

**William & Mary  
Poverty in America  
Syllabus**

ECON 453  
Spring 2022  
Mon., Wed.  
3:30 – 4:50 PM in Chancellors Hall 121

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**Course description and objectives**

America is one of the wealthiest countries in the world yet continues to struggle with high rates of poverty. Even our cherished Williamsburg has a homelessness problem. This course will consider poverty in America with particular attention to public policies that mitigate or exacerbate the problem. Students will learn about details of public policies such as cash assistance, housing assistance, food stamps, minimum wages, healthcare provision, and discrimination law. Students will quantify the scale and distribution of poverty by using government data to measure family incomes and other characteristics. We probably won't end poverty, but we'll move in the right direction by understanding it better.

The course is designed as a capstone for the economics or public policy major, drawing upon prior courses about economic theory, statistics, and data analysis. The course fulfills the COLL 400 requirement. Students will take initiative in synthesis and critical analysis of poverty statistics, solve problems associated with how social scientists and policy makers should measure poverty, create original measurements of poverty in America, and communicate effectively with a diversity of audiences through a policy brief and other writings.

Prerequisite courses are Intermediate Microeconomic Theory (ECON 303) and Econometrics (ECON 308).

**Course Materials**

Selected readings posted at the course Blackboard site  
Stata statistics software (see Blackboard for options)

**Determinants of the Final Grade**

Quizzes	10%
Project 1: Calculation of the official poverty rate	15%
Project 2: Poverty policy brief	20%
Project 3: Universal Basic Income paper	20%
Project 4: Poverty rate design and calculation	25%
Class participation	<u>10%</u>
	100%

**Quizzes**

Quizzes will be available in the “Weekly activities” tab on the Blackboard course site. Most weeks will include one or two quizzes that will be due before class meetings. Quizzes provide a check on preparation for class meetings. There will be enough quizzes through the

semester that any individual quiz is a low-stakes evaluation. I will drop the lowest two quiz scores.

### **Projects**

Students will complete four projects. See the separate document called “Guide for Projects” for details. Projects involve a mixture of empirical work with data, written work, and presentations. Essays will be evaluated for economic content and writing style. Late submission earns a reduced grade.

The Writing Resources Center, located on the first floor of Swem Library, is a free service provided to W&M students. Trained consultants offer individual assistance with writing, presentation, and other communication assignments at any stage, from generating ideas to polishing a final product, and across disciplines. To make an appointment, visit the WRC webpage [www.wm.edu/wrc](http://www.wm.edu/wrc).

### **Class Participation**

Class meetings are most productive when students participate in an active way. Part of the course grade will reflect the frequency and quality of a student’s participation in the class, especially during class meetings. Students should study reading assignments prior to the relevant class meetings. To facilitate this, I will distribute questions for class preparation; students should prepare responses to them and come to class ready to discuss their responses. Reading assignments for each week are posted at the Blackboard course site.

### **Grading Standards**

Letter grades for the course will be based on a standard 100-point scale where 93-100 implies an A, 90-92.9 implies an A-, 88-89.9 implies a B+, 83-87.9 implies a B, and so on.

### **Office Hours**

I will be available in my office (Chancellors Hall 256) from 11 AM to noon each Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday during the semester. Please let me know if you would like to schedule a meeting outside those times. E-mail is an excellent way to contact me ([pmchenry@wm.edu](mailto:pmchenry@wm.edu)).

### **Honor Code**

I encourage you to collaborate in your studies and discussion of course material. However, plagiarism on a writing assignment is a violation of the Honor Code. Plagiarism is presenting someone else’s words or ideas as your own. When you write a document and distribute it, you imply that its words and ideas are your own, except where explicitly noted in the text (as with citations to others’ work). Please do not plagiarize. If you have questions about plagiarism, please ask me.

More resources about plagiarism (and writing in general) are available through the Writing Resources Center (see above).

Students may refer to course notes and other materials when completing quizzes. However, assistance from other people on quizzes is prohibited.

## **Schedule with Meetings and Due Dates**

(Meetings in Chancellors Hall room 121)

### Week 1: Introduction and course details

Meeting: 1/25 at 3:30 PM

### Week 2: Poverty and decision making / Measuring poverty

Meetings:

1/30 at 3:30 PM

2/1 at 3:30 PM

Assignments:

Blackboard quizzes before Monday and Wednesday class meetings

*2/3 is the end of the Add/Drop registration period*

### Week 3: Stata practice / Characteristics of poverty populations

Meetings:

2/6 at 3:30 PM (coding day: bring your computer)

2/8 at 3:30 PM

Assignments:

Blackboard quizzes before Monday and Wednesday class meetings

### Week 4: Economic trends and anti-poverty public policies

Meetings:

2/13 at 3:30 PM

2/15 at 3:30 PM

Assignments:

Blackboard quiz before Wednesday class meeting

Project 1 (Calculation of the official poverty rate) due by 11:59 PM on Wed., Feb. 15

### Week 5: Housing

Meetings:

2/20 at 3:30 PM

2/22 at 3:30 PM: Fred Liggin visit

Assignments:

Blackboard quizzes before Monday and Wednesday class meetings

### Week 6: Housing / Neighborhoods

Meetings:

2/27 at 3:30 PM

3/1 at 3:30 PM

Assignments:

Blackboard quizzes before Monday and Wednesday class meetings

Project 2 (Poverty policy brief) due by 11:59 PM on Sunday, March 5

### Week 7: Stata practice / Employment

Meetings:

3/6 at 3:30 PM (coding day: bring your computer)

3/8 at 3:30 PM

Assignments:

Blackboard quizzes before Monday and Wednesday class meetings

## SPRING BREAK

### Week 8: Employment

Meetings:

3/20 at 3:30 PM

3/22 at 3:30 PM

Assignments:

Blackboard quizzes before Monday and Wednesday class meetings

Notify Prof. McHenry about your Project 4 group by 11:59 PM on Sunday, March 26:  
whether individual, or who is in your group

### Week 9: Universal Basic Income (UBI)

Meetings:

3/27 at 3:30 PM

3/29 at 3:30 PM

Assignments:

Meetings with group for Project 3

*3/27 is the last day to withdraw from courses*

### Week 10: Health

Meetings:

4/3 at 3:30 PM

4/5 at 3:30 PM

Assignments:

Blackboard quizzes before Monday and Wednesday class meetings

Project 3 (Universal Basic Income analysis) due by 11:59 PM on Wednesday, April 5

### Week 11: Stata practice / Race, ethnicity, and nativity

Meetings:

4/10 at 3:30 PM

4/12 at 3:30 PM

Assignments:

Blackboard quizzes before Wednesday class meeting

Project 4 plan due by 11:59 PM on Wednesday, April 12

### Week 12: Race, ethnicity, and nativity

Meetings:

4/17 at 3:30 PM

4/19 at 3:30 PM

Assignments:

Blackboard quizzes before Monday and Wednesday class meetings

Project 4 Stata code due by 11:59 PM on Wednesday, April 19

Week 13: Education / Student presentations

Meetings:

4/24 at 3:30 PM

4/26 at 3:30 PM

Assignments:

Blackboard quiz before Monday class meeting

Project 4 presentation for students scheduled this week

Week 14: Student presentations

Meetings:

5/1 at 3:30 PM

5/3 at 3:30 PM

Assignments:

Project 4 presentation for students scheduled this week

Project 4 due by 11:59 PM on Monday, May 8

**Instructor: Peter McHenry**

I was born 50 miles away into a Navy family in Portsmouth, VA. I earned my BS from Vanderbilt and my PhD in economics from Yale. My research is mostly in labor economics and health economics. I use a variety of survey and administrative data sets to test and measure theories about work and pay. I have studied schools, hospitals, and nursing homes in depth, and I have a particular interest in the influence of public policies on people's lives.

Over the past several years, I've been getting more involved with those trying to serve the poor in Williamsburg. I'm learning a lot. I hope you can say the same throughout this semester. Toward that end, I welcome your questions and comments. My contact information is on the first page.