Teaching The Wire: Contemporary Analysis of Social Welfare Problems & Solutions

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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK
Teaching Television: An Introduction

- Social welfare in the media largely negative and demoralizing.
- Social work often seen as part of society’s problems rather than solutions.
- Economic and social environment of intolerance, economic bifurcation, and redacting of the social safety net.
- It is imperative that citizens have awareness of complexity of social problems and policy responses.
Television Provides Access

- Most citizens are not and cannot be exposed to the complexity of social problems in an intimate way.
- Citizens must have an awareness of problems to find reasonable solutions.
- Issues of power, cultural competency, diversity, ethical practice, social justice, and critical thinking are part of the milieu.
Students see the inconsistencies in television’s coverage of social issues and the students hone their critical thinking skills.

If students develop critical viewing habits, they begin to understand the breadth of television’s power and the individual and cultural consequences for everyone.

Distance education with technology can provide an effective format for gathering and using interdisciplinary, cutting-edge material.
"The Wire’s exploration of sociological themes is truly exceptional. Indeed I do not hesitate to say that it has done more to enhance our understandings of the challenges of urban life and urban inequality than any other media event or scholarly publication, including studies by social scientists."

What Is The Wire

- 5 Season television mini-series set in Baltimore, created by David Simon.

- Explores issues of: power, social institutions, drugs, crime, substance abuse, gangs, economic deprivation, gentrification, unions, human trafficking, politics, legislative process, poverty, child welfare, and education policy
Moore (2011) noted that the show’s powerfully critical view of social problems would be best understood by students when they could dialogue using things like blog posts.

Harvard’s Johnson also said “It does an excellent job of portraying fundamental sociological principles that have been the focus of social scientists on urban inequality.”

Peter Beilenson, a public health officer in Maryland and instructor at Johns Hopkins Univ., used the show and brought in guest speakers for “real life” perspectives, then asked students to write about relevant social factors.
A Taste of The Wire

• The is Rigged, Man or
• Wallace Teaching Math Game
  – Note: Harsh/Crass Language.

• Syllabus has the following warning:

This course and the DVD contain adult content that may be offensive. Please note that by maintaining enrollment in this course you understand and recognize that to be the case. You also accept any risk this may cause.
1. Identify the major themes of The Wire. (Measure: Create an assignment, Exam II)

2. Reflect on their own sources of privilege and personal assumptions regarding disadvantaged populations. (Measure: Autobiography)

3. Be able to define the processes by which policy is made in the public arena. Interpret the complex impact that urbanization has had on institutions and individuals. (Measure: Exam I, Character & Power Analysis)

4. Formulate recommendations for intervention strategies corresponding to the dominant issues identified in The Wire. (Exam I)

5. Apply their understanding of urban issues to the development and critical analysis of programs and policies appropriate to addressing contemporary social and economic problems. (Character & Power Analysis, Exam II)
# The Syllabus/Readings

**Session Schedule**

Differential for Undergraduates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Meeting Date</th>
<th>Class Discussion/Lecture Topics/Preparation</th>
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**Note:** Nothing is required the week of Spring Break!

**Have fun, recharge, and travel, don’t blame your fatigue on me!**

**Practice self-care!**

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*Department of Social Work*
Season One: Life on the Streets

- Why I signed up for this class
- Open Impressions
- Our Weekly Community Blog – The Streets
- Poverty in the United States: A Snapshot
- Global Rich List

Take a moment to add your income onto the global rich list to see where you "stand" in relationship to the rest of the world.

- About Baltimore
- A Timeline of US Drug Policies
- Murphy Homes
- Jay Z's 99 Problems and DeAngelo's stop on I-95
- Blackwell not Barksdale
Data Collection & Evaluation Methods

- Demographic Survey
- Pre-test
- Post-test
- Course Evaluations
- Assignment Grades & Content

- Univariate Analysis on Demographic Data
- Paired T-Test
- ANOVA
- Content Analysis of Qualitative responses
## Student Demographics (N=20)

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<tr>
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<tr>
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<table>
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<td>Suburban</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
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Pre-Test Results

I am comfortable defining the process of policy development in the public arena. 3.15

I am able to interpret the complex impact that urbanization has had on institutions. 3.1

I am able to identify the implications of social equity and cultural competency in public policy development and implementation. 3.55

I currently reflect on my person sources of privilege and assumptions regarding disadvantaged populations. 3.75

I am able to apply policy theories and problem solving methods as the focal point of case analysis. 3.3

I am able to apply my understanding of urban issues to the development and critical analysis of programs and policies appropriate to addressing contemporary social and economic problems. 3.35

I am able to formulate recommendations for intervention strategies corresponding to dominant urban issues. 2.89
Unsolicited Feedback

Select Feedback:

— I just wanted to email you and thank you for starting such a wonderful class. I really enjoyed the class, not to mention that The Wire is fantastic. I really felt like I learned a lot and was exposed to so much information. This class has deeply affected me, before this I couldn't "see" how the police, local government and the community interacts so closely. Most importantly, I am able to see how institutions (especially the cops) can be influenced by funding, political agendas, and personal interests of those in said institutions. Thank you so much, it has been a great experience! Have a great rest of the summer!

— I just wanted to say thank you for such a great class. I learned so much and it was so much fun. I really didn't realize how many things were so connected!

Final Assignment: Inaugural Class

http://prezi.com/1cdyw1yuip5j/the-wire-concept-mapping-project/
References


Thank You!

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