Rural Minority Groups and Poverty in the United States (Next Semester's Title: Poverty and Place) Community and Environmental Sociology 578 **Cross-listed with Sociology and American Indian Studies 578**

Syllabus Spring 2012

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Office Hours: Monday 9:30-11:00 and by appointment

Objectives: This course presents an overview of place-based poverty in the United States, concentrating on the economic structure of poor places and the characteristics of the people who live in those places. We examine the allocation of economic and social rewards in contemporary society with an emphasis on persistently poor regions and communities, analysis of selected minority groups and their poverty statuses, and poverty programs and their consequences for structural and cultural changes. As the semester goes along, I hope that you will gain an increased awareness of the nature and scope of poverty in the US, develop an understanding of the explanations for poverty, especially as it is experienced by minority groups, and begin to critically evaluate public policies intended to address poverty. Last, but not least, I aim to increase your sociological skill set through gathering of evidence and application of theory.

Prerequisites: Students should be familiar with basic concepts of sociology and prepared to complete a major research project. Junior status and introductory sociology or instructor permission is required. Graduate students are welcome.

Organization: The course is organized in three major sections, each taking about 5 weeks. The first section provides an overview of poverty in the United States, paying special attention to the rural places and to the explanations of persistent poverty. The second section focuses on the structure of poverty in particular rural places and how that affects the people in those places. The final third of the course focuses on the question of what policies have been tried and what might be needed to ameliorate poverty.

Readings: There are several important organizations within universities and government agencies, as well as ngos (non-governmental organizations) involved in conducting and disseminating poverty research and policy briefs. We will tap into these throughout the semester. We can also use their e-newsletters to keep ourselves up-to-date on the latest. I will send several recommendations via email, but I am also requiring that you sign up for updates from Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity http://www.spotlightonpoverty.org/ for the duration of the semester (click on box in upper right hand corner of homepage). You might also want to bookmark this site since it has links to great reports and data sources.

Nearly all of the required reading for this course will available electronically, either through a publically accessible website or through Learn@UW in the *Electronic Readings* module under the *Content* tab. A reading schedule for each section of the course will be posted on Learn@UW and I expect you to check the course website on a regular (near-daily) basis.

In the second half of the semester, we will read two books which you can purchase from local bookstores (note that one of them has not yet been published). When the time comes to read these books, I ask that you consider patronizing a locally-owned downtown bookstore *A Room of One's Own*.

The required texts are:

David Treuer. 2012. Rez Life: An Indian's Journey Through Reservation Life, New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.

Jane L. Collins and Victoria Mayer. 2010. Both Hands Tied: Welfare Reform and the Race to the Bottom of the Low-Wage Labor Market. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Requirements: The requirements of this course reflect the "3 to 1" rule. Generally, UW faculty assume that students will spend three hours per week working on course requirements outside of class for every course credit hour spent inside the classroom. The grading for this course will be based on the following assignments.

- 1) This class will have discussion of assigned reading as its foundation. Therefore, I am requiring that you post a thoughtful reaction to the assigned reading before each class. In order to receive credit, your reaction must appear on the discussion board of Learn@UW by 10pm the day before each class. No credit will be given for late posts. I expect you to post at least 25 times throughout the semester (this gives you a couple of byes). Your postings should be approximately 250-300 words, summarize key ideas, and make connections to prior reading, lectures, discussion and/or current events. A maximum of 3 points per posting will be assigned. If you do more than 25, you will receive additional credit.
- 2) In-class participation is vital and will be graded. You will receive a maximum of 25 points for the quality of your participation.
- 3) Analysis of place-based poverty, submitted in two parts. First, you will choose a state (no duplications of states among the students in this class will be allowed). The first analysis will be a comparison of two nonmetropolitan counties in that state the one with the lowest poverty rate and the one with the highest poverty rate in 2010. The report should contain data on the demographic, economic and social characteristics of those counties in 2000 and 2010 (at a minimum), and a written narrative that explains how those characteristics help us understand the economic circumstances of the counties. A draft will be due in week 7 and the final version will be due in week 10, accompanied by inclass presentations of your analysis. The second part of your case studies will explore the public policies and organizations that affect your cases. This will be due in week 14 and

again you will be expected to present your findings to the class. For each part, the written narrative must integrate knowledge and ideas gained from the readings in the course. In total, this assignment will be worth a maximum of 100 points. (I will distribute the exact distribution of the possible points for each part of the assignment soon.)

4) A final take home exam will be distributed in the final week of the semester and will be due on May 17 at 2:45pm. The final exam will be comprehensive and integrative. It will be worth a maximum of 100 points.

Grading: No curve is used in this course which means that you will be able to gauge your status at any time and that you will get the grade that you earn. Your final course grade will be based on the following components and according to the following distribution:

Posted reaction papers 75 points

Participation 25 points

Case study reports and presentations 100 points

Take home final 100 points

You will earn the grade for this course that corresponds with the following point distribution:

93-100, A	70-78, C
89-92, AB	60-69, D
83-88, B	0-59, F
79-82, BC	

Incompletes will not be awarded. Extensions will be considered only under extreme circumstances pertaining to family or medical emergencies. You will lose a full letter grade for each assignment or exam that is turned in late without an authorized extension.

Cheating (including plagiarism) is not tolerated. Students who are caught cheating will automatically receive an F (zero points) for the relevant assignment/exam. In addition, the incident will be reported in writing to the Dean of your school or college as well as the Dean of Students so that they may decide whether further disciplinary action is needed. A clear definition of plagiarism and information about disciplinary sanctions for academic misconduct can be found at the Dean of Students website (http://students.wisc.edu/saja/misconduct/UWS14.html http://www.wisc.edu/students/saja/misconduct/misconduct.html). It is your responsibility as a UW student to be knowledgeable of these rules; lack of familiarity with the rules will not excuse misconduct. Plagiarism detection software will be used in this course.

A Note for Graduate Students. Graduate students enrolled in the course are expected to meet the same requirements *and* perform at a higher level. That is, you are expected to engage with the material in greater depth (more advanced analysis) and to provide a more polished product (more advanced communication).

Etiquette:

Respect must be shown toward each other at all times. We simply cannot have a quality learning environment without tolerance and respect for other's views.

Common courtesies are expected. Please remember that the classroom is a place for learning. That means that your CELL PHONE IS TURNED OFF while class is in session and that you do not engage in behaviors that place barriers to your and others' learning. Examples that spring to mind include sleeping, chatting, eating, and other distracting actions.

No laptops or other internet devices including ipads (tablets) or smartphones. While computers are a valuable tool for research and study, they are inimical to participation and collegiality in the classroom, creating a "cone of distraction." The use of laptops for note taking or other purposes in class, therefore, will not be permitted.

Religious observances and other anticipated absences: Please let me in advance about any dates you will be absent from class for religious or other reasons.