ECONOMIC REALITIES OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

S20-5018 (Social Work)
348 (Economics)
3910 (Sociology)
Spring 2018
Monday 4:00 - 7:00
305 Seigle Hall

Instructors:
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Office Hours:
Tuesday 2:45 - 4:15
and by appointment

Office Hours:
Tuesday 2:00 - 3:30
and by appointment

I. Overview:

This course explores from an interdisciplinary perspective the American Dream and its viability within the current economic realities of the United States. The course is divided into four sections. We begin by examining the components of the American Dream in today’s society, tracing the economic history of the concept, and exploring the extent to which social and economic justice play a role in the American Dream.

The second section of the course examines several traditional pathways to achieving the American Dream, including overall economic growth and rising standards of living, economic mobility, equality of opportunity, and the availability and creation of jobs that will adequately provide for individuals and families.

In the third part of the course we discuss some of the current obstacles that prevent the realization of the American Dream. These include the prevalence and consequences of poverty and economic insecurity, unemployment, and challenges posed by income and wealth inequality across all of American society.

The final section of the class explores the future directions and possibilities for strengthening and/or modifying the American Dream with the objective to improve the lives of the American population.

Throughout the course, a variety of perspectives and viewpoints will be presented. Research will be drawn from economics, sociology, social work, and other areas of social inquiry. Emphasis will be placed upon the consistency between empirical data and different aspects of the American Dream.
II. Texts and Reading Materials:

The following texts are required:


Course Readings – Readings will be available on the course web site.

III. Organization of Course:

Each week the instructors will lecture and present material for approximately the first hour and a half of class. Following a break, the second part of each meeting will be devoted to class participation and discussion. Hopefully, this format will maximize the learning experience for us all.

The role of the instructors is to make this class a dynamic, challenging, and enriching learning experience for each student in the course.

The role of the student is vital in helping all of us learn and refine our thinking and arguments regarding the course subjects and material. Active class participation is expected by all, with that participation providing insights, questions, and observations. In addition, we encourage students to embrace the interdisciplinary approach of the course. Students should actively probe new ideas and ways of thinking during the course discussions.

IV. Assignments and Grading Criteria:

1) Notes on Readings (25% of total grade)

In order to make the class more interesting, stimulating, and relevant, a great deal is expected from each of you in class participation. Reading the assigned material prior to class is a prerequisite for intelligent class participation. To help in this process, students will turn in a set of notes each week on the assigned readings. These notes should, first, describe and synthesize what in your opinion are the major points and themes of the week's readings. Second, the notes should include your personal reactions and ideas to these themes and any other issues raised in the readings that you would like to comment on. Your work in developing these notes will not only help prepare you for each week’s class, but they will provide you with an excellent starting point for constructing your answers on the take-home essays. Our overall goal is to encourage participation from every member of the class, and to have that participation add to both your learning as well as ours.

2) Take-Home Essays (75% of total grade)
The majority of your grade will be based on three take-home essay assignments. The assignments will ask you to respond to a general question designed to encourage you to synthesize and extend the ideas discussed in the course lectures, discussions, and readings. The weight of each essay assignment in your final grade will be 20% for the first essay, 25% for the second essay, and 30% for the final essay. Due dates appear on the course outline. The assignments will be distributed at least two weeks prior to the due dates. Further details will be given in class.

COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

PART I: WHAT IS THE AMERICAN DREAM?

Introduction - January 22

Values and Components - January 29


Economic History - February 5


First Take Home Essay Handed Out February 5th, Due February 19th

Justice and the American Dream - February 12


PART II: PATHWAYS TO THE AMERICAN DREAM

**Rising Economic Standard of Living** - February 19


**Economic Mobility and Equality of Opportunity** - February 26


**Quality Jobs** - March 5


PART III: BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES TO THE AMERICAN DREAM

**Poverty and Economic Insecurity** - March 19


**Unemployment and Underemployment** - March 26

Keynesian Basics pages from “Muddy Water Macro” website. Links on course website.


**Second Take Home Essay Handed Out March 19th, Due April 2nd**

**Income and Wealth Inequality: Part 1** - April 2


**Income and Wealth Inequality: Part 2** - April 9

“The Rise and Consequences of Inequality in the United States.” Krueger, remarks presented to the *Center for American Progress*, January 12, 2012. Course website


PART IV: THE FUTURE OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

Policy Ideas - April 16


Reshaping the Future - April 23


Third Take Home Essay Handed Out April 23th, Due May 7th