Introduction

The contemporary welfare state is undergoing a fundamental transformation. Between the last quarter of the 19th century and the middle of the 1970s, industrialized societies throughout Western Europe and North America created a panoply of social programs which became known as welfare states. The generosity, scope and coverage of these programs varied from one country to another, but by the 1970s, across the advanced capitalist world, the state had taken responsibility for a wide range of activities that had previously been provided either by the market or by unpaid labor within the family (usually performed by women).

Beginning in the 1970s, welfare states everywhere found themselves threatened by ideological criticism from both the Right and the Left, and a raft of economic and social challenges, including the aging of the population, globalization, feminization of the labor force, and deindustrialization. The question of the compatibility of welfare states and market capitalism was again raised for the first time since the 1930s. Initially, the response of governments tended to be to curtail the generosity of welfare programs and generally ratchet down the scope and scale of social spending. But in the last two decades, a more fundamental transformation has begun to become apparent. Welfare spending has shrunk in some areas, while expanding in others, tax-credits have replaced state programs, and the balance of state, market and family provision of welfare has changed in important ways. This course investigates this process of transformation. It looks at the scholarly debates that seek to explain the causes and trajectory of change, and evaluates arguments about the extent of divergence of welfare states across advanced capitalist societies. Particular attention will be paid to changes to welfare and healthcare programs.

Engaging in a significant research project is a major aim of this research seminar. Part of the semester will be taken up with discussion of student research papers, as students present their research proposals, and then drafts of their papers, and other students and the instructor offer comments and constructive criticism.

Requirements

This is a seminar and so the primary requirement is that students do the assigned reading (which is about 200 pages a week) on time and be prepared to discuss it in class. Each student must
write comments (anywhere from a paragraph or two to a page or two) on the readings each week. The purpose of the comments is to identify the main issues, questions and criticisms so that we can incorporate them into class discussion. A description of what I expect from these comments is available on the Blackboard web site for this class, and at the end of this syllabus. You should read it carefully. The comments should be posted to the ‘Discussion Board’ tab of Blackboard by 6.00am on the morning of class (i.e each Tuesday for which we have class readings). Students will often make oral presentations of the readings in class. The written comments, oral presentations, and general class participation, will be worth one third of the grade.

The other two thirds of the grade will come from a substantial (roughly 20-25 page) research paper on a topic chosen by the student, due at the end of the semester. In addition, students must hand in a prospectus for their research paper (the topic plus a preliminary bibliography) by Monday October 27th at 8.00am. The October 28th class period will be devoted to a discussion of those proposals. For the last three weeks of the semester, class periods will be devoted to discussion of draft research papers with students acting as discussants. The research paper is due by 11:00am on Friday December 19th.

Finally, there will inevitably be some changes to the course as the semester progresses – changes in the readings, additional details of assignments, questions for the weekly comments, and so on – which are not included on this syllabus. I will provide weekly updates in the “Announcements” section of the Blackboard web site for this course along with a syllabus and other materials. We will also use Blackboard for posting drafts of research papers and proposals. Check the Blackboard site at least once a week. In the unlikely event that you miss a class, you should always check the web site in case I have announced something of importance.

Course readings

There are one book to buy for this course: Neil Gilbert, Transformation of the Welfare State. It is available at the College Bookstore.

All the other readings will be available electronically, and can be found at the “Course Readings” tab on Blackboard. You can then read (and if you wish, print) this material. The readings are listed alphabetically by the last name of the first author on the syllabus. Check page numbers carefully, so that you read the correct section of each reading at the correct time. In many cases I have had some sections of a book scanned in that you do not need to read, or that you read at different points in the semester, so do be aware of page numbers.

Class Schedule:

September 2nd

Introduction

No reading
September 9th

Theorizing


Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Regulating The Poor*, chapter 1 (pages 3-42).

David Goodhart, “The Discomfort of Strangers” (9 pages) in *The Guardian* [February 24, 2004].


September 16th

Showing of Frederick Wiseman’s *Welfare*


September 23rd

Gendering and Categorizing


September 30th

The Transformation of the Welfare State


William Sewell, “From State-Centrism to Neoliberalism” (pages 254-287) in Peter Hall and Michele Lamont, eds., *Successful Societies*.


October 7th

Taxation, Gender and Varieties of Welfare State Change


Monica Prasad and Yingying Deng, “Taxation and the Worlds of Welfare” (pages 431-457) in *Socio-Economic Review* [2009].


Rebecca Surender, “Modern Challenges to the Welfare State and the Antecedents of the Third Way” (pages 3-24) in Jane Lewis and Rebecca Surender, eds., *Welfare State Change: Towards a Third Way*?


**October 14th**  
No Class

No reading or class. Consult with me about paper proposals.

**October 28th**  
Discussion of Paper Proposals

No reading. Circulate paper proposals by Monday October 27th at 8.00am.

**November 4th**  
Welfare to Workfare


Loic Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor*, prologue and chapter 3 (pages xi-xxiii & 76-109).

**November 11th**  
Healthcare: In Theory and The Rest of the World


**November 18th**  
Healthcare Reform in the United States

Terri Reynolds, “Dispatches from the Emergency Room,” in *New Left Review*, #61, 2010
(pages 49-57).


Thomas Miller, “When Obamacare Fails: The Playbook for Market-Based Reform” (all) *American Enterprise Institute* [2012].

**November 25th, December 2nd and 9th** Discussion of Paper Drafts

Discussion of research paper drafts. To be circulated to class participants by 1:00pm on Monday before class.
How To Do The Weekly Reading Comments Assignment

This assignment is not complicated, but it is easy to misunderstand. The purpose of these sets of comments is threefold. First, I want to know that you have read the assigned material ahead of class so that I can structure the class on the assumption that we have a shared starting point, and so that we can set about discussing the reading rather than having me simply lecture on it. The class is reading-driven because I am trying to expose you to a wide range of different viewpoints and approaches to the topic, and that requires that I do everything I can to encourage you to do the reading. Second, I need to know ahead of time if some part of the reading was consistently misunderstood so that I can concentrate on going over that material in class. It is often the case that one author or piece of reading is open to multiple interpretations, and if several students interpret it differently from me, we will need to discuss that. I may be expecting you to get something from the reading when you in fact take away something quite different. There may also be language and concepts that you don’t understand, so the written comments are an opportunity to let me know what you would like me to explain in class. Third, your reaction to the reading plays a central role in helping me decide how to organize class discussion. I am particularly interested in which readings resonated with you, and why, and which readings you found weak, irritating, ignorant, or whatever, and why. The critiques of the readings are the best place to start a class discussion – and it means I can call on you to explain your reaction.

What does this mean for the comments you write? It means that, at a minimum, I want the comments to demonstrate that you did the reading. That means a brief summary of the main themes and arguments presented in the reading. You can do this by writing a paragraph on each reading, or by drawing out some themes and using your comments to illustrate how each reading addressed those themes. You do not need to summarize and/or discuss every reading if you do not want to. I want a sense that you have done all the reading, but if you found some of the readings particularly insightful or heinous, then, by all means, focus on them in your comments. Do identify terms or concepts that you would like me to go over in class. Finally, along with your summary and questions, please offer comments, critiques and reactions to the readings. Again, you can do this for every reading, or just a few; you might organize your comments around a general critique of the readings for that week, or point to surprising similarities or differences.

The “product” should be written comments ranging from a couple of paragraphs to a couple of pages. They should be posted to Blackboard at the ‘Discussion Board’ tab by the deadline listed on the syllabus. Please write and post your comments before reading those of other students in the class. I want your reactions to the reading, not your reactions to the comments of other students. You are welcome to respond to student comments after posting your own.

Here is how I grade the comments. I DO NOT make comments on them. If you post comments that demonstrate that you have done the reading, or the great bulk of it, regardless of the quality of those comments, you get one point. If you post no comments, or your comments appear to be about reading for another class, you do not get a point. On rare occasions your comments may be so impressive that I give you two points. In the past this has been true for only about 10% of students each week, and it only happens for comments that go well beyond summary and questioning to offer insightful reaction and critique. You can check that I read and graded your comments by going to the Blackboard gradebook each week. I’m also happy to meet with you to give you some further feedback on your written comments.