

University of Iowa

Economic and Health Care Innovations to Help Women & Children Escape Poverty 165:197

Instructor: Amy Butler (amy-c-butler@uiowa.edu);
Coordinator: R. Rajagopal (r-rajagopal@uiowa.edu)

Winterim 2011-12 (December 27-January 15/16)

Course Outline

Course description

A large part of the population of India remains extremely poor. A quick look at World Bank statistics: 44% of children under five are malnourished, female adult literacy is 48% (compared to 73% for men), 42% of families are living on less than \$1.25/day. Yet visionary individuals and organizations work against the odds to find solutions where others only see problems. In this course, we will visit, participate with, and learn directly from several innovative organizations employing a diverse variety of techniques to address social issues such as unemployment, poverty, leprosy, healthcare for the poor, illiteracy, combating blindness, and empowering women and children.

This course has two foci: (1) innovations in children's health care and hospital social work and (2) empowering poor women with financial independence.

Students will have a hands-on experience. We will meet and talk with women who are participating in a microfinance program, observe their meetings, and explore how the program has changed their lives. We will visit hospitals and talk with patients and their families about the hospital experience. We will visit remote sites where villagers receive telemedicine care and pediatric care. In addition, we will visit social agencies that address other needs of poor families including HIV/AIDS education and prevention, a leprosy asylum, support for women who experience domestic violence, and other services.

Travel broadens the mind and expands the self. This course provides an opportunity for students to see the world from a different lens on many levels. We will help you understand how to reframe problems and difficulties into challenges and opportunities. You will see the world from an Eastern mindset, from a developing world perspective, from an economic perspective and from a spiritual perspective. This is truly a life altering experience that has the potential to expand your worldview.

The course instructor, Amy Butler, is Associate Professor in the School of Social Work. She earned an MSW and PhD in Social Work and Sociology at the University of Michigan. She conducts research on poverty and the effects of social policy on families. She teaches courses on social welfare policy and has led India Winterim courses since 2008.

Our Host Organizations

Our primary collaborating organizations in India are the Meenakshi Mission Hospital, which provides special outreach to the poor, and the Mahasemam Trust of Madurai, a microfinance organization.

1. The Meenekshi Mission Hospital has 43 specialties including pediatric oncology, palliative care and hospice, Telemedicine, and health camps for poor children. We will explore answers to the questions such as, “what would a hospital social work department look like to enhance the hospital experience for the poor?”

2. Mahasemam Trust of Madurai is a microfinance organization whose primary aim is to “help eradicate poverty and improve the social status and self-esteem of poor women ... in order to empower poor women and improve the quality of life for them and their families”

(<http://www.mahasemam.org/index.html>). Mahasemam is modeled on Muhammad Yunus’ vision for bringing banking to the poor. Muhammad Yunus and his Grameen Bank shared the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize for their pioneering work in this area. Mahasemam is built on the concept poor women are good credit risks even though they have no collateral. Poor women have untapped skills and creativity that they are prevented from using to raise their families out of poverty because they lack the resources to start or expand an enterprise and are denied credit from traditional financial institutions. When women join Mahasemam, they form small groups with other women in their community. These groups takes on the responsibility that group members will repay their loans. The group experience itself is also empowering for women.



In addition, we will visit

- a leprosy asylum – a community for people with Hansen's disease and their families;
- an organization that works with sex workers and provides a HIV/Aids prevention program;
- Habitat for Humanity houses built for Mahasemam clients and their families;
- The Aravind Eye Hospital whose mission is to end unnecessary blindness with a focus on the poor (watch their video on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?gl=US&hl=hi&v=3cjinPua7Ag>.)
- Thalir Thiran Thittam (Aparajitha Foundation), which has developed a life skills education program for children in the 7th through 12th grades and which will be expanded and extended to Mahasemam clients.

Course Requirements

Prior to departure

- Attend orientation meeting(s).
- Watch *Gandhi* (1982), directed by Richard Attenborough (190 min.). This film won eight Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Actor.
- Read: Yunus, M. (2007). *Creating a World without Poverty: Social Business and the Future of Capitalism*, pp. 43-75, NY: Public Affairs.
- Read: Banerjee, A. B., & Duflo, E. (2011). Low-hanging fruit for better (global) health? Pp. 41-70 in *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty*. NY: Public Affairs.

During our stay in India

- Attend all planned activities and excursions.
- Attend regular group meetings with the instructor to process experiences.
- Actively engage with our hosts and partner organizations—you will spend 8+ days with your partner organization.
- Prepare a short paper and presentation of your final project (individual or group) for delivery at a one-day conference in Madurai on January 12. Submit an electronic version of the paper and presentation to Amy Butler before returning to Iowa.
- Keep a daily journal.

Followup

- Prepare an essay (500-750 words) on the most important aspects of your experience.
- Participate and present a group summary with the instructor (under 45 minutes) at a Winterim symposium that will be organized before the end of February at the UI.

Recommended Films

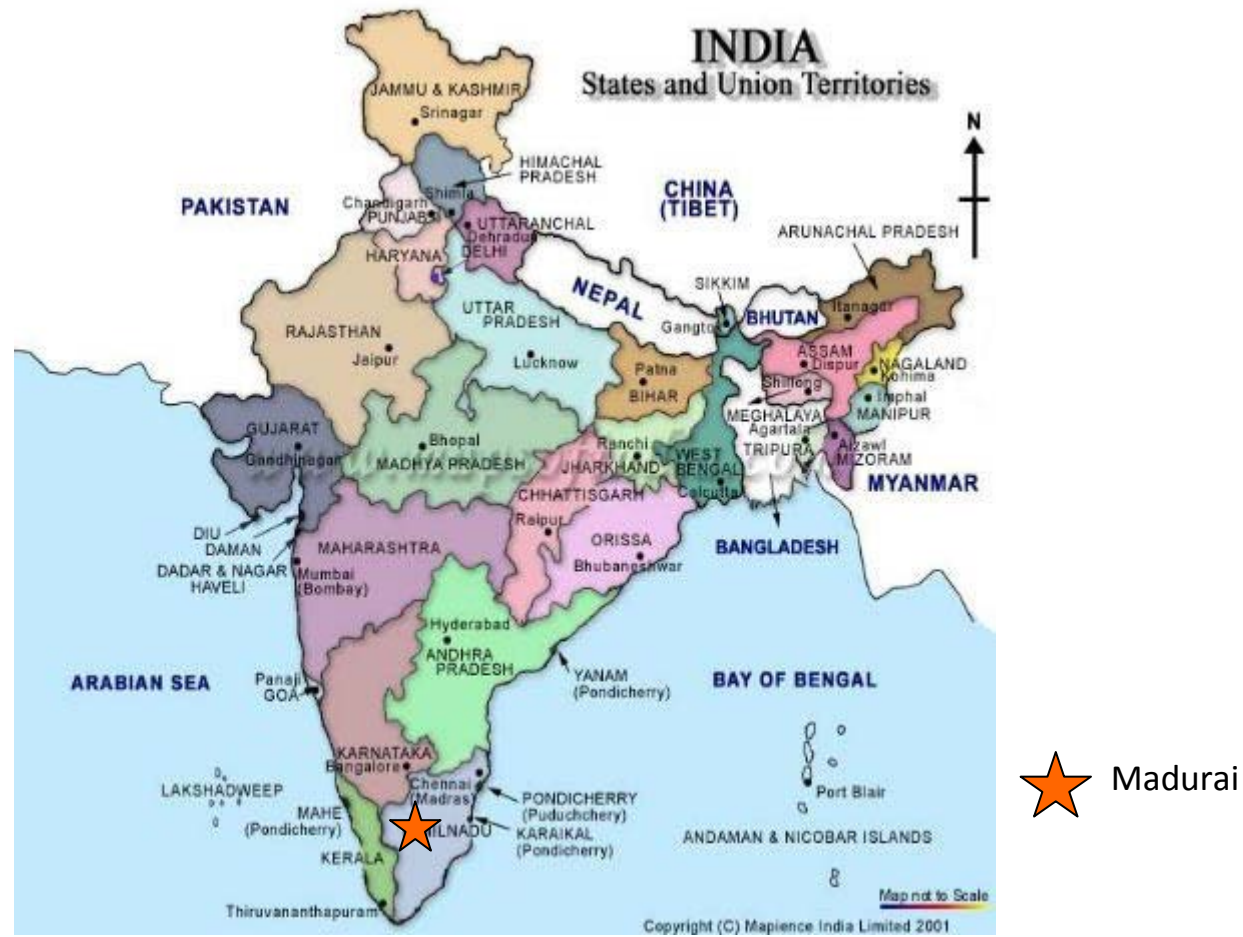
- *Small Fortunes: Microcredit and the Future of Poverty* (2005), PBS documentary (1 hour). See their website at <http://www.kbyutv.org/programs/smallfortunes/innovations/>

Course Grades

Grades for the course will be based on the following elements:

- **25%** Active engagement and discussion with fellow students and instructor, our hosts, the sponsoring organization, and the follow-up forum in Iowa City.
- **40%** Project (individual or group) report and presentations.

- **25%** Daily journal: record your thoughts, feelings, ideas, fears, joys, anxieties, insights and experiences. The instructor will keep what you write confidential. Submit to Amy Butler on the last day of the trip.
- **10%** essay on what you have learned.



For more information:

- go to the INDIA and IOWA (INDIA) Winterim webpage at <http://www.uiowa.edu/~geog/india/>
- contact Professor Amy Butler at amy-c-butler@uiowa.edu or stop by her office (333 North Hall) during her office hours (Tuesday, 1-2:15; Thursday, 10:45-noon; Friday 11:30-noon).
- For information about financial aid possibilities, go to <http://international.uiowa.edu/study-abroad/funding/financial-aid/iowa-programs.asp> and click on either “undergraduate scholarships” or “graduate fellowships.”