What do Courses in Poverty, Social Justice, and Human Capabilities Offer?

Challenging Academics

Women & Gender Studies 422: Gender and Global Economic Justice
Instructor: Strassmann, Fall 2006
This course explores the persistence of gender inequality in societies around the world. What are the causes of this inequality? More generally, how can we best measure and understand poverty and human well-being? Do measures of national output and income status, such as gross domestic product (GDP) help us understand individual well-being?
The concept of human capabilities, developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, provides a new way of theorizing human well-being. The course examines this theory, and considers how gender relations and the organization of domestic life and work may contribute to the persistence of gender inequalities. The course also examines connections with other inequalities, such as class, ethnicity, caste, race, and sexual orientation. Selected readings throughout the course consider policies designed to improve standards of living around the world and to enhance gender equity and women's political empowerment.

Sociology 470: Urban Life and Systems
Instructor: Emerson, Fall 2006
Study of urban development, its systems, and life experiences of urbanites. Will pay particular attention to ways in which cities generate inequality, wealth and poverty. Course uses readings and weekly time spent in assigned neighborhoods. Students will conduct urban ethnographies and analysis through a series of guided assignments.

English 342: The Nineteenth-Century Novel
Instructor: Michie, Spring 2007
A survey of the many genres of the nineteenth-century novel, this course will try to come to terms with some of the insistent questions posed by and through the fiction of the period, including responses to poverty and class conflict and the tension between public and private spheres. This year we will emphasize the genre of the aptly named “social problem novel,” written to alert (usually middle-class) readers to the plight of the poor and disadvantaged. We will also be looking at the detective novel, the marriage plot novel, and the sensation novel on their own terms and for the insight they offer into social problems. Although this is a three-credit course, I will be offering a one-credit trailer, open to all but especially designed for students interested in the study of poverty, where we will look at non-fictional sources dealing with various social problems and will think through their relation to the novel.

History 468: Women and the Welfare State: Sexual Politics and American Poverty
Instructor: Sneider, Spring 2007
This course in the history of women and welfare focuses our attention on women’s contributions to the growth of the welfare state and how welfare has been shaped by understandings of gender, race, and class. We begin by considering the history of women’s benevolent associations and charity organizations prior to the Civil War. We then turn our attention to post-Civil War women’s involvement with settlement houses, unions, and missionary societies. Finally, we investigate the construction of need and entitlement through the Progressive era and the New Deal and pay particular attention to battles overprotective labor legislation and the institutionalization of welfare programs at the federal level.

Summer Internships

Students who have taken one of the four classes may apply for a summer internship that will allow them to combine course study and practical experience in the field working for a non-profit organization or charity.

For the summer of 2007, we will offer a number of paid internships of $3,500 each. The internships will offer nationwide placement and the selection process will be competitive.

These courses in Poverty, Social Justice, and Human Capabilities at Rice University offers a combination of academic studies and practical experience, focusing on fostering human development to alleviate poverty. Students who complete these courses are not only sensitive to the serious problem of poverty but also know what questions to ask so that their decisions as professionals and engaged citizens will impact favorably on impoverished communities and persons.

These courses in Poverty, Social Justice and Human Capabilities are being assembled at Rice in an interdisciplinary manner for the first time this year. This approach was begun with support from the Bridgeway Foundation in Houston, Texas and in collaboration with the Shepherd Program for the Interdisciplinary Study of Poverty and Human Capability at Washington and Lee University. These courses are designed to supplement all majors and fulfill Rice University's mission to “contribute to the betterment of our world.”

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