

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL STRATIFICATION
SOCIOLOGY 140 & 240

Instructor: David B. Grusky

Teaching Assistants: Kate Weisshaar, Koji Rafael Chavez

Class Location: Hewlett Teaching Center, Room 102

Class Time: Monday & Wednesday, 2:15pm–3:05pm

Discussion Sections: Wednesday, 4:15pm–5:05pm (Koji Chavez); Thursday, 9:00am–9:50am (Kate Weisshaar); Thursday, 2:15–3:05 (Kate Weisshaar); Thursday, 3:15–4:05 (Koji Chavez)

Office Hours: David Grusky (1pm–2pm, Tuesday, Bldg. 370, Center for the Study of Poverty and Inequality); Kate Weisshaar (3:15–4:15pm, Monday, Bldg. 120, McClatchy Hall, Rm. 260); Koji Rafael Chavez (2pm–3pm, Thursday, Bldg. 120, McClatchy Hall, Rm. 029)

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The brute facts of poverty and massive inequality remain everywhere with us. Although egalitarian values are a fundamental feature of our post-Enlightenment heritage, these values exist in tension with the extreme and, in some cases, increasing levels of inequality that are part and parcel of the contemporary late industrial experience. We appear to be entering a new era of change not just in the amount of inequality but also in the processes that generate and maintain inequality. The foregoing changes, which are dramatic and historic, have made the study of inequality one of the most prominent subfields in the social sciences. We will be discussing questions and issues of the following kind:

- (a) What are the major forms of inequality in human history? Is inequality an inevitable feature of human life?
- (b) Why is income inequality increasing in so many countries? What are the effects of this increase on other domains of social life?
- (c) Is the recession increasing income inequality? Wealth inequality? Which groups are most harmed by the recession? Most protected?
- (d) How many social classes are there? What are the principal “fault lines” or social cleavages that define the class structure? Are these cleavages strengthening or weakening with the transition to advanced industrialism?
- (e) How frequently do individuals cross occupational or class boundaries? Are educational degrees, social contacts, or “individual luck” increasingly important forces in matching individuals to jobs and class positions?
- (f) How are the lifestyles, attitudes, and personalities of individuals shaped by their class locations? Are there identifiable “class cultures” in past and present societies?
- (g) What types of social processes and state policies serve to maintain or alter racial, ethnic, and sex discrimination in labor markets? Have these forms of discrimination weakened or strengthened with the transition to late industrialism?
- (h) Will inequality regimes take on new and distinctive forms in the future? Are the inequality regimes of modern societies gradually shedding their distinctive features and converging towards some generic late industrial regime?

Although one can never completely determine how a course unfolds, we've listed below the main principles upon which we've attempted to construct this course.

Intellectual Ambition: We're committed to introducing students to serious scholarly work in the field of social inequality rather than some watered-down formulation. As we all know, issues of inequality are everyday fare in conventional journalism (e.g., newspaper, television), but such fare often rests on a naive understanding of inequality. The objective of this course is to rise above such standard formulations and examine the powerful models, methods, and concepts that serious scholars of inequality have used. While the assigned readings will accordingly require careful study, the class lectures will be devoted in large part to rendering the readings as clear as possible. There will also be ample time to address any questions that might emerge.

Student Engagement: We strive for as much engagement among students as possible (bearing in mind the constraints of a relatively large class). The classes will take on a lecture form, but we encourage you to participate whenever necessary to raise objections, ask for clarification, and the like. The discussion sections will of course offer the best opportunity for participation. Also, if you need extrinsic motivation, we're here for you: We've decided to make participation count for 10 percent of your grade.

Exams: We want to reduce the tension associated with grading. Accordingly, the two exams (which are in-class, closed-book) will involve answering one of the study questions that will be made available on the website and reviewed in the discussion sessions. Although you will not know which questions we shall select, you will see in advance all possible questions. For each of the two exams, one of these study questions will be selected, and your simple task will be to answer it (a simple task because hopefully you've prepared for it). The exams will also contain three short-answer questions (which will not be provided in advance) in addition to the essay question. The short-answer questions will each be worth 10 points, and the essay question will be worth 70 points. The first exam will occur in class on Monday, Oct. 31. The second exam will occur on Monday, Dec. 12 (i.e., the day assigned for our final exam). It will again be a 50-minute exam and will not be cumulative (i.e., it will only cover materials in the second half of the course).

Opinion pieces: But that's not all! In addition to the two in-class exams, you'll be expected to write two opinion pieces, each no more than 800 words. We are looking for a special type of opinion piece that's built around a pregnant fact, a fact that is perhaps underappreciated yet has implications for the views we hold or positions we adopt (see course website for an example of the type of opinion piece that we have in mind). The assigned readings and lectures should provide some such pregnant facts, but you're free also to draw on facts available from outside sources. We're advocating here for a bit of a departure from a more typical approach to writing an opinion piece. The typical author of an opinion piece will *begin* with a commitment to a certain position (e.g., "there's just too much income inequality these days") and then scurry around to dredge up facts that might be construed as substantiating that view. We can't outlaw that conventional approach, and no doubt good pieces can be written in that way. If this approach is taken, it's absolutely essential that the featured facts (1) represent the best that science has to offer (i.e., come from the best possible research), and (2) are indeed central to the question at hand and not simply footnotes to the argument being made. The more creative way, however, to proceed is to actually *begin* with the fact and ask how it might inform our understanding of inequality. That is, instead of taking some predetermined commitment as the starting point, a more exciting and innovative piece might sometimes

emerge if you instead begin with the fact itself and think creatively about what it means. The first opinion piece is due on Friday, Oct. 14 (by midnight), and the second opinion piece is due on Friday, Nov. 18 (by midnight). Special bonus situation: If anyone gets their opinion piece accepted at a major outlet (e.g., San Jose Mercury News and up), it's an automatic A+. Although you still need to complete all the course work, as long as your grade is a guaranteed A+.

Discussion Sections: The discussion sections will be organized around (1) assisting you with writing the opinion pieces, and (2) reviewing the study questions (one of which will appear on each exam). The first two meetings of the discussion sections will focus on writing the opinion piece (as that will be your first task). For your first discussion section, you might want to come to class with possible ideas for your opinion piece, as you'll have an opportunity to try them out. If you submit an outline of your first opinion piece by Friday, Oct. 7 (by midnight), your TA will get back shortly to you with reactions and suggestions. *We strongly encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity.* The first opinion piece is due on midnight, Friday, Oct. 14 and should be uploaded by then to the course website. The same format obtains for the second opinion piece: The outline should be submitted by midnight, Friday, Nov. 4, and the piece itself is due on midnight, Friday, Nov. 18.

Course Readings: The course readings will all be drawn from *The Inequality Reader* (2nd edition). This book is available at the Stanford University Book Store and all other usual outlets.

Grades: The grades for the course will be based on the two opinion pieces (20 percent each), the two exams (25 percent each), and participation in the discussion sections (10 percent). We strongly encourage attending the lectures and the discussion sections.

The grading scheme is as follows:

97-100 points: A+

93-96 points: A

90-92 points: A-

87-89 points: B+

83-86 points: B

80-82 points: B-

77-79 points: C+

73-76 points: C

70-72 points: C-

67-69 points: D+

63-66 points: D

Under 63 points: F

Sociology 240 option: For students taking Sociology 240 (instead of Sociology 140), the requirements are the same (but you should do a better job of meeting them!)

Website: The lecture notes, study questions, a sample opinion piece, and other course information can be found on the course website.

Late work: It's fine to turn in your work late. There is no need to ask for permission! But the privilege comes with a price: If you do turn it in late, it will be graded in the usual way and after the grade is determined it will then be reduced by 10 points for every 24 hours it is late (prorated as necessary). If you think you can produce a significantly better piece by having a day longer than everyone else, then this may be the option for you.

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: *The many varieties of inequality*

Monday, Sept. 26: Introductory comments

Wednesday, Sept. 28: The variety of inequality regimes

Assigned Readings: Part I

Discussion Sections: No discussion sections in first week

Task: Sign up for discussion section

WEEK 2: *Trends in inequality*

Monday, Oct. 3: Long-term trends in inequality

Wednesday, Oct. 5: Why is inequality taking off in recent decades?

Assigned Readings: Parts II & III

Discussion Sections: Brainstorming about first opinion piece; discussion of study questions; queries about readings

Task: Upload rough outline of first opinion piece by midnight, Friday, Oct. 7

WEEK 3: *The building blocks of inequality: Class, status, and income*

Monday, Oct. 10: An introduction to class, status, and “class warfare”

Wednesday, Oct. 12: Are there really social classes?

Assigned Readings: Parts II & III (review)

Discussion Sections: Discuss problems arising in drafting opinion pieces; discussion of study questions; queries about readings

Task: Upload final opinion piece by midnight, Friday, Oct. 14

WEEK 4: *Inequality at the extremes*

Monday, Oct. 17: Poverty and the underclass

Wednesday, Oct. 19: Elites today

Assigned Readings: Part IV

Discussion Sections: Discussion of study questions; queries about readings

Task: Study for first exam

WEEK 5: *Gender inequality*

Monday, Oct. 24: Why is there gender inequality?

Wednesday, Oct. 26: Why have recent declines in gender inequality stalled out?

Assigned Readings: Part VI

Discussion Sections: Discussion of study questions; queries about readings

Task: Study for first exam

WEEK 6: Racial and ethnic inequality

Monday, Oct. 31: First exam (in class)

Wednesday, Nov. 2: Trends in racial and ethnic inequality

Assigned Readings: Part V

Discussion Sections: Brainstorming about second opinion piece; discussion of study questions; queries about readings

Task: Upload rough outline of second opinion piece by midnight, Friday, Nov. 4

WEEK 7: Generating inequality

Monday, Nov. 7: Social mobility today

Wednesday, Nov. 9: Why is there so much inheritance?

Assigned Readings: Part VII

Discussion Sections: Discuss problems arising in drafting opinion pieces; discussion of study questions; queries about readings

Task: Work on opinion piece

WEEK 8: Consequences of inequality

Monday, Nov. 14: Why we like what we like

Wednesday, Nov. 16: Trends in class determination

Assigned Readings: Part VIII

Discussion Sections: Discuss problems arising in drafting opinion pieces; discussion of study questions; queries about readings

Task: Upload final opinion piece by midnight, Friday, Nov. 18

WEEKS 9 & 10: The future of inequality and how to change it

Monday, Nov. 28: The Great Recession and inequality

Wednesday, Nov. 30: The conventional wisdom on reducing poverty and inequality

Monday, Dec. 5: New approaches to reducing poverty and inequality

Wednesday, Dec. 7: Open discussion

Assigned Readings: Parts IX & X

Discussion Sections: Discussion of study questions; queries about readings

Task: Study for second exam

SECOND EXAM: Monday, December 12 (12:15pm – 1:05pm)