Sociology 130 AC—Social Inequalities, American Cultures

UC Berkeley, Fall 2014

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Tu/Th 3:30-5 pm, 145 Dwinelle

Office Hours: Tuesdays. 9:30-11:30 and by appointment, 479 Barrows. Sign up on the sheet outside the door.

Course Description:

This course explores the causes and consequences of social inequalities in the U.S. We begin by discussing theories and concepts that scholars use to understand different forms of inequality. We then turn to the central institutions and mechanisms that sociologists argue are responsible for creating, reproducing, reducing and changing the structure of inequalities in the U.S. today, including education, labor markets, families, social policies, neighborhoods and the criminal justice system. Within each topic area, we will pay special attention to the significance of race and ethnicity, social class and gender and how they combine. We will focus on the present period but place each topic in a broader historical context.

Goals for the course are:

- To introduce students to theoretical and conceptual tools sociologists use for understanding and studying inequalities
- To cultivate an understanding of the complexity of current inequalities in the U.S., through exposure to empirical research
- For students to be able to apply sociological perspectives to current events
- To practice analytical and critical writing

Why?

The ability to apply sociological concepts, theories and methods to contemporary social issues will help you make sense for yourself of various inequalities in the U.S. today and identify those you are embedded in. Exposure to empirical research about controversial issues is important because it builds deeper understandings of topics that are complex, yet may be presented as very simple in popular media and commentary. Empirical research is necessary for making reliable generalizations about social trends. Many of us have “beliefs” or perceptions about something that may be contradicted by sociological research. Our own “common sense” and experience may turn out to be atypical and biased by our class position, race, gender and other factors. Finally, the ability to build and support a clearly
written argument is a skill that will distinguish you in the future—at work, at school and in life.

Some students have asked if this is a “liberal” course. Is it? It is true that most sociological research findings about social inequalities resonate more with policy positions on the left side of the U.S. political spectrum than with those on the right. But I encourage students from all political persuasions to think critically about the course materials and the relationship between empirical findings, policies and politics.

**Required Readings:**

The two books will be available at the campus bookstore, or can be ordered online where you might find a better price. Most readings will be in a course reader, on Bspace and online. The reader can be purchased from the Copy Central on Bancroft St. and a copy will be on reserve at Moffitt Library. Readings in the reader are marked with an (R) in the syllabus. I strongly recommend that you buy one. Other readings are posted in the “readings” folder on Bspace, or you can access online with the information provided on the syllabus.

**Required Books:**


**Recommended reading:** I’ve posted a list on Bspace for those inclined to pursue further reading about topics we cover in the course. I am always happy to make personalized recommendations—just come to office hours.

**Evaluation:**

45% papers — (20%) Paper 1 is due in class on Oct. 2nd. Paper 2 (25%) is due in class on Nov. 25th.

5% participation quizzes—throughout the semester, announced in lecture, on Bspace.

20% in-class midterm— Oct. 28

30% take home final exam— Due Dec. 15th

**Exams:** The midterm will be an in-class exam consisting of short essay questions, based on course readings and lectures. The final will be a take-home essay exam. It will focus on material covered after the midterm, but will likely ask you to incorporate materials from the entire semester.
**Papers:** You are required to turn in two papers for this course. There are specific instructions for each paper. **See the document on Bspace called “papers” for complete instructions for these assignments.**

**Participation quizzes:** The purpose of these is to encourage consistent attendance in lecture. Quizzes will be randomly announced in lecture throughout the semester. After class, you will have 24 hours to complete the quiz on Bspace. Questions will be based on the lecture from that day. The quizzes will count for 5% (50 points) of your final grade. There will be six quizzes. Each correct answer on a quiz is worth 2 points and will count toward the fifty point total. There will be no opportunity to make up these quizzes.

**Grading:** There will be two or more (depending on enrollment) graduate student readers for this course who will be responsible for most of the grading. The process for grading is as follows: I develop a rubric for the exams and papers and discuss it with the readers. We then grade several papers/exams together to make sure the grading is consistent. We will try to return exams and papers to you within two weeks. Readers will be available to discuss your assignments with you after they are returned, either during office hours or by appointment. I am always available to discuss the reasons for a grade with a student. If you have a problem with a grade, however, you should first discuss it with the reader who assigned the grade. If that does not resolve the problem, then I will discuss it with the reader and meet with you. **Please know that if we agree to re-evaluate your work, it will be under closer scrutiny and your grade could possibly go down as a result. If you ask us to consider raising your score, be prepared to make a specific argument as to why you think you deserve more points,** making sure to reference the rubric for the assignment in question. We will use the gradebook function on Bspace to post grades. Be sure to make sure the grade on the hard copy of your paper or exam matches the one online.

**Course Policies:**

**Students are responsible for all material covered in lecture, including announcements.** You will be expected to integrate materials from lecture and readings on exams and papers. Do not enroll in this class if you will not be able to (or do not plan to) attend the lectures regularly.

If you need **accommodations** for a disability, university athletics, or have a conflict due to the observance of religious holidays, please email or speak with me early in the semester to discuss appropriate arrangements.

**Exams and assignments must be taken and turned in on time.** If you have a personal emergency, contact me at the earliest opportunity to discuss alternative arrangements. Late papers will be penalized one third of a letter grade for each day they are late (including weekends). The final must be taken at the assigned time.

**Academic honesty is expected of all students.** I encourage students to discuss the readings and study together, but everyone must do their own work. Suspected violations relating to this course will be reported to the appropriate administrative department and
dealt with according to university policies. Be aware of plagiarism. Word for word use of even a single sentence from another author, publication or website without citation is plagiarism and is unethical. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade on the paper with no opportunity to rewrite. If you have questions about how to properly cite materials, or how to paraphrase appropriately, please ask me about this during office hours.

Email: Email should not be used for questions about class materials—these questions should be asked in class or during office hours. I don’t check email more than once per day, and cannot always respond right away, so talk to me before or after class, or during office hours if you have an important issue. I typically do not respond to emails asking for information that is on the course syllabus or the paper prompts, so if you don’t hear back from me, try reading these documents.

Office Hours: I urge students to talk with me sometime during the semester, just to say “hi” and especially if you are having trouble with the course. I want you to feel that the time you spend in this class is worthwhile. Either come to my office hours, or schedule a meeting. I can’t help you if you don’t communicate with me! Please sign up for office hours on the sign up sheet posted outside my office door at 479 Barrows. You are free to drop by, but I’ll give priority to people who have appointments.

Laptops, etc.: You are welcome to take notes on your laptop if you sit in the first five rows.

Circulation of Course Materials: DO NOT reproduce course materials or post them on-line or anywhere else. This includes the syllabus, lecture slides, notes, handouts and exams. As a student in the course, you will have access to everything you need on Bspace.

Course Schedule*:

Introduction, Aug. 28: INEQUALITY FROM A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE


Week 1, Sept. 2, 4 : ECONOMIC INEQUALITY IN THE U.S., CLASSIC THEORIES OF INEQUALITY


Week 2, Sept. 9, 11: MORE THEORIES OF CLASS AND STRATIFICATION


Week 3, Sept. 16, 18: RACE & CLASS—race as a social construct; history of race in the U.S.


Week 4, Sept. 23, 25: CLASS & RACE & GENDER


**PAPER 1 DUE OCT. 2**

**Week 6, Oct. 7, 9: FAMILIES, INEQUALITY AND POLICY—family structure changes, poverty and parenting**


**Week 7, Oct. 14, 16: FAMILIES/NEIGHBORHOODS**


**Week 8, Oct. 21, 23: NEIGHBORHOODS AND RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION—how do neighborhoods matter? How are race and neighborhoods related?**


Week 9, Oct. 28, 30: EDUCATION—education and achievement gaps; social mobility, class and education in the U.S.

MIDTERM EXAM IN CLASS OCT. 28


Week 10, Nov. 4, 6: EDUCATION


Owen, S. & Sawhill, I. (2013) *Should Everyone Go to College?* Center on Children and Families, Briefing #50, Brookings Institution (Bspace)

Week 11, Nov. 13 (no class Nov. 11, holiday): EDUCATION/LABOR MARKETS AND WORK—social mobility and labor markets—historical overview; work and communities; gender segregation


Week 12, Nov. 18, 20: LABOR MARKETS AND WORK—segmented labor markets; examples of labor market processes


Week 13: Nov. 25 (no class Nov. 27, holiday): LABOR MARKETS AND WORK—globalization and U.S. labor markets

Week 14: Dec. 2, 4: MASS INCARCERATION


Week 15: “RRR” week: Extra office hours, TBA

**TAKE HOME FINAL EXAM:** Questions will be posted on Bspace on Dec. 11 at 12 noon. **Exams are due on Dec. 15 by 3:30 pm.** There will be instructions on your exam for turning it in.

*The course schedule is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.*