational programs. For more information or to make an appointment, visit

Website: <https://www.binghamton.edu/counseling>