This course will focus on the sociology of welfare in our society by critically evaluating theory, research, public policy, and action.

While “welfare” normally means to “fare well,” it has come to mean programs (ostensibly) intended to “help” ensure that citizens of a given society “fare well.” It is a policy term that is closely connected to the how a society distinguishes wants from needs. A commonly accepted definition of “need” is “that which is necessary not only for survival, but to live a reasonably autonomous, ‘respectable’ life.” In modern society, these needs would have to include the provision of basic food and clothing, adequate housing, healthcare, education, and opportunities for employment.

While it is universally recognized that the state has an important role, there is wide disagreement about what it should do to accomplishing this. Is the state primarily a facilitator of wealth generation (through market mechanisms in which sufficiency is generally determined by the ability to pay) or, should it be more active in wealth redistribution using the concept of “need” to help ensure a minimal standard of living to all citizens?

This is partially an economic question about how best to correct “market failures” so that increasing wealth for some groups does not come at the expense of others (i.e. ensuring “pareto optimality”).

Yet, it is, perhaps more importantly, a sociological question about the social causes and effects of given economic “systems” (e.g. “capitalism”) and arrangements. It may be that the Canadian economic “system” not only creates but perpetuates a class of “poor people.” It may be that poverty is not well understood or addressed under the assumption of “economically rational individuals making choices in the marketplace.” It may be that a personal responsibility framework suffers a certain poverty of its own in providing the conceptual means to understand and solve economic (and other forms of) marginalization, wealth disparity, and, ultimately, the pain and suffering associated therewith.

In this course, we therefore ask what social, political and economic factors are associated with some populations becoming indigent, marginalized, and chronically lacking in the means to live at or above need. In order to respond to this question, it is necessary to understand those
who experience persistent insufficiency of food, housing, healthcare, education and employment. This means understanding how insufficiency affects people from increases in stress to decreases in health.

A sociological focus continues to provide important research that identifies and tries to understand those who are not faring well. Among other things, it shows who benefits (and who suffers) from mainstream economic assumptions, institutions and practices and the policies of the “welfare state.” How might our economic and our state sponsored welfare systems be part of the problem or part of a solution? Developing an empirical understanding of the real effects of our dominant economic, social and, political assumptions have on each other gives us more power to confront and correct them.

“The poor complain; they always do
But that’s just idle chatter
Our system brings reward to all
At least all those who matter.”
Gerald Helleiner (Canadian Economist)

f) **Course Format:** Seminar style with some lecturing, student presentations, close use of required texts and use of on-line resources, discussions, media, music and films will be used.

g) **Learning Objectives:**

- To understand the common ways in which those in poverty are characterized
- To develop a sociological vocabulary pertaining to the wealth and poverty
- To develop an advanced knowledge sociological of concepts pertaining to social, economic and political marginalization
- To apply sociological concepts to different worldviews about the relationship between economic assumptions and social class.
- To understand how conceptions of welfare serve certain social interests, institutions, hierarchies and power structures
- To answer the question: “Whose interests are advanced by this way of understanding welfare?”
- To apply sociological theory to “social problems”
- To apply sociological theory to understanding the relationship between individuals, society, wealth and poverty
- To consider and debate ideas, concepts and theories vis-à-vis welfare and poverty orally and in writing.
- To advance logic and reasoning skills in writing, on-line discussions and speaking
- To increase confidence and skill in public speaking and presenting ideas to an audience

h) **Assessment/Evaluation (subject to revision):**

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<th>Assessment Type</th>
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<td>Participation</td>
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<td>Quizzes</td>
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<td>On-Line Discussions</td>
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<td>Presentation + Peer Evaluations</td>
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| **Total**               | **100%**

Note: Changes to the outline are possible prior to the first class.

h) **Readings/resources:**

*The Stacked Deck: An Introduction to Social Inequality*
By Jennifer Ball & Lorne Tepperman
Toronto, Oxford University Press, 2016

Other required and supplementary material are posted on ARES.
[http://www.lib.uoguelph.ca/find/find-type-resource/course-reserves-ares](http://www.lib.uoguelph.ca/find/find-type-resource/course-reserves-ares)