

**EC325**  
**ECONOMICS OF POVERTY AND DISCRIMINATION**  
**SHORT PAPER**

You are to write a position paper making the case for some policy that you believe will reduce poverty. You should

1. Describe the groups/causes of poverty that the policy is intended to address.
2. Explain why economic theory suggests that the policy should be desirable.
3. Address any problems suggested by theory.
4. Discuss relevant research that shows whether the policy is effective.

Because you need to use research to support your policy, you will probably want to do a variation on an existing policy. For example, you might want to modify Head Start or have a school supper program in addition to the school breakfast and lunch programs. Simply expanding an existing program generally does not make for a first-rate paper, but you can use information about the existing programs to support your conclusion that the new or modified program would work. If you come up with a completely new program that has never been tried, it is unlikely that you will be able to make a compelling case for adopting it. For the same reasons, it is generally very hard to write a good paper arguing that abolishing some poverty program will reduce poverty: abolishing all taxes *might* create incentives for job creation, work, etc., but it is usually hard to make a really strong argument that global economic changes of that sort will reduce poverty. Similarly, do not try to develop a program that will eliminate all poverty.

The paper should be no more than 2500 words (or about eight pages in 12 point proportional font double-spaced type) including footnotes and/or endnotes. Any standard style of referencing is acceptable. References do not count in the word limit.

***Submitting your paper:*** Do not waste time on fancy covers. Simply stapling the pages together is adequate. In fact, I recommend submitting your paper by email. If you do, there is a good chance that if you want a recommendation from me two years from now, I will be able to find your paper and say something nice about it. If you submit by email, put **EC325 paper in the subject line** and include your paper as a WordPerfect, Latex, Word or PDF file. Be sure to include your name in the title of the file. I am most likely to be able to find your paper at some future date if it is called *your\_name\_ec325*.

There is no one set format that the paper must follow. The following outline may nevertheless be helpful:

1. Describe the nature of the poverty problem you are addressing including relevant data on its prevalence (1 page).
2. Discuss the history of policies designed to alleviate the problem including evidence of whether or not they have worked (1-2 pages).
3. Your proposal. Why theory suggests it should work. Additional evidence that you can bring to bear on the topic. In presenting the case for this policy, you should consider costs as well as benefits. Use economic analysis and data to support your arguments (4 pages).

#### 4. Conclusion (1 page)

#### 5. References

If you are modifying an existing program, then the second section will probably be longer and the third section shorter since you will want to spend time in the second section clarifying the weaknesses in the existing program that your modifications are intended to address. The third section will probably be shorter. Do not forget to address obvious weaknesses in your proposal. Will it create work disincentives or other inefficiencies?

All thoughts, words, and ideas that are not your own must be referenced appropriately. You may cite references from popular magazines and newspapers and the textbooks, but you should not rely solely on these sources. P&D frequently cites the original research papers that form the basis for my conclusions. You will want to look at the original papers. A good paper will go beyond what is available in the assigned readings and show that you have learned how to analyze policy related to poverty in-depth. While your interest in the policy may be based on opinion or emotion, your paper will be evaluated on the basis of the effectiveness of your rational argument(s).

My most common comments on papers are:

Causality? (You should think about and discuss whether “Studies show that children who eat breakfast do better in school.” shows that getting kids to eat breakfast will improve school performance or whether the studies merely show that kids from the sorts of households that ensure that they eat breakfast have other advantages that enhance school performance. The studies may or may not address causality.)

Evidence? (What is your evidence for your statement “Less educated mothers are less effective parents.” And, of course, is your evidence convincing about causality.)

Cite? (This is a variant on “Evidence?” but suggests that you claim that evidence exists but have not referred me to the source of that evidence.) “Research has shown” is almost always an indication that you did not put enough effort and/or thought into the paper. By this point in the course, you should be aware of the strengths and limits of the research. “A study by ... compares outcomes for As and Bs and shows that As outperform Bs. Since assignment to A or B is random, this is convincing evidence that being an A causes better outcomes.”

A couple of more points:

Citations to long pieces should have page numbers. If the whole paper is about a particular experiment, it will make sense to cite the entire paper. But x% of people believe ... (*Encyclopedia Britannica, 10<sup>th</sup> edition*) is not an adequate citation.

It is fine to cite P&D, but I generally know the material in P&D. It should not be your only source.

**The paper must be typed, double-spaced using a font size of 12 or larger.**