Welfare means public aid given to people who cannot support themselves. Should government provide such assistance, and if so how? These have been central issue in American politics for over forty years. A decade ago, the nation launched a radical reform of family welfare. It was unexpectedly successful yet remains controversial. Comparable disputes occur in Europe. At issue are the breadth and nature of the welfare state and even the meaning of citizenship.

This seminar will consider the politics of welfare at several levels—public opinion, debates in Washington, and at the state level, where welfare reform was implemented. We will also investigate several of the ethical and theoretical issues that surround the subject.

My course V53.0382 The Politics of Poverty and Welfare covers the policy side of welfare reform, including evidence on the causes of poverty and the pros and cons of various antipoverty strategies. In this seminar, we will set those concerns largely aside to focus on the politics in more depth. Students who wish more background on the policy issues should consult the syllabus for V53.0382, available on my web page, at www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/politics/faculty/mead/mead_home.html. The books assigned below also include a good deal of policy material.

Your instructor is a protagonist in the welfare wars. My books helped develop the case for work requirements that now dominates national policy. My recent work has focused more on the politics of poverty and welfare. I will bring to the seminar work from three unpublished studies, and I look forward to your reactions.

**READINGS**

Students should purchase the following texts at the book store or plan to read them at Bobst, where they will be on reserve. I list them roughly in the order in which they will be read.


Some additional articles and chapters will be assigned where indicated in the class schedule. All of these items will be on reserve at Bobst. However, most items are also available on the web, at specified locations. The two that are not may be purchased from New University Copy and Graphics, 11 Waverly Place, phone 212-473-7369.

REQUIREMENTS

The class will emphasize discussion of issues rather than lecturing. To make this work, students must do the readings for class sessions in advance and participate actively in discussion. To promote this, students will be expected to make notes on the readings and turn in a copy before class. I will distribute a handout about how to do this. Each week, those who turn in adequate notes on time will get 1 point; if they are more than adequate, 2 points. If the notes are inadequate or not turned in on time, 0 points.

Students should think through responses before class to the questions posed in the summary of each class session. I will record attendance and the number of times students speak in the discussion. Together, the notes, attendance, and speaking will determine 30 of your grade.

The last two sessions of the course will be devoted to presentations of papers by students, to be chosen from among volunteers. Students who present will get no extra credit, but they will get excellent experience and feedback. For these sessions there will be no assigned reading, because you will be working on your papers.

Students will write a paper of 20-25 pages on a question related to the course, to count 40 percent of the grade. See the detailed assignment below. I suggest some topics you might write on, with some initial readings. You may also develop your own questions in consultation with me. There will also be a final exam, to count 30 percent of the grade.

In determining final grades, students will be ranked on the basis of average. About the top third of the class will receive A, about half the class B, the rest C, or in unusual cases lower grades. Because of this scaling procedure, final grades may not correspond precisely to what one would expect on the basis of average.

CLASS SCHEDULE

The following is the schedule for class sessions. For each session, a topic and related questions are posed and readings assigned. Read the items in the order suggested. Do the readings before class, prepare notes on them, and think through responses to the questions.

Jan 26: Poverty: The meaning of poverty to history, to the public, and to the government. The economic and behavioral dimensions of poverty. The work issue. The federal poverty line and its limitations. What is your own understanding of poverty? What alternatives would you propose to the official definition?

Handouts on poverty and the poverty line.
Levitan et al., ch. 1.
Mead, Beyond Entitlement, chs. 1-2.
Mead, New Politics of Poverty, ch. 1.

Feb. 2: Welfare: The nation’s means-tested aid programs, both cash and in-kind. How did they arise? Why do they seem so fragmented and incomplete? Why don’t we just guarantee everyone an income? Van Parijs’s proposal for an unconditional basic income. How do you respond?

Handout on welfare.
Levitan et al., chs. 2-4.

Feb. 9: Welfare reform: The course of welfare reform to date. The rise of the work issue and the dramatic changes of the last decade. Welfare has many shortcomings—has reform focused on the right ones? How would you have reformed welfare?

Weaver, ch. 4.
Mead, Beyond Entitlement, chs. 3-5.
Mead, New Politics of Poverty, chs. 8-9.

Feb. 16: Public opinion: How does the public feel about welfare? Is it generous, indifferent, demanding, racist? How do Americans understand citizenship? What is your own view?

Weaver, ch. 7.
Gilens, chs. 1-3, 8.
Mead, New Politics of Poverty, ch. 3.
Mead, Beyond Entitlement, pp. 233-58.
Feb. 23: National politics: The political patterns underlying welfare politics in Washington. Why does welfare arouse such passions inside the Beltway? Is this a partisan issue, or is it something else? What is the real issue?

- Mead, Beyond Entitlement, chs. 8-11.
- Weaver, chs. 5-6, 8.

March 2: State politics: How is state politics surrounding welfare different from federal? How are the states different from one another? What explains the extraordinary success of reform in Wisconsin? How did your home state tackle reform?

- Mead, Government Matters, chs. 1-3, 6, 11-12.

March 9: Change over time: Debate about welfare has shifted substantially over time, becoming less focused on economics and more on moral proprieties. How do you explain these changes? What questions can one raise about them?

- Joel Schwartz, “PRWORA and the Promotion of Virtue,” from Welfare Reform and Political Theory, ed. Lawrence M. Mead and Christopher Beem, forthcoming. Available at: www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/politics/faculty/mead/Course_page_V53.0395.html

March 14-19—Spring recess.

March 23: Secular ethics: Nonreligious arguments for and against a social responsibility for the poor. Does society have an onus to support the needy or not? Is this prudent? Morally required? Under what conditions? Should the poor have to work in return?

- Schmidt and Goodin.

March 30: Biblical ethics: A key influence on attitudes toward poverty is Biblical religion, both Judaism and Christianity. What do these traditions say about what a moral welfare policy requires? How do they differ from the secular philosophies? Again, may any expectations be made of the poor in return for support?

- Passages from the Bible. Available at www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/politics/faculty/mead/Course_page_V53.0395.html

Bane and Mead, chs. 1-4.

**April 6: Paternalism:** Some welfare reform programs involve close supervision of the clients. Is this effective? Morally acceptable?


**April 13: Political theory:** Are the problems of poverty and welfare dependency anticipated by traditional political theorists such as Hobbes, Locke, or Madison? What assumptions of that theory do these social problems bring into question? Do we need a new political theory?


**April 20: Student presentations**

**April 27: Student presentations**

_Papers due in class._

**May 11: Final examination, 2-3:50 PM, in 25 West 4th St., #C-5._
PAPER ASSIGNMENT

Questions

Your paper should allow you to delve more deeply into some topic related to the politics of welfare or poverty. The following are some possible topics. You may also develop your own question in consultation with me.

Welfare waivers: A little-known aspect of welfare reform was the use of “waiver experiments” to develop alternatives to standard AFDC. States began requesting waivers of normal federal welfare rules to run demonstration programs in the 1970s, and in the 1980s and 1990s presidents actively encouraged this. It was a way to reform welfare at a time when reform at the national level was stalemated. Wisconsin and other states used waivers to institute important reforms well in advance of PRWORA. Question: To what extent did PRWORA depend on the waiver? Could they have transformed welfare without PRWORA?


On the Wisconsin case, see Mead, Government Matters, ch. 2.

The politics of reauthorization: Supposedly, the success of PRWORA narrowed the range of debate about welfare in Washington. Extreme positions on left and right were now less defensible. And yet Congress has been unable to agree on the reauthorization of TANF, which is now more than two years overdue. Question: What explains the impasse over TANF reauthorization? Are the older divisions still operative, or have new ones arisen?

Search for journalistic accounts of the politics over the past four years, particularly in the New York Times and Washington Post.

Search for analyses of the issues by scholars at the Washington think tanks, particularly the American Enterprise Institute, the Brookings Institution, and the Heritage Foundation. An example is Ron Haskins and Paul Offner, “Achieving Compromise on Welfare Reform Reauthorization,” from the “Welfare Reform and Beyond” project at Brookings. Available through the Brookings web page.

The political effects of welfare reform: Traditionally, liberals were frustrated by the power of the welfare issue to deflect attention from the problems of poverty or inequality in America. But it may be argued that if work were enforced in welfare, these economic concerns could get back on the agenda, and social politics would shift to the left. Question: How, if at all, has welfare changed the agenda in social policy?


Examine the Congressional hearings and debates on TANF reauthorization to see whether there is any discernible shift in the agenda compared to 1996 or earlier. For one approach to doing this, see Mead, “Welfare Politics in Congress.”
Examine the party platforms from the 2000 versus 2004 campaigns to see if and how the discussion of social problems changes.

Also consider any change in public opinion. One source is periodic reviews of polls on welfare and poverty in the journal Public Opinion. The last I know is R. Kent Weaver, Robert Y. Shapiro, and Lawrence R. Jacobs, “The Polls—Trends: Welfare,” Public Opinion Quarterly 59, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 606-27; there may be a later article.

The politics of welfare reform in Britain: Outside the U.S., the most advanced welfare reform has occurred in Britain. The last Conservative government and the current Labor government have both pushed reforms with some resemblance to ours. Question: Compare the politics of welfare reform in the United Kingdom to the politics here. What are similarities and differences?


Good sources on the British reform include Ivar Lødemel and Heather Trickey, ’An Offer You Can’t Refuse’: Workfare in International Perspective (Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2001), chs. 1, 7; and Robert Walker and Michael Wiseman, eds., The Welfare We Want? The British Challenge for American Reform (Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2003). Both books should be on reserve at Bobst.

Welfare reform and the left: Work-enforcing welfare reform is usually taken as a conservative policy, but some have justified it as serving the goals of the left. To these interpreters, welfare reform promotes, not individualism and smaller government, but equality and community. Question: Is this a defensible interpretation of reform as it has actually occurred?


The British socialist tradition has usually been seen as endorsing entitlement. However, Stuart White, The Civic Minimum: On the Rights and Obligations of Economic Citizenship (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), ch. 3, argues that, that work requirements are consistent with the leftist tradition. He cites such well-known authors as Beveridge, Hobhouse, T.H. Marshall, and R.H. Tawney. White is on reserve at Bobst.
The basic income debate: Philippe Van Parijs argues that society ought to provide a guaranteed income to all adults regardless of need and work effort. This proposal has provoked wide debate, particularly in Europe. Question: Is universal basic income a defensible proposition? Why or why not?

Van Parijs’ statements include:


For criticisms see:

Stuart White, Civic Minimum, especially ch. 7.

Stuart White, “Social Minimum,” a more recent paper, is available at http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/social-minimum/

The reactions of critics of Van Parijs in the Boston Review symposium.

Rawls and the work test: What does the influential theory of justice developed by John Rawls imply about welfare policy? Must aid be given to the needy? May conditions such as work tests be set on aid? Question: Does Rawls’ political ethics require that entitlement aid be given to the needy or not?

The case that Rawls demands unconditional income support is made in Van Parijs, “Why Surfers Should Be Fed.”

But in later publications, Rawls appeared to qualify this position. Did this shift really change his argument, or was it only superficial? Taking different sides are William Galston, “Conditional Citizenship,” and Stuart White, “Is Conditionality Illiberal?” from Welfare Reform and Political Theory, ed. Lawrence M. Mead and Christopher Beem, forthcoming. Available at www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/politics/faculty/mead/Course_page_V53.0395.html.

The constitution and entitlement: Advocates of entitlement welfare have long argued that some minimum income and other social benefits ought to be guaranteed to all citizens as a constitutional right. This argument has been rejected by the courts but continues to attract attention from legal academics. Question: Currently, is there any constitutional basis to argue for unconditional social benefits such as welfare? Should there be?


*The care work question:* Welfare rights groups traditionally argued for generous aid for single mothers on entitlement grounds rooted in claims to rights. But some advocate such aid, instead, on the ground that the mother performs a social function in raising her child. *Question: Is the care work argument for aid compelling? Can it really be distinguished from the claim based on rights?*


*Conditions and conditionality:* Several authors argue that it is just to demand work of aid recipients only if certain background conditions of justice are satisfied. *Question: Does the legitimacy of work tests depend on other social conditions outside welfare? Why or why not?*

The major statements for this position appear in Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), especially ch. 8, and Stuart White, *The Civic Minimum*. Both are on reserve at Bobst.

For counterarguments, see Mead, “Welfare Reform and Citizenship.”

*Is welfare reform communitarian?* Some would justify reform and work enforcement on classical liberal grounds as promoting individualism and self-reliance. But some have argued that reform really expresses a collective ethos of mutual responsibility often called communitarianism. *Question: Is this interpretation defensible?*


An important statement of communitarian thinking that interprets welfare reform this way is Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy’s Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), especially ch. 9 and Conclusion. On reserve at Bobst.


See the statements of the denominations in testimony before Congress on welfare reform in 1994-6 and more recently. Some sources are given in Bane and Mead, Lifting Up the Poor. Consider also surveys of lay opinion that may exist.

Details

Due: April 27, the last meeting of class. Papers handed in after this will be accepted but penalized--5 points if handed within a week of the due date, that is by class time on May 4.
--10 points if handed in later than this but prior to the time grades are submitted.

Be aware that delays due to commuting, the subway, or computer or printer problems are to be expected and are the student's responsibility.

Extensions without penalty will be given for serious, unexpected, and documented demands on your time, such as illness or family emergency. Students in difficulties should confer with me out of class before the paper is due. For illness, bring a note from a parent or doctor.

Extensions beyond when grades go in require an Incomplete. This also requires that there be serious, unexpected, and documented demands on your time. You must confer with me out of class before the end of the course. Students who fail to turn in a paper, or turn in a paper after grades are submitted, without first arranging an Incomplete will simply fail the course.

Submission: Papers may be handed to me in class on or before the deadline. They may also be left in my box at the Politics Department prior to when I leave for the class when the paper is due.

Papers may be mailed, but must arrive by the time due, not simply be postmarked on that date. Papers may not be submitted by fax or e-mail.

Keep a copy of your paper, in hard copy or on disk, in case it should become lost.

Format: Papers should observe the following guidelines. Papers infringing the rules will be accepted but incur a penalty of 4 points off per infraction, but not more than 8 points total:

--Cover page: must include name, local address, e-mail address, and all possible phone numbers. Please place this data in the upper left-hand corner, to make it easier to locate your paper in a stack.

--Cover page: must also include the question being answered. Write it out on your cover page. This is to make sure that you focus on it. Students often forget to do this!

--Length: 20-25 pages, including footnotes or endnotes but excluding cover page and bibliography. In figuring length, half the length of any tables or figures will be added to the text.
--Papers must be typed or written on a computer.

--Spacing: double-spaced, with 23-6 lines to the page.

--Margins: 1-1.5" on the left and top of pages, .75-1" on the right and bottom.

--Type size: close to the size used for this assignment.

--Pages must be numbered, starting with the first page of text. Numbers may be handwritten.

--Binders--avoid. Instead, papers should be stapled at upper left-hand corner.

**Documentation**: See separate handout. You may use either the author/date or footnote/endnote method.

**Sources**: The paper should be written using the suggested sources and such others as you are able to cover in the time available. Normally, materials cited should have been regularly published as books or as articles in journals or periodicals.

  Materials downloaded off web pages may be cited provided that they come from government sources or were also regularly published.

  Unpublished papers may be cited provided they were written by reputable academics with regular university appointments.

  Materials may *not* be cited if they come from web pages other than the government and were not otherwise published or from academic sources.

**Originality**: Students may discuss the assignments with other students but must write their papers individually, without collaboration with others. Students may seek help with their writing in general, but the writing they hand in should be entirely their own, not edited by others.

**Plagiarism**: Do not use ideas or language borrowed from others without giving the source. *Also*, do not use an author's actual language as if it were your own. When you quote a source verbatim, it is not sufficient to give the reference; you must *also* put quotation marks around the borrowed language to make clear that someone else is talking. It is plagiarism not to cite a source *and also* to use an author's words as if they were your own--even if you do cite the source.

Do not copy material out of books into your paper. Quote from the books only when the author really says it better than you can, and then make clear that someone else is speaking. Plagiarism is a serious offense that will draw heavy penalties.

At the same time, don't feel you have to have a citation on every sentence. The paper is intended to test your own thought and expression. There is no need to document facts that are commonly known to your audience.