

SOCIAL INEQUALITY
SOCI 480/880
Fall (Aug 22, 2016–Dec 16, 2016)
Tuesday, Thursday 3:30 PM – 4:45 PM
121 Burnett
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Professor: Dr. Jeffrey A. Smith
Office: 706 Oldfather Hall
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Office Hours: Monday 12:30-1:30 p.m. and Thursday 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. or by appointment

Course Overview

This course serves as an introduction to the field of social inequality. Inequality is one of the main lines of inquiry in sociology and is an extremely timely topic, given the current political and social climate in the United States. We will explore the basic features of inequality in the U.S. through classic and contemporary readings on class, race and gender. The readings will include theoretical work (or frameworks by which to understand/explain inequality) as well as more empirical work (where a given framework is employed to explain a phenomena of interest). The motivating questions of the class are pressing, crucial ones. Who gets what? Why do some people get more than others? Where does inequality come from? Why would we see increasing/decreasing levels of inequality? What, if anything, should be done about inequality? We will develop answers to these questions through close engagement with the readings, in-class discussion and reflective writing assignments. The first part of the class will introduce the basic concepts, problems and theories of a sociological approach to inequality (why is there inequality?). The second part of the course will focus on the allocation of resources, covering topics related to class mobility, racial hierarchies and gender (who gets what?). The last part of the course will examine the political and structural factors associated with levels of inequality (how much inequality?).

Overall, there are three main objectives:

- a) become familiar with the major frameworks used to explain inequality
- b) become familiar with the empirical questions explored by inequality researchers
- c) gain experience applying theoretical frameworks to current debates about inequality.

Readings, Reading and the Format of the Class

This class will require each student to fully engage with the material each week. This means that you must read the assigned material. And I do mean *read* the material. Some of these readings will be difficult, making it tempting to skim. This is not a good idea, however, as you are trying to learn the material for the first time. It is particularly important to read the material before class as this will greatly facilitate in-class discussion. Class will consist of (some) lecture, but much of the time will be spent in discussion about the material. After an initial lecture, we will break up into small discussion groups of 3-4; after 10 minutes (or so) we will come together

again for a class-wide summary of the small-group discussions. Such a format only reaches its full potential if everyone reads the material and is ready to answer and ask questions.

My suggestion on how to read the material is to underline and take notes as you read, and then, afterwards, consider the following: a) what the authors are arguing; b) how/why they are arguing it; c) how the arguments relate to contemporary sociological research and trends in inequality.

Note that there will often be different sets of readings for each week, depending on whether you are a graduate or undergraduate student.

Required Texts

Most of the readings will be placed on Blackboard. There are two additional, required books for the class:

The Inequality Reader: Contemporary and Foundational Readings in Race, Class, and Gender, 2nd Edition, edited by David B. Grusky and Szonja Szelényi. 2011. Boulder: Westview Press.

Tilly, Charles. *Durable Inequality*. Univ of California Press, 1999.

These books are available in the bookstore and can be found online at a reasonable price.

Grading

Note that this class is a mix of graduate and undergraduate students. My hope is that both sets of students will gain something from having the other in the class. Nonetheless, I recognize that the goals and experience of the undergraduates may be slightly different than the graduate students and have set up the grading system accordingly.

Undergraduate

1. Participation: 10%

Participation is a key requirement of this class. One must attend class *and* actively participate to earn full marks. You are expected to come to class on time and to be actively engaged. This includes paying attention, taking notes, working in groups (when prompted) and asking questions. Leaving class early will be counted the same as not attending (unless there is a valid excuse and you let me know before class that you have to leave early). Coming late will also be reflected in lower participation grades. Arriving late to class is very disruptive and is disrespectful to your fellow students.

More generally, you need to come to class prepared, interested, and ready to discuss the material at-hand. I also ask that you keep an open mind when entering the classroom. The more you are aware of your biases about the texts, the social world, etc., the better you will be able to view

such things with a critical eye. For example, you should not reject/accept an author based on purely a priori political reasons. You need to actually read what the author wrote and interpret them as a sociologist working today. Similarly, while you should feel free to critique a writer, you should do so based on what they actually wrote, not what you think they wrote.

2. Weekly Memos: 30%

You will have to write weekly memos in response to the readings assigned for that day. These weekly memos should be 1-2 pages in length, double spaced. They are due at the beginning of class. You must hand me the memos. Emailed submissions are not acceptable. The memos have two basic parts. First, you should pick one reading for the day and quickly summarize the argument. Second, you should develop a clear, well-written reaction to the article or book. Example questions you may address:

- What would you say is the most important concept(s) espoused by the writer? What is the definition they offer and do you agree with it?
- What is the main question the author is answering? Is this the 'right' question to be asking? Why or why not?
- Who is the author arguing against? Why do they think this other work is wrong? Who do you think is right?
- What did you find most interesting, challenging or confusing?
- What did you disagree with in the readings?
- Can you think of substantive or empirical setting where the argument of the article could be applied?

Grades will be primarily recorded as complete/incomplete but a poor effort (badly written, incoherent argument, etc.) will not receive full points. I will drop the lowest three responses, meaning you can miss three and not lose any points. Late responses will, however, be counted as incomplete. I will not accept late response papers as they are designed to facilitate in-class discussion. Accepting the papers after the class would defeat that purpose.

3. Exams: Midterm Exam 25%; Final Exam 35%

There will be two exams making up 60% of the course grade. The midterm is an in-class exam while the final (cumulative but focusing on the second half of the semester) will be a take-home exam. The midterm will be held on Tuesday, October 25th. The final exam will be passed out on the last day of class, Thursday Dec 8th, and will be due on our final exam day, Monday Dec 12th at 10:30 p.m.

Graduate

1. Participation [same as above but the expectations are higher; for example, you will be expected to lead small group discussions]: 20%
2. Weekly Memos [same as above]: 20%
3. Discussion leader for entire class: 10%

As a core requirement of the class, each graduate student will act as a discussion leader for one day during the semester. Discussion leaders will have the floor to start the class and must be prepared to talk. Students will have their day assigned soon and this cannot be changed later on in the semester (unless there are extenuating circumstances). Your responsibilities as discussion leader are to:

- a) summarize the main argument of the day's readings (with my and the classes' help). You should be prepared to cover one of the readings (limited to a reading that everyone has read).
- b) initiate the conversation by introducing a key argument/claim or question of your own. We will then open the class up to more general discussion, with you (ideally) facilitating this discussion. If things go as planned, you should be prepared to lead class for approximately 20-25 minutes.

4. Research proposal: 50%

The main assignment in the course is a research proposal. This will consist of a highly focused literature review on a topic of your choosing related to inequality. The topic must be approved by me by October 13th. You will identify the key questions and theoretical traditions that are most important for the chosen topic. You must also identify key problems and contentious issues, as well as problems that seem understudied; i.e., you should identify a problem that is important and warrants further consideration (or a 'gap' in the literature). This discussion must then be followed by a short discussion of a proposed research project. You should discuss the following: the question of interest, the data and methods, and the manner in which the data/methods will answer the proposed question. This should be as concrete as possible; i.e., based on available data. In general, you should identify an outstanding question and propose a study to answer it. The paper should be about 20-25 pages double-spaced, not including citations. An annotated outline for the proposal is due Nov. 15th at the beginning of class. The final proposal is due by the end of the official final exam period, Dec. 12th at 10:30 p.m.

Course Policies

Classroom Conduct

Students are expected to be engaged in the course. Out of respect for you fellow students, I ask that cell phones be turned off and that students refrain from distracting behavior (i.e. inappropriate talking or web browsing). In general the course will be much more enjoyable if everyone is considerate of the other individuals in the room. Excessive talking or distracting

behavior will not be tolerated. Students who participate in distracting behavior will receive a 0 for the day for participation, as will any student who is found texting or talking on a phone. Additionally, as this class will cover some sensitive and controversial topics (race, class, gender, etc.), I ask that you treat each other with respect. You need not agree with everything your classmates say, but you should find a way of disagreeing in a respectful manner.

Academic Misconduct (or Don't Cheat)

“The maintenance of academic honesty and integrity is a vital concern of the University community. Any student found guilty of academic dishonesty shall be subject to both academic and disciplinary sanctions. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: Cheating; Fabrication or Falsification; Plagiarism; Abuse of Academic Materials; Complicity in Academic Dishonesty; Falsifying Grade Reports; Misrepresentation to Avoid Academic Work.” Quoted from the UNL Student Code of Conduct

Disabilities

“It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodation to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY.”

If you need accommodations it is your responsibility to discuss this with me *early* on in the semester.

Exam and Paper Policy

The midterm must be taken in-class on Tuesday October 25th. The final exam must be turned in by the end of the official exam period for the class, stipulated by the university (Monday Dec. 12th at 10:30 p.m.). There will be no exams accepted (or taken in the case of the midterm) after the fact unless there are extraordinary circumstances and the student has received permission from me to turn in the exam late.

Course Schedule (subject to change)

Part I: Introduction to the Study of Inequality: Why is there Inequality?

Day 1 (Tuesday, Aug. 23) Introduction to the Class

Day 2 (Thursday Aug. 25) Setting the Stage: Background on Studying Inequality

1. Grusky, David B., and Manwai C. Ku. 2008. “Gloom, Doom, and Inequality.” (on blackboard)

Graduate students also read:

Kerbo, Harold. "The History of Inequality" (on blackboard) p. 52-63

Day 3 (Tuesday Aug. 30) Setting the Stage: Background on Studying Inequality

1. Massey, Douglas. "How Stratification Works", Chapter 1 of *Categorically Unequal* (on blackboard)

Graduate students also read:

Kerbo, Harold. "The History of Inequality" (on blackboard) p. 63-78

Day 4 (Thursday Sep. 1) Where We are Today

*Weekly Response Due

1. Emmanuel Saez. 2012. "Striking it Richer: The Evolution of Top Incomes in the United States" (on blackboard)
2. Stiglitz, Joseph. "America's 1 Percent Problem", Chapter 1 of *The Price of Inequality* (on blackboard)
3. Smeeding, Timothy M. 2008. "Poorer by Comparison." Chapter 17 in *Inequality Reader* (also on blackboard)
4. Newman, Katherine S. and Victor Tan Chen. 2008. "The Missing Class: Portraits of the Near Poor in America." Chapter 16 in *Inequality Reader* (also on blackboard)

Day 5 (Tuesday Sep. 6) Is There a 'Function' of Inequality?

1. Davis, Kingsley and Wilbert Moore. 1945. "Some Principles of Stratification." Selections in Chapter 1 of *Inequality Reader* (full article on blackboard)
2. Tumin, Melvin. 1953. "Some Principles of Stratification: A Critical Analysis." Selections in Chapter 2 of *Inequality Reader* (full article on blackboard)

Graduate students must read the original text on blackboard!

Day 6 (Thursday Sep. 8) Modern Day Arguments about the Necessity of Inequality

*Weekly Response Due

1. Fischer et al., 1996. *Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth*. Chapter 1; Chapter 4 (on blackboard)
2. Lenski, Gerhard. 1994. "New Light on Old Issues: The Relevance of Really Existing Socialist

Societies“ for Stratification Theory.” Pp. 55-61 in Social Stratification: Class, Race, and Gender in Sociological Perspective, edited by David Grusky. Boulder, CA: Westview Press. (on blackboard)

Day 7 (Tuesday Sep. 13) Modern Day Arguments about the Necessity of Inequality

1. Fischer et al., 1996. Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth. Chapter 5; Chapter 6 (on blackboard).

Day 8 (Thursday Sep. 15) A Marxist Approach to Inequality

*Weekly Response Due

1. Wright, Erik Olin. 1995. Class Counts: Comparative Studies in Class Analysis. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1 (on blackboard)

Day 9 (Tuesday Sep. 20) A Marxist Approach to Inequality

Undergraduate students read:

1. Marx, Karl. “Classes in Capitalism and Pre-Capitalism.” Chapter 5 in Inequality Reader

Graduate students read:

1. Sections from Marx-Engels Reader (Robert C. Tucker, ed. 1978. *The Marx–Engels Reader*. New York: W.W. Norton) (all on blackboard):

- Manifesto of the Communist Party [1848] (p 473-491)
- Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 (p 70-81)
- Alienation and Social Classes [1845] (p 133-135)

Day 10 (Thursday Sep. 22) A Weberian Approach to Inequality

*Weekly Response Due

1. Weber, Max. Class, Status, Party. Chapter 4 of Inequality Reader

Graduate students also read:

- Wright, Erik Olin. 2002. "The shadow of exploitation in Weber's class analysis." *American Sociological Review*: 832-853.

Day 11 (Tuesday Sep. 27) A Weberian Approach to Inequality

1. Weeden, Kim A. "Why do some occupations pay more than others? Social closure and

earnings inequality in the United States." *American Journal of Sociology* 108.1 (2002):
Just read 55-71; Graduate students read the whole thing

2. Chan, Tak Wing and John H. Goldthorpe. 2007. "Class and Status: The Conceptual Distinction and Its Empirical Relevance." *American Sociological Review* 72(4):512-532.

Day 12 (Thursday Sep. 29) Culture, Class and Inequality

*Weekly Response Due

1. Elliot B. Weininger. Foundations Of Pierre Bourdieu's Class Analysis, Ch 4
Approaches to Class Analysis. Cambridge University Press: 2005 (on blackboard)

Graduate students also read:

Bourdieu, Pierre. "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction." (on blackboard)

Day 13 (Tuesday Oct. 4) Rent-based Approaches to Inequality

1. Sorensen, Aage. Foundations of a Rent-Based Class Analysis, Ch 5
Approaches to Class Analysis. Cambridge University Press: 2005 (on blackboard)
2. Wright, Erik Olin. "Class, Exploitation, and Economic Rents: Reflections on Sørensen's "Sounder Basis"." *American Journal of Sociology* 105.6 (2000): 1559-1571. (on blackboard)

Day 14 (Thursday Oct. 6) Elites

*Weekly Response Due

1. G. William Domhoff, Who Rules America website: "The Class-Domination Theory of Power," April 2005 (a summary of Who Rules America?)
http://www2.ucsc.edu/whorulesamerica/power/class_domination.html
2. C. Wright Mills. "The Power Elite" Chapter 11 in Inequality Reader

Day 15 (Tuesday Oct. 11) Networks and Inequality

1. DiMaggio, Paul and Filiz Garip. 2012. "Network Effects and Social Inequality." *Annual Review of Sociology* 38: 93-118.

2. Granovetter, Mark S. 1973. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78(6):1360-1380.

Day 16 (Thursday Oct. 13) Durable Inequality

*Weekly Response Due

*Graduate Students: must have topic approved by me by today

1. Tilly, Charles. *Durable Inequality*. Univ of California Press, 1999. Chapters 1-2

October 18: No Class

Day 17 (Thursday Oct. 20) Durable Inequality

1. Tilly, Charles. *Durable Inequality*. Univ of California Press, 1999. Chapter 3 and Chapter 8

Graduate Students are expected to read the whole thing!

Day 18 (Tuesday Oct. 25) Catch-up and Exam Review

Day 19 (Thursday Oct. 27) Exam

Part II: Who Gets What?

Day 20 (Tuesday Nov. 1) Human, Social and Cultural Capital

1. Coleman, James S. 1988. "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital." *American Journal of Sociology* 94:S95-S120 (on blackboard).
2. Lareau, Annette. 2003. "Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life." Chapter 68 in *Inequality Reader*
3. Hout, M. (2012). Social and economic returns to higher education in the United States. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 38, 379-400 (on blackboard)

Graduate students also read:

Bowles, Samuel and Herbert Gintis. 1975. "The Problem with Human Capital Theory – A Marxian Critique." *American Economic Review* 65(2):74-82.

Optional Reading:

Lareau, Annette. 2002. "Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Childrearing in Black Families and White Families." *American Sociological Review* 67(5):747-776.

Day 21 (Thursday Nov. 3) Mobility (or class background)

*Weekly Response Due

1. Jonsson et al. Decent Bet That Our Children Will Be Professors, Too." Chapter 54 in Inequality Reader
2. Hout, Michael. 2015. "A Summary of What We Know about Social Mobility." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 657:27-36 (on blackboard).
3. Emily Beller and Michael Hout. 2006. "Intergenerational Social Mobility: The United States in Comparative Perspective." *The Future of Children* 16 (Fall, 2006): 19-36 (on blackboard).

Graduate students also read:

Florencia Torche. 2011. "Is a College Degree Still the Great Equalizer? Intergenerational Mobility Across Levels of Schooling in the United States." *American Journal of Sociology* 117: 763-807.

Day 22 (Tuesday Nov. 8) Racial/Ethnic Inequality

1. Desmond, Matthew and Mustafa Emirbayer. 2009. "What Is Racial Domination?". *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 6(02):335-55. [on blackboard]
2. Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. 1994. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to The 1990s*. New York: Routledge. [excerpt on Blackboard]

Day 23 (Thursday Nov. 10) Racial/Ethnic Inequality

*Weekly Response Due

1. William Julius Wilson. "Jobless Poverty: A New Form of Social Dislocation in the Inner-City Ghetto." Chapter 18 Inequality Reader
2. William Julius Wilson. "The Declining Significance of Race" Chapter 32 in Inequality Reader
3. Feagin, Joe R. 1991. "The Continuing Significance of Race: Antiblack Discrimination in Public Places." Chapter 30 Inequality Reader

Graduate students also read:

Bloome, Deirdre. "Racial inequality trends and the intergenerational persistence of income and family structure." *American Sociological Review* 79.6 (2014): 1196-1225.

William Julius Wilson. 2011. *The Declining Significance of Race: Revisited & Revised*.
Daedalus 140(2):55-69. (on blackboard)

Day 24 (Tuesday Nov. 15) Racial/Ethnic Inequality in a Larger Context

*Graduate Students: annotated outline of proposal is due

1. Massey, Douglas S. and Nancy A. Denton. 1993. "American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of an Underclass." Chapter 19 Inequality Reader
2. Pebley, Ann R. and Narayan Sastry. "Neighborhoods, Poverty, and Children's Wellbeing." Chapter 20 Inequality Reader
3. Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro. "Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality." Chapter 33 Inequality Reader
4. Western, Bruce. 2001. "Incarceration, Unemployment and Inequality." Chapter 22 in Inequality Reader

Graduate students also read:

Pager, D., Western, B. and Bonikowski, B., 2009. Discrimination in a low-wage labor market a field experiment. *American Sociological Review*, 74(5), pp.777-799. (on blackboard)

Day 25 (Thursday Nov. 17) Gender Inequality

*Weekly Response Due

1. Risman, Barbara J. 2004. "Gender as a Social Structure: Theory Wrestling with Activism." *Gender & Society* 18(4):429-450. (on blackboard)
2. Ridgeway, Cecilia L. and Shelley J. Correll. 2004. "Unpacking the Gender System: A Theoretical Perspective on Gender Beliefs and Social Relations." *Gender & Society* 18: 510-531. (on blackboard)

Day 26 (Tuesday Nov. 22) Gender Inequality

1. England, Paula. 2010. "The Gender Revolution: Uneven and Stalled." *Gender & Society* 24(2):149-166. (on blackboard)

2. England, Paula. 2011. "Devaluation and the Pay of Comparable Male and Female Occupations." Chapter 47 in *Inequality Reader*
3. Blau, Francine D. and Lawrence M. Kahn. 2007. "The Gender Pay Gap." Chapter 48 in *The Inequality Reader*

Graduate students also read:

Correll, Shelley J., Stephen Benard, and In Paik. 2007. "Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty?" *American Journal of Sociology* 112:1297-1338. (on blackboard)

Optional reading:

Goldin, Claudia. 2006. "The Quiet Revolution That Transformed Women's Employment, Education, and Family." *American Economic Review* 96(2):1-21. (on blackboard)

Thursday Nov. 24 No Class

Part III: How Much Inequality?

Day 27 (Tuesday Nov. 29) Structural Explanations for Rising Inequality

1. Morris, Martina, and Bruce Western. "Inequality in Earnings at the Close of the Twentieth Century." *Annual review of sociology* (1999): 623-657. (on blackboard)
2. Kenworthy, Lane. 2015. "Income and Wealth Inequality." *The Good Society*. (on blackboard)

Graduate Students also read:

Weeden, Kim A., and David B. Grusky. "Inequality and market failure." *American Behavioral Scientist* 58.3 (2014): 473-491.

Western, B., & Rosenfeld, J. (2011). Unions, norms, and the rise in American wage inequality. *American Sociological Review*, 76, 513-537.

Day 28 (Thursday Dec. 1) Politics, Capital, Financial Markets and Inequality

*Weekly Response Due

1. Stiglitz, Joseph E. 2015. "Inequality in America: A Policy Agenda for a Stronger Future." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 657:8-20. (on blackboard)
2. Volscho, Thomas W., and Nathan J. Kelly. "The rise of the super-rich power resources, taxes, financial markets, and the dynamics of the top 1 percent, 1949 to 2008." *American Sociological Review* 77.5 (2012): 679-699. (on blackboard)

Graduate students also read:

Lin, Ken-Hou, and Donald Tomaskovic-Devey. "Financialization and US Income Inequality, 1970–20081." *American Journal of Sociology* 118.5 (2013): 1284-1329.

Day 29 (Tuesday Dec. 6) Solutions to Inequality

1. Lane Kenworthy. 1999. "Do Social-Welfare Policies Reduce Poverty? A Cross- National Assessment." *Social Forces* 77: 1119-1139. (on blackboard)
2. Heckman, James. "Skill Formation and the Economics of Investing in Disadvantaged Children" Chapter 74 in *The Inequality Reader*
3. Conley, Dalton. "A Golden Parachute for Everyone" Chapter 77 in *Inequality Reader*
4. Frank, Robert. "The Pragmatic Case for Reducing Income Inequality" Chapter 78 in *Inequality Reader*

Day 30 (Thursday Dec. 8) Catch-up, Summary and Review for Exam

Final Exam and Papers due on Dec. 12 at 10:30 p.m.