OVERVIEW

Welcome to *Introduction to Social Inequality*. In this course, we will identify the basic contours of the structure and culture of social inequality in the United States and beyond through engagement with sociological research on class, race, gender, and immigration. Through our reading and active participation in lectures, we will develop answers to the central questions that motivate much sociological inquiry into inequality: Who gets what? Who is included and excluded? How and why? Should/can inequality be addressed?

OBJECTIVES

In this introductory course on social inequality, we will:

1. Develop a descriptive and analytical understanding of inequality
2. Explore central concepts through which sociologists investigate inequality.
3. Become familiar with key debates that animate contemporary research on inequality.
4. Consider and critique competing explanations for distribution and recognition conceived as two dynamic dimensions of inequality.
5. Mobilize the analytical tools learned in this course to make sense of your own experience with the various dimensions of inequality (access to resources and (mis)recognition).
6. Consider how you can address the challenges presented by inequality in the current moment (e.g. by lowering stigmatization in your immediate environment, collaborating with various NGOs, etc.).

REQUIREMENTS

In service of our objectives for the course, you are asked to:

1. Attend and contribute to the discussion in class and in section (10% of final grade). This means that you have to engage in thoughtful consideration of the texts. It is essential that you complete the assigned reading before each and every class session.
2. Write a response to the assigned reading for five weeks (to be chosen on week 2). Your memo (2 double-spaced pages maximum) should accurately summarize a central
argument in the reading; develop a coherent reaction to that argument; and raise a few analytical questions, which I will refer to in structuring my lectures. The response papers are due on Monday by 4pm, and are graded complete/incomplete, presuming that your paper meets a threshold of quality in the three areas listed above (15% of your final grade). You will not have access to the responses written by the other students until after you upload yours on the course website.

3. Write an 8 to 10 page paper (12 font; double-spaced) connecting topics covered in the required readings and lecture (prompts will be offered) (30% of final grade). Due on March 9th.

4. Take a final examination (25% of your final grade). The exam is on May 12th.

5. Develop as a small team project a strategy to address inequality, drawing on the lecture on social engagement to be delivered by Amy Schalet on March 29th. This can take the form of writing an op-ed or a blog, or writing a short policy paper. Each student will write a separate paper and be graded individually (20% of your final grade).

Thus, final grades will be determined as follows:

- Participation and attendance in lectures and sections: 10%
- Reading memos: 15%
- Mid-term paper: 30%
- Final exam: 25%
- Public engagement exercise: 20%

GENERAL POLICIES

To prevent misunderstandings, we agree to the following policies for this course:

1. Late midterm/final papers will be automatically graded lower, at the rate of 1/3 of a letter grade per day (e.g. an A- becomes a B+). Late response papers will receive a grade of incomplete.

2. Students should be aware that in this course collaboration of any sort on the paper assignments is not permitted (except for the public engagement exercise). All work should be entirely your own and must use appropriate citation practices to acknowledge the use of books, articles, websites, lectures, discussions, etc., that you have consulted to complete your assignments (you may find the American Sociological Association Style Guide a useful resource).

3. Many students find it useful to form study groups to prepare for exams; I encourage this sort of preparation if you find it useful.

4. Other guidelines: 1. Be on time. When we take roll, we do so only once— at the beginning of class. 2. Final grades are final. 3. Students can only use their laptop in class to take notes. Phones are not permitted. Violation of this policy will strongly affect your participation grade due to the pedagogical importance of the policy and out of fairness to your fellow students.

4. I do not give make-up exams or incomplete grades, except under the most extreme circumstances. If you encounter such an emergency, you should contact me before the test is administered, and you must verify your emergency. 5. It is the students’ responsibility to ensure that we receive completed assignments. 6. A great deal of this
course involves class discussion. Please respect the following rules of good discussion: a) be respectful listeners to your fellow students; b) try to focus your discussion on broader society, social theory and course concepts and not personal stories; c) encourage everyone to contribute, not just a few talkative students; d) welcome all political and ideological perspectives and give them fair and critical consideration. 7. I cannot overemphasize the importance of regular class attendance. A substantial amount of the final exam is based on lecture material that is not covered in the readings. 8. Students with disabilities (of any kind) that may affect their ability to participate fully in the class or to complete all course requirements are encouraged to bring this to my attention promptly so that appropriate accommodations can be made. Students whose first language is not English should discuss any concerns with me. I will accommodate these or related concerns, but let me know as soon as possible. 9. I will do my best to be straightforward and fair. Please let me know if you encounter any difficulties.

GRADING SYSTEM AND STANDARDS

The course will follow the grading system for Harvard College. The complete Harvard College grading system can be found online in the Handbook for Students and on the course website, but please make sure to review the following, which will be adhered to:

A, A– Earned by work whose excellent quality indicates a full mastery of the subject and, in the case of the grade of A, is of extraordinary distinction.

B+, B, B– Earned by work that indicates a good comprehension of the course material, a good command of the skills needed to work with the course material, and the student’s full engagement with the course requirements and activities.

C+, C, C– Earned by work that indicates an adequate and satisfactory comprehension of the course material and the skills needed to work with the course material and that indicates the student has met the basic requirements for completing assigned work and participating in class activities.

D+, D, D– Earned by work that is unsatisfactory but that indicates some minimal command of the course materials and some minimal participation in class activities that is worthy of course credit toward the degree.

E Earned by work which is unsatisfactory and unworthy of course credit towards the degree.

If you have any problems—understanding the material, completing assignments, attendance, etc.—contact the teaching fellow or instructor as soon as possible. If we know about problems ahead of time we will be better able to solve them.
The Sociology Department’s Departmental Writing Fellow is available to meet with students to discuss their papers. Please also remember that the Harvard College Writing Center is available to assist in any stage of the writing process. Information about both can be found online.

**WELCOME TO THE CLASS!!! YOU WILL WORK HARD AND LEARN A LOT!!**

**READINGS**

Most readings will be available on the course website. Students can access all required and supplemental course readings on the course website, as accessed through your “My.Harvard” website. Additional readings may be assigned.

I recommend that you buy the following books:


**Week 1 (January 23 & 25)): Introduction: Why Study Inequality in the Current Moment?**

In this introductory lesson, we will discuss an overview of the course’s objectives, requirements and expectations. We will also start to define key concepts related to the course. We will see why distribution and recognition are important to understand inequality in today’s world, including for meritocracy, fairness, solidarity and what may define successful societies. We will also detail the requirements of the course, and how students will be evaluated.


Recommended:


**Week 2 (January 30 & February 1): Neoliberalism and the Growing Inequality in the Distribution of Resources**


Recommended:


World Inequality report http://wir2018.wid.world/

**Week 3 (February 6 & 8): The Upper Class and the Elite (sections begin)**

**February 6th:** Visit to Harvard university archives in the Pusey Library: Representations of elites in American higher education


Watch the film “Park Avenue: Money, Power and the American Dream – Why Poverty.” 59 Minutes https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6niWzomA_So


Recommended:


**Week 4 (February 13 & 15): The Upper Middle/Middle Classes and Social Mobility**


Recommended:


Week 5 (February 20 & 22): The Working Class: Education and Politics


**Optional: Viewing of the film “I, Daniel Blake” by Ken Loach**

Recommended:


Week 6 (February 27): Black Professionals

**Guest speaker: Adia Wingfield, Washington University in St. Louis**


Weeks 6/7 (March 1 and March 6): The Poor and Social Resilience (no class on March 8th)

**Listen to:** Chana Joffe-Walt. 550: Three Miles. This American Life. WBEZ, Chicago. 13 March 2015. https://www.thisamericanlife.org/550/three-miles#play


**Section:**

Experiment with the Poverty Risk Calculator which estimates the likelihood that an individual will experience poverty in the future. https://confrontingpoverty.org/

**Recommended:**


Optional: Viewing of documentary film “The Land of the Free” by Vadim Jean

NO CLASS WEEK OF MARCH 12: WINTER BREAK

Week 8 (March 20 & 22): Race and Inequality

March 22: Lecture by Derek Robey on findings from the American Mosaic Project. https://cla.umn.edu/sociology/graduate/collaboration-opportunities/american-mosaic-project-amp


Recommended:


Week 9 (March 27 & 29): How to Create Social Change? Public Engagement

Guest speaker (March 29): Amy Schalet, University of Massachusetts- Amherst

Recommended:


**Week 10 (April 3 and 5): Immigration**

**Guest speaker (April 5): Steffen Mau, Humbold University**


Recommended:


**Week 11 (April 10 and 12): Gender and Sexuality**


**Section:**


Recommended:


**Week 12 (April 17 and 19): The United States in a Global/Comparative Perspective: How to Create Greater Equality? Solidarity? Justice?**


**Section:**


Recommended:

**Week 13 (April 24): Putting it All Together: Boy, the World is Complicated!!**


**Final exam: May 12**

**HAVE A GREAT SUMMER!!**