

**Rural Poverty
RS 666
Spring 2007
TERM PAPER**

This assignment is an excellent way for you to expand your interests in this class and, for *graduate students, to help you to complete thesis and dissertation work as well as papers to be published and presented*. Papers should focus on a topic in which you have genuine interest and should relate to the course focus on poverty or social stratification.

Graduate students must complete a course paper. This paper must be at least 15 typed pages of text, doubled spaced pages (not including references)—*but no longer than 25 pages*. Masters'/Ph.D. proposal development around the topic of poverty is also acceptable, but should be discussed with me first. Type font should be the size used here. Margins should be no more than one-inch each on either side.

Undergraduates may complete a course paper of at least 12 pages (not including references) or two book reviews (each about 6 pages, for a total of 12 pages). Type font should be the size used here. Margins should be no more than one-inch each on either side.

All paper topics and books must be cleared with me first. To help you **I will need a one-paragraph, typed, abstract from you by Tuesday, April 17.** *For papers* indicate on the abstract: 1) the topic for the paper; 2) why the topic is important; 3) the type of research you will conduct--where you will get your data, etc. *For book reviews* indicate on the abstract: 1) two books related to poverty or some aspect of a population's well-being that you plan to read; and 2) why you have selected these books.

All papers are due on in my office or before Friday, June 1. For students graduating in Spring Quarter, please turn in your paper one week before your final grades are due.

Please be aware of university regulations concerning plagiarism. You must provide references whenever you *a) quote more than several (3 or 4) words from another author b) mention ideas that are not your own but from some other writer c) report numbers or figures.* *Quotation marks must be used to indicate all text that is taken word-for-word from another person or publication.* **If you are in any doubt whether or not quotations or citations are needed, or if plagiarism might be an issue, it is your responsibility to check with me.**

Citing references in your assignment: For papers, it is easiest to give the author's name and year of publication only in the text ---for example, (Lobao 1990, p. 102) because you will also have a separate bibliography page at the end of your paper that lists the full title and publisher. For newspaper articles, you can note the source of the information in the text directly, by naming the author and title of report, book, or article. For website material, please put in the complete link, so that I can look at the sources of your web-based material.

Bibliography: You can use any established style for your bibliography, as long as you are consistent. An easy style is to use the journal, *Rural Sociology*, a style which you can see in my article from the April 24 readings.

Editing and proof-reading your paper: Before submitting your paper to me, please make sure that you have edited it thoroughly. Good ideas are lost to the reader, if you have not edited carefully. Also, failure to carefully edit your paper indicates that you have rushed through the assignment.

Please begin thinking about and working on your assignment now! The quarter goes by very fast.

Criteria I use in grading your paper:

Your grade is based on the quality of your work. In grading your work, I ask: 1) Is the paper/review well-organized? Is the discussion clear? Is the text tight and to the point? Do the arguments follow a clear, logical path? 2) Does the discussion show thoughtful consideration of the material at a level that would be expected for a graduate/undergraduate student at a major university? 3) Did the student carefully follow the directions for the assignment? In the case of book reviews, for example, did the student clearly cover all sections listed? Is this student's paper long enough as per instructions for paper length, margins, and printing? 4) Has the student carefully edited the material? (Lack of editing reflects that you have rushed through an assignment).

I. A BASIC OUTLINE FOR RESEARCH PAPERS (Assignment for Graduate or Undergraduate Students)

****Note: this outline is intended as a guide to conventional, generally quantitative research--mainly for graduate students. You may have to modify this for more qualitative types of studies. But whether your research is qualitative or quantitative, you need to be cognizant of the organization of your material, previous research and the importance of your topic, clear statement of findings and conclusions.*

1. Introduction

What is the topic? Why is the important--to which audiences/bodies of literature are you addressing this paper? (The importance of your paper for theory, policy, and empirical work should be noted as appropriate). What will you do in this paper? e.g., "In this paper, I focus on three questions (about my topic)--these questions are....." By the second page of your paper (if not earlier) the reader should know exactly what you plan to do in the paper.

2. Literature Review

What is known about this topic and who has done significant work on it? What are the conclusions of research on this topic--summarize the findings to date. What is still not known about this topic? For example, researchers may not have examined the topic in certain geographic contexts, among certain groups of people; there may be methodological/theoretical limitations of previous research; researchers may not have applied your particular theory to their research question at hand. Usually, a paper/thesis/dissertation will focus on these gaps in the research--the exception to this

rule is a study that is focused on directly replicating someone else's work.

3. Hypothesis Development

Based on the previous research/or logical extension of this research, what relationships do you expect to see? You don't have to state formal hypotheses--you can simply state your expectations on the basis of previous literature are appropriate.

4. Method of Data Collection and Measurement of Concepts

Data can be gathered in a number of ways. In this course, main ways of gathering data will probably be (because of human subjects review, time limitations) use of pre-collected data, such as surveys that others have done or use of secondary data such as that collected by the Census. Data from sources such as key informants (e.g., agency personnel, professors, employers), published biographies, journal and newspaper articles may be appropriate.

5. Analyze Results

Arrange the information in orderly form and interpret the findings. Confirm, reject, or modify your hypothesis--if you perform a quantitative analysis, you will do this by confirmation of statistical results/for qualitative research, what do your findings tell you about expected relationships?

6. Conclusions

Discuss the significance of the findings, relating them to existing theory and research. What limitations of your study are there--e.g., what questions would you have liked to answer but were unable to? What new research should be done? Define topics for future research.

Potential Topics for Papers

1) Consequences of economic changes for the well-being of a subset of the population (e.g., women, ethnic groups, children) and/or in a particular region, nation, time period (be sure that you are not too broad in focus).

Sources of data: national censuses, International Labour Organization (ILO) statistics, Latin American Statistical Abstract. For the U.S.: Statistical Abstract, County-City Data Book, U.S. Census of Population, Census of Agriculture.

2) How are particular rural industries such as the extractive sector (natural resources or forestry, fishing, mining, and family/industrialized farming) related to poverty and/or inequality? You could look at the U.S., a particular state or region, or a location outside the U.S. such as a particular country or region within (e.g., the Amazon rainforest in Brazil).

3) Historical Research-- focus on poverty/poor people in the past: on Ohio farms, in coal mining communities, in your country. How were poor people treated in the past--use of the work-house, prisons?

Sources of data: national censuses; oral history collections; biographies; case study examples in books; analysis of old newspapers, magazine articles.

4) Focus on economic and political power of elites. How do elites contribute (or not) to the maintenance and creation of poverty?

5) Social problems related to poverty, such as hunger or homelessness in the U.S. (data from books, interviews with staff at shelters, churches).

6) Social change in a third world nation and their impact on well-being. You should focus on one major type of change, such as political, demographic, economic or religious changes, or changes in the role of women. What are some of the factors causing these changes? What are the consequences of these changes on various indicators of well-being including poverty? You might also examine the role of the U.S. in bringing about these changes. Data sources include: case studies of specific nations and statistical abstracts (e.g., Latin American Statistical Abstract) of major world regions and nations.

7) Government policy and social/economic well-being. Choose a certain set of government policies, such as those dealing with social welfare or economic development policies. How are government policies related to the well-being of populations?

II. BASIC OUTLINE FOR BOOK REVIEWS (Assignment for Undergraduate Students Only)

Critical Essays On Two Books Related to Course Topic

Examples of books that you may want to select are listed on the course syllabus. You can also choose other books. All books, however, need to be cleared with me first, as is requested in the abstract assignment.

The purpose of this topic is to write a critical essay on two books that illustrate sociological issues or principles related to the course material. Examples of such books include: Night comes to the Cumberlands (a classic study about the effects of coal mining in Appalachia); As You Sow (the effects of corporate farming on communities) Harvest of Rage and Rural Radicals (both are about political radicalism in rural areas as a response to hardship), Pigs, Profits, and Rural Communities (the effects of large hog operations on communities), Making Ends Meet (how poor women survive), Children of the Land, Beyond the Amber Waves of Grain, and Debt and Dispossession: Farm Loss in America's Heartland (all three books are about the effects of downturns in farming on families, and communities), Working Hard and Making Do in Small Town America (how working families survive in small towns), Indian Reservations in the United States: Territory, Sovereignty and Socioeconomic Change (about the reservation system where most rural Native Americans live), Learning to Labor (how working class children are channeled into blue collar jobs), Fast Food Nation (how the fast food industry is linked to low-paying jobs, environmental degradation, and American's obesity). (See list attached on course syllabus for these and other books). You may choose other books than those I have listed--but you must have a confirmation from me approving the two books you have selected.

Your essays should cover the outline below and major aspects of your book's topic. *Each essay should be at least 6 pages long---12 pages total for reviews of both books.*

For Each Book:

1. Present a brief summary, describing the most important points (about one page).
2. What sociological issues or principles does this book address? Why are these important? Consider some of the issues addressed in this class--how does this book illustrate (or not illustrate these issues). (at least two pages)
3. Explain the author's viewpoint towards these issues. Do you think this viewpoint would be closer to the structural or conflict perspectives (e.g., focus on how the economic system creates and maintains poverty unequal distribution of wealth) or closer to the functionalist/neo-classical economic perspective (e.g., focus on individual or "flawed character" factors). And/or is some other theory being used? Did the author suggest any programs or policies that might help improve the lives of rural people? (at least two pages)
4. Give your critical evaluation of the book. What did you like/dislike about the book? Did the author overlook any important points you felt she/he should have discussed? What issues haven't been addressed in the readings? What new issues are there? What new methodologies should be used?. Note: your discussion should center on the sociological aspects of the book and not on literary technique, writing style. (about one page)

How to "Critique" a Book, Article, or other Scholarly Work

In the social sciences and humanities, a critique = an analytical discussion. To "critique" is not the same as "criticize." "Critiques" are the building-blocks of the production of scholarly knowledge.

For instance, a researcher writes a book/article. In the case of important published work, it is first greeted with world-class approval. Later researchers will then a) begin to extend the work in various ways, often by branching out into new but related topics and b) begin to "pick apart" at the original publication, which will spawn new research c) as research continues, the original publication may continue to be seen as path-breaking but usually with limitations noted by its critics---and/or the publication may be eventually rejected by the scholarly community. The most likely scenario, however, is that it is simply forgotten. Then, the authors arguments may be re-packaged by subsequent generations of scholars. This is the spiral of scholarship in social science.

Graduate and (some undergraduate) "seminar" courses in the social sciences and humanities are usually built around the idea of reading books/articles and providing a "critique" of them.

A good example of the "critique" is the book review. All academic disciplines publish "book reviews" of relevant books. You can easily find examples in your discipline's major journals. In sociology, we have an entire journal, Contemporary Sociology, devoted to book reviews.

In a critique, the purpose is to consider questions/issues such as:

- 1) What are the author's assumptions about the social world?
(eg. the author's theoretical perspective)
- 2) How do these assumptions lead the author to focus on certain aspects of social reality to the neglect or down-playing of others? That is, authors cannot address all relevant questions and populations of interest--they must choose selectively. How do their assumptions about the social world affect what they will address, what they will ignore?
- 3) Contextualize the publication in the time and place in which the author was writing. What data/information were available at the time and place of writing? How did the social context influence what the author "saw" at the time? Freud's theories, for instance, came out of the Victorian era. We could not expect him to have foreseen the advances made in psychotherapy. We can look back today and point out the limitations of Freud's work from a feminist perspective--but to "criticize" in this case "reprimand" Freud himself for failing to take a radical feminist perspective is misguided.
- 4) What is the stated purpose of the article/book? Again, one has to be choosy about selecting certain aspects of the topic over others. By the time you reach the conclusions, you should be able to answer whether the author attained her/his stated goals.
- 5) Given what we know about the topic, compare the book/article to others on the same topic.

What are the strengths, limitations as compared to other literature? The relevant lines along which this assessment may occur include: adequacy of theory and research methods, logic and organization of the argument, strength of findings, importance of findings for theory, policy (in other words, some articles/books may be excellent in their technical execution but very boring--they don't make an "impact").

- 6) Looking Backward---often you will have the chance to write a "critique" of a book/article written long ago. You must be particularly careful to contextualize the author's work in that case. Questions to ask include: How did the author's work affect subsequent research--what impact did it have on the field? How did subsequent researchers learn and build from this work? What related topics did the research generate? What findings have been generated from subsequent research that bear upon the evidence presented by the author? How does this new evidence reflect back on the author's arguments? For an excellent example of a scholar whose work has been the subject of numerous "critiques" in the social science, see any recent discussion of Marxian theory-- "critiques" of Marx resulted in a re-thinking of his social theory, now aptly called "Neo-Marxian" theory.