

Social Policy and Inequality
CRN 20206
4 Credit Hours
Winter 2026
Faculty: Michael Crow, Ph.D.

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Office hours: By appointment
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Class dates: Friday, February 6, 6 – 8:50 pm
Saturday, February 7, 9 am – 3:50 pm
Sunday, February 8, 9 am – 3:50 pm

Friday, February 27, 6 – 8:50 pm
Saturday, February 28, 9 am – 3:50 pm
Sunday, March 1, 9 am – 3:50 pm

Classroom: Seminar II E3109
Canvas Page: <https://canvas.evergreen.edu/courses/7851>
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Course Description and Goals

Any serious study of American public policy and administration today must include a firm understanding of social policy. Social policy comprises those areas of public policy that distribute or redistribute society's resources across lines of economic class, race, gender and other broad social categories, including such issues as poverty, racial and gender inequalities, taxes, health care, education, urban renewal and labor relations. More often than not, these issues pit social groups in a zero-sum game and thus often generate much political conflict. Moreover, social policy issues have increasingly come to dominate the policy agenda at federal, state and local levels. Studying social policy, then, can shed light on how we govern ourselves today.

Our main objective in this course is to develop analytical tools for *explaining* the causes of social and economic inequalities in society, *analyzing* the impact of social policy on these inequalities, and *evaluating* proposed alternatives in social policy. These skills will prepare you to make effective arguments about public policy and thus are essential for aspiring legislators, policy advocates, nonprofit administrators, professional policy analysts and government officials. In this way, this course complements and expands on the analytic toolkit you have developed in your research methods and policy analysis courses. By the end of this course, you will have demonstrated your ability to:

- Evaluate the impact of social policies on individuals, social groups and society
- Develop arguments about the scope and causes of social and economic inequality
- Critique alternative policy proposals for addressing social and economic inequalities.

Communications

I encourage and expect contact from you over the quarter. The easiest way to reach me is by e-mail (crawm@evergreen.edu). You may also reach me at my office phone during business hours (9 am to 5 pm) and cell phone before 9 pm. Or you may make an appointment with me for a one-on-one meeting, Zoom conference, or phone call.

I use Evergreen's e-mail and the course Canvas system to conduct course business. If you do not use Evergreen's e-mail system, please be sure to forward messages from this account to the e-mail account that you use. I will also place course assignments, handouts, PowerPoint slides and other course materials on the course Canvas site.

Course Materials

Two books are required for this course:

Goldin, Claudia. 2021. *Career and Family: Women's Century-Long Journey to Equality*. Princeton University Press.

Katznelson, Ira. 2005. *When Affirmative Action Was White*. W.W. Norton

Other course readings will be available on the course Canvas site.

Course Assignments, Credit, and Evaluation

You will be evaluated in this course based on your progress in meeting the course objectives described above, as assessed by the following assignments and requirements. To earn full credit for the course, students must satisfactorily complete all the following requirements:

Course participation: One of the primary objectives of this class is to develop your ability to critically analyze budget policy issues. In class sessions and activities, we will engage in activities such as discussion and group work that will call on you to apply new ideas from the reading to policy problems. Thus, it is important for you to come to the class prepared to participate by having studied the assigned reading. Your participation will be assessed on the following criteria:

--- *Attendance:* You are expected to be present for the scheduled times when we meet on February 6-8 and February 27-March 1.

--- *Collegiality:* Showing respect for your peers by being in class on time, staying through the entire session, and respecting the views of others in class discussion.

--- *Preparation:* Completing reading before class, coming to class prepared with assignments and reading materials, active participation in discussion and small group work.

--- *Engagement out of class*: Our class sessions are not the only opportunity to discuss course ideas with me. I want to know if you are having trouble with the material and what you like and don't like about the course. You may reach me by e-mail or phone or schedule an in-person or Zoom chat session.

Pre-class reading responses: After you complete the reading for each module we will discuss, you will prepare a response of at least 500 words (1-2 pages double-spaced) to a question or prompt about that reading assignment. These responses will serve as a starting point for discussion of each module. You must complete four of the five pre-class reading responses for the first weekend and three of the four pre-class reading responses for the second weekend. Your pre-class reading responses for the first weekend are due **Monday, February 2** at 11 p.m. Your pre-class reading responses for the second weekend are due **Monday, February 23** at 11 p.m.

Analytic essay: After completing each weekend session, you will write an essay of 2000 – 3000 words (7 – 10 pages double spaced) in response to an essay question that I will provide for you in class. This essay will test your ability to integrate course readings, discussions, assignments, and analytic skills in order to apply them to ongoing dilemmas in social policy. Your response to the first essay question will be due **Monday, February 16 at 11:00 pm**. Your response to the second essay question will be due **Monday, March 9 at 11:00 p.m.**

Evaluation: Students are encouraged to complete a self-evaluation and faculty evaluation and to participate in an evaluation conference with the faculty member. The evaluations must be submitted using the My Evergreen system (my.evergreen.edu).

Submitting Assignments

Assignments may be submitted to me either on Canvas and/or by email to me (crawm@evergreen.edu). I recommend both uploading your assignment to Canvas and emailing it to me to ensure I receive it. It is your responsibility to assure that I have received your work on time.

Academic Integrity

Cheating, plagiarism and other violations of academic integrity standards will not be tolerated. Any student turning in work that is in violation of Evergreen's academic integrity standards will automatically receive a No Credit in the course and the matter will be referred to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities for disciplinary action. Please be aware that including material generated by an artificial intelligence tool in work turned in for academic credit without appropriate citation or attribution is considered to be academic dishonesty. An overview of academic integrity standards and the Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities are available at <https://www.evergreen.edu/offices-services/student-affairs/student-rights-responsibilities>

AI Policy

The use of AI is permitted on a faculty-by-faculty basis.

Students should assume that the use of AI is not permitted in a class unless the faculty have explicitly stated otherwise and provided clear guidelines for its use. Additionally, students should not assume that what is allowed in one class applies to all classes. Inappropriate and/or prohibited use of AI can be considered academic dishonesty under The Evergreen State College's Student Conduct Code [WAC 174-123-170 \(1\)\(a\)](#) (Links to an external site) If an assignment or activity in our class involves the use of AI, we will provide specific guidelines and expectations for its use on a case-by-case basis. At a minimum, you will be required to document and attach your research and writing strategies, all prompts used, and a copy of the resulting conversation.

Included in Evergreen's Microsoft 365 suite is an AI chatbot, Copilot. If logged in through your Evergreen Microsoft 365 online account, Copilot does not share your information and hence has privacy that others do not.

Accessibility

Your success in this class is important to me, and it is the policy and practice of The Evergreen State College to create inclusive learning environments consistent with federal and state law. If you have a documented disability (or need to have a disability documented), and need an accommodation, please contact me privately as soon as possible, so that we can discuss with the office of Access Services for Students with Disabilities (360) 867-6348; accessservices@evergreen.edu) how to meet your specific needs and the requirements of the course. For more information, please visit the Access Services website at <https://www.evergreen.edu/offices-services/access-services-for-students-with-disabilities>

Bad Weather Policy

If weather or other event makes it difficult or impossible for the class to meet in-person at our scheduled class times, the faculty may change the format for the class to remote instruction, with the class meeting occurring over Zoom. The faculty will make every effort to make you aware of this change at the earliest possible time.

If it is likely that many students or faculty will be affected by a power or internet outage, faculty may choose to cancel a class session entirely. If we do this we will make every effort to send an all-class email by 3:00 pm. If you've not already done so, sign up to receive alerts about campus closing or other emergencies [here](#).

Religious Holidays

Washington State law (RCW 28B.10.039) requires that institutions of higher education accommodate students by allowing two days of absence and make-up work for religious holidays per year. Please consult with me at the start of the quarter should you anticipate an absence owing to a religious holiday. While Evergreen moves toward putting religious holidays into the online campus calendar, check the University of Washington's [religious holidays calendar](#).

Other Expectations of Students and Faculty

We commit to promoting a cooperative, supportive atmosphere within the community; give everyone opportunity for self-reflection and expression; use high standards in reading the text and preparing our papers, lectures, and comments in seminar; handle all disputes in a spirit of goodwill; respect our differences; and, discuss any problems involving others in the learning community directly with the individuals involved.

We abide by the [social contract](#), the [student conduct code](#) and the [non-discrimination policies and procedures at TESC](#).

All students are expected to support and contribute to a well-functioning MPA classroom learning community. Behavior that disrupts the learning community may be grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal from the MPA program.

Course Schedule

These topics and reading assignments may change throughout the course of the quarter, depending on our speed and interests. Changes will be announced in class.

Date	Topic and reading assigned
Monday, February 2	Pre-Class Reading Responses for February 6-8 Due
Friday, February 6	Defining and Describing Economic Inequality Iceland, "Methods of Measuring Poverty" Coy, "The Unfinished Pursuit of a Better Poverty Measure" Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "A Guide to Statistics on Historical Trends in Income Inequality" https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/a-guide-to-statistics-on-historical-trends-in-income-inequality Recommended: National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2023. An Updated Measure of Poverty: (Re)Drawing the Line. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/26825

<p>Saturday, February 7 (morning)</p>	<p>Political and Economic Inequality in America Hacker and Pierson, "Winner-Take-All Politics: Public Policy, Political Organization, and the Precipitous Rise of Top Incomes in the United States"</p> <p>Page, Bartels, and Seawright, "Democracy and the Policy Preferences of Wealthy Americans"</p> <p>Rau and Stokes, "Income Inequality and the Erosion of Democracy in the Twenty-First Century" https://www.pnas.org/doi/epub/10.1073/pnas.2422543121</p> <p>Recommended: Olson, Mancur, 1965, <i>The Logic of Collective Action</i>, pp. 5-16 and 132-167</p>
<p>Saturday, February 7 (afternoon)</p>	<p>Is there an equality-efficiency tradeoff? Okun, "Increasing Equality in an Efficient Economy"</p> <p>Stiglitz, "Inequality and Economic Growth"</p> <p>"40 Years After Arthur Okun's 'Tradeoff', the Classic Book Still Has Lessons for Tackling Inequality", https://www.brookings.edu/articles/40-years-after-arthur-okuns-tradeoff-the-classic-book-still-has-lessons-for-tackling-inequality/</p>
<p>Sunday, February 8 (morning)</p>	<p>Racial inequality and social policy Katznelson, <i>When Affirmative Action Was White</i></p>
<p>Sunday, February 8 (afternoon)</p>	<p>Housing Policy Judd and Swanstrom, "National Policy and the City/Suburban Divide" and "Federal Programs and the Divisive Politics of Race"</p> <p>National Low Income Housing Coalition, "The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes"</p> <p>Parolek, "Implementing Missing Middle Housing"</p>
<p>Monday, February 16</p>	<p>Analytic Essay 1 Due</p>
<p>Monday, February 23</p>	<p>Pre-Class Reading Responses for February 27 - March 1 Due</p>
<p>Friday, February 27</p>	<p>Two American Families We will view Frontline's <i>Two American Families</i> together in class</p>
<p>Saturday, February 28 (morning)</p>	<p>Analyzing Gender Inequality Goldin, <i>Career and Family</i></p>

<p>Saturday, February 28 (afternoon)</p>	<p>Family and Child Care Policy National Women's Law Center. 2024. "Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: State Child Care Assistance Policies 2023." https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/NWLC-State-Child-Care-Assistance-Policies-2023.pdf</p> <p>Gornick and Meyers, "Institutions that Support Gender Equality in Parenthood and Employment"</p> <p>Koslowski et al, "Parental Leave Policies, Parental Diversity and Precarity in Family Life: A Cross-National Comparison"</p>
<p>Sunday, March 1 (morning)</p>	<p>Health Inequalities Blumental et al. 2024. "Mirror, Mirror: A Portrait of the Failing U.S. Health System" https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/fund-reports/2024/sep/mirror-mirror-2024</p> <p>Akerlof, "The Market for Lemons"</p> <p>RAND, "The RAND Health Insurance Experiments"</p>
<p>Sunday, March 1 (afternoon)</p>	<p>Healthcare Reform Blumberg et al., 2019. "Comparing Health Insurance Reform Options: From "Building on the ACA" to Single Payer" https://ldi.upenn.edu/our-work/research-updates/reforming-long-term-care-policy/ https://www.urban.org/research/publication/incremental-comprehensive-health-reform-how-various-reform-options-compare-coverage-and-costs</p> <p>Werner et al, "The Evolution of Long-Term Care and Health Policy in the United States" https://read.dukeupress.edu/jhpl/article/50/6/1037/401244/The-Evolution-of-Long-Term-Care-and-Health-Policy</p> <p>Weiner, "Reforming Long-Term Care Policy" https://ldi.upenn.edu/our-work/research-updates/reforming-long-term-care-policy/</p>
<p>Monday, March 9</p>	<p>Analytic Essay 2 Due</p>