

Course Syllabus

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PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS

(Subject to Update)

SYLLABUS

Ending Homelessness: The Public Policy Challenge of our Time (Fall 2025)

FACULTY: Rick Cole

OFFICE HOURS: TBD

CLASS SESSIONS: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30-2:55 pm

LOCATION: Tuesdays 10:30 - Noon & by appointment

CREDIT HOURS: 4 credits

LENGTH: 15 weeks

COURSE DESCRIPTION: “Homelessness” is the product of intersecting failures, including a broken housing market; inadequate mental health and addiction treatment services; mismatch between wages and housing costs; and reliance on law enforcement to address social breakdowns. This course will analyze the causes of homelessness; the competing political and ideological narratives around its nature and cure; as well as promising policy approaches that actually work. Using Los Angeles as the primary case study, adjunct professor Rick Cole draws on his first-hand experience as a former mayor, city manager and current Pasadena City Councilmember (along with guest speakers who are leaders in local government, non-profits, and law.

Some of the major questions we will explore:

1. How is public policy shaped? What roles do narratives, politics, public opinion, institutional structures and data play? What can promote better outcomes?
2. What are the causes of homelessness? Both the personal and the systemic
3. What accounts for the stark differences in the levels of homelessness between cities? And how do their responses differ – from each other and over time?
4. What is the state and federal context for homelessness policies?
5. Using Los Angeles County and City as case studies, how do the public policy failures and shortcomings when it comes to homelessness illuminate other issues in our democracy and society?

6. How do leaders impact outcomes? What are the barriers to effective leadership?

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

1. Have a breadth and depth of understanding of one of the defining domestic public policy challenges of our time.
2. Grapple with the complexities of a “wicked problem”
3. Engage in thought-out, data supported group discussion with each other and guest speakers with first-hand involvement in the issue of homelessness
4. Write succinctly and persuasively about homelessness in a range of formats
5. Explore varied paradigms for interpreting and acting on a real-time crisis
6. Recognize the use case for different types of sources and sieve through them
7. Based on understanding the role of power, politics and policy in shaping decision-making, develop their own perspective on effective leadership: how to recognize it, how to promote it and how to practice it
8. Assess aspirational policy ideas and understand how to shape them to be adopted and implemented

TEXTBOOKS

You should purchase the following books, available at the college bookstore:

- ***Evicted* by Matthew Desmond**
 - (Publisher: Crown - Reprint edition 2017)
 - ISBN-10: 0553447459; ISBN-13: 978-0553447453
- ***Homelessness in America: The History and Tragedy of an Intractable Social Problem* by Stephen Eide**
 - (Publisher : Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2022)
 - ISBN-10: 1538159570; ISBN-13: 978-1538159576
- ***Homelessness Is a Housing Problem* by Gregg Colburn and Clayton Page Aldern**
 - (Publisher: University of California Press - First edition 2022)
 - ISBN-10: 0520383788; ISBN-13: 978-0520383784

You must also have a subscription to the Los Angeles Times (available through the College Library)

The course involves extensive reading – and I’m sensitive to the demands that places on you given your other class responsibilities. The emphasis of this class is not on learning and retaining facts, but rather gaining understanding both of an intractable economic and social challenge and how to address it. So while there will be no quizzes or exams, you will get out of the course what you put in – and our discussions will be enriched by your participation.

INSTRUCTOR'S NOTES

There is no specific body of knowledge that covers the topic of homelessness. The topic is too broad; the issues are too complex; and the roles you may play (professional, decision-maker, advocate, academic or citizen) are too diverse to comprehensively cover all you'll need to prepare for leadership. So there will be no "tests" but I expect you to develop and refine your own understanding of homelessness and what role you might play in addressing it in your future studies and careers.

COLLEGE STANDARD DISCLAIMERS

Civil Rights & Title IX statement, and statement of role of faculty member as a responsible employee

In the event that you write or speak about having experienced discrimination or harassment on the basis of a protected characteristic or sexual misconduct (including sexual assault, dating/domestic violence, stalking, sexual exploitation or any other form of sexual and/or gender-based harassment), as a designated Responsible Employee, I must inform the [Civil Rights & Title IX Office](#)[Links to an external site.](#). They will contact you to let you know about resources and support services at Oxy, as well as reporting options both on and off-campus. You have no obligation to respond to the Civil Rights & Title IX Office or to meet with them to discuss support services and reporting options.

If you do not want the Civil Rights & Title IX Office contacted, instead of disclosing this information to your instructor, either through conversation or a class assignment, you can speak confidentially with:

- Oxy's Survivor Advocate, Project SAFE (survivoradvocate@oxy.edu)
- Emmons Counseling (For appointments, call: 323-259-2657)
- Rev. Dr. Susan Young, Office of Religious and Spiritual Life (young@oxy.edu)
- Oxy 24/7 Confidential Hotline (323-341-4141)

The College's civil rights policies, along with additional resources, can be found at: <https://www.oxy.edu/civil-rights-title-ix>[Links to an external site.](#). If you would like to contact the Civil Rights & Title IX Office directly, you may email Civil Rights & Title IX Coordinator Alexandra Fulcher at afulcher@oxy.edu or call 323-259-1338.

Special Accommodations/Learning Differences

Occidental College (Oxy) complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as amended, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended, and other applicable state and federal law prohibiting discrimination against individuals with disabilities.

- All accommodation requests including academic, housing (ESA & Services Animal) and temporary accommodations are managed by the Disability

Services Office. It is a student's responsibility to request accommodations via the [Disability ServicesLinks to an external site.](#) website. For information about additional accommodations and support services, students can email accessibility@oxy.edu.

- **Oxy's Psychological Testing Program:** We offer low cost psychological testing for students who qualify. Any student who thinks they may have a learning, or psychological disability may complete [Oxy's Psych Testing ApplicationLinks to an external site.](#) to be added to the waitlist.
- **Academic Success Coaching:** Our Academic Success Coach assists students in developing skills and strategies to enhance their academic performance. They provide personalized guidance on time management, organization, study techniques, goal setting, and self-regulation. By collaborating with students, our coach helps identify and overcome obstacles to academic success, fostering a supportive environment that promotes personal and educational growth. Contact: academiccoaching@oxy.edu
- **Learning Disability Specialist:** Our Learning Disability Specialist evaluates and supports students with (diagnosed or suspected) learning disabilities. They also provide counseling and resources to help students develop effective learning strategies. By collaborating with students, our Learning Disability Specialist helps identify and overcome obstacles to academic success, fostering a supportive environment that promotes personal and educational growth. Please contact: accessibility@oxy.edu.

Accommodations for Reasons of Faith and Conscience

Consistent with Occidental College's commitment to creating an academic community that is respectful of and welcoming to persons of differing backgrounds, we believe that students should be excused from class for reasons of faith and conscience without academic consequence. While it is not feasible to schedule coursework around all days of conviction for a class as a whole, faculty will honor requests from individual students to reschedule coursework, to be absent from classes that conflict with the identified days. Information about [this policyLinks to an external site.](#) is available on the [ORSL websiteLinks to an external site.](#).

LESSON PLAN

Assignments for pre-class reading and watching is subject to change throughout the semester. Students will be notified of changes. Course schedule may also be modified to accommodate guest speakers. * = Guest Speaker confirmed

WEEK 1: Tuesday, August 26, 1:30-2:55

Lecture and Discussion: Public Policy Analysis and Decision-Making -- What kind of problem is homelessness?

Definition of a “wicked problem” -- *A wicked problem is a social or cultural problem that's difficult or impossible to solve because of its complex and interconnected nature. Wicked problems lack clarity in both their aims and solutions, and are subject to real-world constraints which hinder risk-free attempts to find a solution.*

We will begin by exploring the perspectives of the students and professor:

- What is your experience with homelessness?
- Have you or anyone in your family experienced it?
- Do you know anyone who has?
- Is it a problem in your hometown? What do you know about homelessness in LA?
- How have your experiences and exposure affected your views?

WEEK 1: Thursday, August 28, 1:30-2:55

Guest Lecture: **History of Homelessness in America**

Jeff Olivet, Former Executive Director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness*

Read this before class:

- Eide, *Homelessness in America* 1-47
- Colburn & Aldern, *Homelessness is a Housing Problem*, pp. 1-68
- Shinn & Kiduri, *In the Midst of Plenty*, PDF

WEEK 2: Tuesday, September 2, 1:30-2:55

Listen to this podcast before class:

- [Homeland/Home Makes Us WholeLinks to an external site.](#) (56 minutes)
- [How Los Angeles Became the Epicenter of America's homeless crisisLinks to an external site.](#) LAT, July 10, 2025

Guest Speaker: Ben Kay, Producer of Homeland podcast series*

WEEK 2: Thursday, September 4, 1:30-2:55

Watch this video before class:

- [Lost Angels: Skid Row is my Home \(2010\)](#)Links to an external site. 1 hour, 15 minutes

Read this before class:

- [Luskin Center Report: "The Making of a Crisis: A History of Homelessness in Los Angeles,"](#)Links to an external site.1-57

WEEK 3: Tuesday, September 9, 1:30-2:55

Lecture: Poverty and Precarity

Read before class:

- Desmond, *Evicted*, 1-107
- Colburn & Aldern, *Homelessness is a Housing Problem*, pp. 71-85

WEEK 3: Thursday, September 11, 1:30-2:55

Lecture: Is Housing a Right or a Privilege?

- Desmond, *Evicted*, 111-203
- Quigley, Shelterforce, "Six Reasons Why Housing is a Human Right"

Guest Speaker: Jane Nguyen, Chief of Staff, Los Angeles City Controller*

WEEK 4: Tuesday, September 16, 1:30-2:55

Lecture: Housing First and Its Critics

Read before class:

- Eide, *Homelessness in America* 49-103 (Chapters 5-8)
- [Housing First Is Still the Best Approach to Ending Homelessness](#)Links to an external site., Urban Institute
- [California Reconsiders Strict Housing-First Approach to Homelessness](#)Links to an external site., Governing

Guest Speaker: John Maceri, Executive Director, Project Understanding*

WEEK 4: Thursday, September 18, 1:30-2:55

Tackling the Housing Problem

Read before class:

- Colburn & Aldern, *Homelessness is a Housing Problem*, 95-144 (Chapters 4-5)
- Desmond, *Evicted*, pp. 293-313 (Epilogue)

Guest Speaker: Jed Leano, Boardmember, Los Angeles County Affordable Housing Solutions Agency*

WEEK 5: Tuesday, September 23, 1:30-2:55

Course Summary to date: [Week 5 Summary.pptx](#)[Download Week 5 Summary.pptx](#)

WEEK 5: Thursday, September 25, 1:30-2:55

Lecture: Public Safety, Police, & Criminal Justice

Read before class:

- Eide, *Homelessness in America* 105-116
- Kelly & Wilson, "[Broken Windows: The Police and Public Safety](#)"[Links to an external site.](#) (The Atlantic, March 1982)

Guest Speaker: Lt. Erika Aklufi, Santa Monica Police Department

WEEK 6: Tuesday, September 30, 1:30-2:55

WEEK 6: Thursday, October 2, 1:30-2:55

WEEK 7: Tuesday, October 7, 1:30-2:55

Lecture: Power, Policy and Politics -- the Overton Window

WEEK 7: Thursday, October 9, 1:30-2:55

Watch this movie before class:

- [The Soloist \(2009\) 1 hour, 57 minutes](#)[Links to an external site.](#)

Read before class:

- Eide, *Homelessness in America* 105-116
- Colburn & Aldern, *Homelessness is a Housing Problem*, pp. 85-94

Guest Speaker: Kerry Morrison, Founder, Heart Forward LA*

WEEK 8: Tuesday, October 14 FALL BREAK

WEEK 8: Thursday, October 16, 1:30-2:55

Lecture: **The Politics of Homelessness**

Guest Speaker: Former LA Councilmember Mike Bonin*

Listen to this podcast:

- [Homeland/No Silver Bullet](#)[Links to an external site.](#) (48 minutes)

Read before class:

- [‘People don’t like to see poverty:’ inside San Francisco’s vicious race for mayor](#)[Links to an external site.](#)

WEEK 9: Tuesday, October 21, 1:30-2:55

Lecture: **Homelessness and Constitutional Law**

Read before class:

- [US Supreme Court, Opinions and Dissent, Grants Pass v. Johnson](#)[Links to an external site.](#)
- [Judge approves L.A. County deal for 3,000 mental health and substance use treatment beds](#)[Links to an external site.](#)

Guest Speaker: Elizabeth Mitchell, Lead Counsel or LA Alliance*

WEEK 9: Thursday, October 23, 1:30-2:55

Lecture: Black People Experiencing Homelessness

Read before class:

- [Committee for a Better Los Angeles, "No Going Back" ReportLinks to an external site.](#) -- Black Life in Los Angeles pp. 39-51
- [Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing HomelessnessLinks to an external site.](#), pp 1-66

Guest Speaker: Veronica Lewis MPA, Director, Homeless Outreach Program Integrated Care System*

WEEK 10: Tuesday, October 28, 1:30-2:55

Lecture: Accountability, Efficiency and Effectiveness

Read before class:

- Rosenthal, ["Inside LA's Homeless Industrial Complex" \(New Republic, May 19, 2022\)Links to an external site.](#)
- Wagner, [Following scathing audit, LA County supervisor proposes moving homeless services under direct county controlLinks to an external site.](#) (LAIST May November 21, 2024
- [LAHSA: FINANCE, CONTRACTS, RISK MANAGEMENT, AND GRANTS MANAGEMENT REVIEWLinks to an external site.](#)

Guest Speaker: Justin Czlasa, LAHSA Board member*

WEEK 10: Thursday, October 30, 1:30-2:55

Lecture: The Limits of Law

[Judge Carter's 2025 Ruling in LA Alliance vs. City of LALinks to an external site.](#)

Guest Speaker: Michelle Martinez, Special Master in the Alliance Case*

WEEK 11: Tuesday, November 4, 1:30-2:55

Read before class:

- Colburn & Aldern, *Homelessness is a Housing Problem*, pp. 147-204

- [“Homeless to Housed”](#)[Links to an external site.](#) Urban Land Institute Report, June 2022 pp. 1-50

Guest Speaker: Andre Bueno, Co-chair of ULI-LA Homeless Initiative*

WEEK 11: Thursday, November 6, 1:30-2:55

Lecture: How Policy is Made

City of Santa Monica Policy Playbook

Guest Speakers: Anuj Gupta, Transportation Director, City of Santa Monica*

WEEK 12: Tuesday, November 11, 1:30-2:55

Lecture: Institutional Reform

Read before class:

- [“We Are Not Giving Up: A Plan for Homeless Governance in Los Angeles](#)[Links to an external site.](#)” Pat Brown Institute (May 2021)
- [Report of LA County Blue Ribbon Commission on Homelessness Governance Reform](#)[Links to an external site.](#) (March 2022) pp. 14-41

Guest Speaker: Sarah Dusseault, Former LAHSA Commissioner*

WEEK 12: Thursday, November 13, 1:30-2:55

Interpreting and implementing the law

Guest speaker: Special Master Michele Martinez (LA Alliance case)*

WEEK 13: Tuesday, November 18, 1:30-2:55

Lecture: The Other Side of the Coin: Work

Read before class:

- Dubb, [Understanding the Chrysalis Job-Training Social Enterprise Model](#)[Links to an external site.](#) (Non-Profit Quarterly, May 14, 2018)

Guest Speaker: Mark Lohranger, Executive Director of Chrysalis*

WEEK 13: Thursday, November 20, 1:30-2:55

Lecture: Income Support

- Shinn & Kiduri, *In the Midst of Plenty*, pp. 121-177

WEEK 14: Tuesday, November 25, 1:30-2:55

Lecture: Making a difference on the ground

Read before class:

- Shinn & Kiduri, *In the Midst of Plenty*, pp. 71-119
- Watch this video: [Built for Zero](#)[Links to an external site.](#)

Guest Speaker: Ashley Bennett, Director of Homelessness, Los Angeles City Controller's Office

WEEK 14: Thursday, THANKSGIVING!

WEEK 15: Thursday, Dec. 4, FINAL POLICY PAPER PRESENTATIONS

Group Presentations of Policy Recommendations