I. BASIC COURSE INFORMATION

   A. Course Number and Title:  HMNS 109 POVERTY & SOCIETY

   B. New or Modified Course:  New

   C. Date of Proposal:  Semester: Spring   Year: 2011

   D. Sponsoring Department:  Humanities, Social Science & Education

   E. Semester Credit Hours:  3

   F. Weekly Contact Hours:  Lecture: 3
                            Laboratory: 0

   G. Prerequisites/Corequisites:  None

   H. Laboratory Fees:  None

   I. Name and Telephone Number or E-Mail Address of Department Chair:
      Kimberley Schirner, kschirn@raritanval.edu

II. COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Through the lens of economic class, this course examines the nature and effect of poverty within our communities and within the socio-political structures that surround them. Students will gain familiarity with poverty issues such as people’s views of poverty, poverty measurement, the characteristics of the poverty population, underlying causes of poverty, and government programs and policies that address poverty. Various theoretical perspectives are utilized in an effort to understand why particular individuals and families become trapped in the tyranny of generational poverty and what change agents are best able to raise people out of poverty. Questions to be addressed include: Who are the poor? Why does poverty remain so pervasive? How do economic processes contribute to poverty? Are people from particular racial and ethnic backgrounds or family types inevitably more likely to be poor? What are the effects of gender? Through a process of co-investigation, students assess their own position within a system of structured economic class (poverty, middle-class and wealthy environments) and develop solutions for solving individual, community and systemic problems that contribute to the perpetuation of poverty in the U.S. Assessment, analysis, and planning for change are key components of the course.
III. STATEMENT OF COURSE NEED

The course is designed for two groups of students. Under-resourced students will find that the course directly addresses the complex economic and social hurdles that they face daily, and resourced students with a concern for social or economic justice will learn about poverty from those who experience it first-hand and have an opportunity to support individuals seeking to escape it. A goal of the course is to provide the under-resourced students with both the knowledge and the social support—during and after the completion of the semester—to assist their escape from poverty and to provide the resourced students with the knowledge and the capacity to help reduce the poverty of individuals they know and the community they live in.

The course is based on the Bridges Out of Poverty and Circles initiatives, community programs for reducing poverty by offering families an understanding of the nature of poverty and helping them develop their own plan for getting ahead, followed by long-term support from middle-class allies. Bridges out of Poverty and Circles initiatives operate around the nation with pilot projects in New Jersey in Sussex and Somerset counties. Community college versions of the program, similar to the one proposed here, are expanding, as are other versions in businesses and other organizations.

While Somerset and Hunterdon counties are wealthy as a whole, significant poverty exists in several communities and is growing in the current depressed economy. While RVCC sees itself as available to any and all who seek higher education, in fact it remains a remote dream for many of the poor. The requirements of transportation, time, money, family support, and basic academic skills make it very difficult for the poor to complete or even begin an education here. This course is designed to inform and support both those individuals as well as students who wish to help them.

IV. PLACE OF COURSE IN COLLEGE CURRICULUM

A. Free elective
B. This course meets a degree requirement for the A.A.S. in Human Services degree.
C. Course transferability; for New Jersey schools go to the NJ Transfer website, www.njtransfer.org. For all other colleges and universities go to their individual websites. (Paul Michaud is currently researching this, but generally believes that it will transfer well.)

V. OUTLINE OF COURSE CONTENT

A. Sociological perspectives on the causes of poverty
B. Economic disparity and the widening of the rich/poor gap
C. The hierarchical structure and the hidden-rules of economic class
D. The role of language, discourse patterns and story structure in framing socioeconomic class
E. The driving force of middle class rules upon the orientation of societal institutions, with primary focus upon institutions of higher education and the human services system
F. The role of institutional sexism and racism in the maintenance of poverty
G. The inter-relationship between college, resources, and economic class
H. The development of human and social capital on the campus and in the community
I. Fostering of student engagement with social capital on the campus and in the community
VI. EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

A. Educational Goals

Students will:
1. examine the psychosocial impact of poverty on individuals and the community (GE- RVCC 6; NJ 5).
2. analyze and discuss the complex dynamics of poverty both orally and in writing (GE- RVCC 2; NJ 1).
3. gather social science data to define the parameters of poverty (GE- RVCC 3; NJ 4).
4. examine poverty from multiple theoretical perspectives (GE-RVCC 4, 6; NJ 5).
5. consider the ethical implications of social policies and societal assumptions (GE-RVCC 5; NJ 9).

B. Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:
1. Demonstrate a basic sociological knowledge of the causes and effects of poverty in the U.S., including the role of institutional sexism and racism in the maintenance of poverty
2. Describe and synthesize concepts, principles, and theories used to study poverty.
3. Critically discuss contemporary poverty issues and information
4. Describe the hidden rules of economic class within each hierarchical structure: poverty, middle class, wealth
5. Describe resources needed for well-being and self-sufficiency. Critically evaluate oneself in relationship to resources, well-being and self-sufficiency
6. Identify processes for formulating change to help remove barriers of poverty
7. Communicate the above effectively, both orally and in writing.

VII. MODES OF TEACHING and LEARNING

A. lecture/discussion
B. small group work
C. student collaboration
D. personal reflection

VIII. PAPERS, EXAMINATIONS and other ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS

A. essays
B. journals
C. action plan(s)

IX. GRADE DETERMINANTS

A. journals
B. exams
C. projects
D. oral presentation

X. TEXT and MATERIALS
   Publisher: University of California Press, 2006
   ISBN: 0-520-24841-4

B. Investigations into Economic Class in America by Philip E. DeVol, Karla M. Krodel
   Publisher: aha! Process, Inc., 2010

C. SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS provided by Instructor

(Please Note: The course outline is intended only as a guide to course content and resources. Do not purchase textbooks based on this outline. The RVCC Bookstore is the sole resource for the most up-to-date information about textbooks.)

XI. RESOURCES

A. course workbook
B. films and other media
C. computer access