

**SOCIOLOGY 360m**  
Social Inequality: Class, Status and Power  
Fall 2013  
TTH 11-12:20 KAP 148

**Dr. Karen Sternheimer**

Office: HSH 214

Office hours: TTH 12:30-1:30; 3:45-4:30 and by appointment

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The aim of this course is to analyze the distribution of wealth, income, political power, and prestige in the United States. Why do some Americans have greater wealth than others do? Why do some people get a better education and ultimately better jobs? We will examine attitudes toward social inequality and changes in patterns of distribution of rewards. We will also explore various theories explaining the roots of inequality focusing on class, and the intersections between class and race and gender. Additionally, we will examine the relationship between the individual and the structure of opportunities. Finally, we consider social movements that seek to reduce social inequality and its consequences. Throughout the semester we will explore how social inequality is reflected and reinforced in various forms of media.

We will challenge the common belief that inequality is solely the result of personal failure and consider how social structure and ideology maintain stratification, and we will also talk about ways changes can be made through political action and social policy.

**Course Goals:**

1. Explore concepts, theories, and empirical research that seek to explain social inequality.
2. Critically examine how American economic, political, educational, and cultural institutions perpetuate and reinforce inequality based on class, race, ethnicity, and gender.
3. Examine causes of poverty in America as well as possible solutions.
4. Consider the possibility of both individual and structural changes in American society.

**Student evaluation:**

Attendance and participation	15%
Tuesday in-class essays	5%
Take home midterm (due Thursday 10/24)	25%
Group project or JEP paper and presentation	25%
Take home final exam (due Tuesday 12/17 at 10 am)	30%

**Tracking your progress:**

You are expected to seek more than a grade from this course. However, I realize grades are very important to students. You are responsible for keeping a record of your grades and to be aware of your progress as well as areas where improvement is needed, and for seeking help from your peers or professor. Use the breakdown above to calculate your grade.

**Participation and Attendance:**

Active student participation in class discussions and activities is absolutely essential for this class. Therefore, students are expected to attend every class meeting prepared to discuss the assigned reading.

Students are expected to welcome differing viewpoints and to respect the thoughts and ideas of all class participants. You are expected to treat everyone in the class with respect; this means quietly listening while others are speaking, and arriving and leaving on time. Note that a great deal of information covered in the lectures may not be in the readings, and vice versa. *Students are responsible for getting notes or assignments from classmates* should an absence become necessary.

Students often overlook the importance of participation and attendance in their course grade. This grade is based on the percentage of class meetings you attend (you can't participate if you are not there!), and may be increased or decreased based on your participation. Things that will increase it are comments and questions that reflect knowledge of course material, as well as courteous attention to your professor and peers. Things that will bring your grade down include disruptive behavior (includes ringing cell phones web browsing and texting), rudeness towards your professor or peers, and comments that reveal a lack of preparation and attention. Ideally all class members will attend class regularly, prepared to discuss the reading and be open and respectful of differing viewpoints.

It is your responsibility to sign in every class, as attendance will be taken at the beginning of each meeting. To receive full attendance credit you must attend the entire class session. Signing in for a previous day is not possible, so be sure to sign in. **Signing in for another student is a form of academic dishonesty.**

### **Technology Etiquette:**

E-mail is a great resource but never takes the place of a conversation. Please put **"SOC 360"** in the subject line of any message. Lengthy questions or concerns should be addressed during office hours or a special appointment. Keep in mind that your professor is quite busy and probably cannot check e-mail as often as you may. **Absolutely no assignments will be accepted via e-mail.** We will be using Blackboard (<https://blackboard.usc.edu>) to post announcements, most handouts and some articles, so check this site periodically.

You are welcome to bring laptops and handheld devices to class, however, if their use becomes a distraction you will be asked to turn them off. Cell phones must be turned off during all class meetings. Disruptions will reduce your participation grade. *Multitasking (web surfing, Facebooking, texting, studying for another class) is disruptive and will reduce your participation grade.*

### **Essays:**

For five Tuesdays of the semester (from 9/10-10/15) there will be a brief essay assignment at the start of class to ascertain how well you are engaged in the course (attending lectures and reading assignments). The assignment will start at the beginning of class so if you are late you will lose time and may not be able to complete the assignment. The essay topic will come from a central theme from the previous week's reading and course discussions and will be an opportunity for you to reflect on the material. Do not assume that simply filling a page will earn you credit; your writing must reflect awareness of central issues and ideas expressed by authors and in class. These assignments are graded credit/no credit and are each worth 1% of your total course grade. **Missed essays or essays that earn "no credit" can be made up with extra credit assignments, as noted below.**

### **Extra Credit**

After the midterm, an essay question will be posted on Blackboard at the end of each week. Your one page response must be uploaded onto Blackboard before the start of class the following Tuesday. By completing these assignments you may make up any missed essays or no credit essays and/or earn up to 3 percent extra credit in the course (1 percent per essay).

You may earn *up to* 10 points extra on your group project grade or midterm (i.e. a grade of 90 can be increased to a grade of 100) by reading one of the optional books in its entirety (listed on Blackboard) and answering the questions (also on Blackboard) in a 5-7 page paper (due date 11/26). A brief, informal presentation to the class is required as well.

### **Group Project:**

For part of the course, we will be using class time to conduct group research projects during the segment of the course on poverty.

The project will involve forming a research question, finding data from academic or government sources that address that question, finding examples of policies and programs that have been implemented to

address poverty, and creating a class presentation to share the group's findings with the class. I will be working one-on-one with each group to facilitate this process during class time.

Each group's presentation should be between 8-10 minutes, highlighting the question, data, and policies and programs the group studied. Your group is encouraged to present a multimedia report to the class; please limit your presentation to no more than 10 slides or images.

A 5-7 page written report highlighting the group's findings (in the style of an executive summary) must be turned in on **Tuesday, October 1** at the start of class, and each group should be prepared to present its findings on that day too.

All group members will share a project grade. Members will be evaluated by their fellow group members on the level of their contribution, and group presentations will be evaluated on the clarity of your discussion of a poverty-related issue and the quality of the data addressing your research question. The presentation will be evaluated by the rest of the class as well as by your professor. **No late group projects or reports will be accepted. More instructions will be posted on Blackboard soon.**

#### **JEP:**

Students participating in the JEP program at CalFresh, Midnight Mission, or LIFT will write a 7-10 page paper based on how their experiences relate to major course concepts in lieu of the group project. During the in-class group project activities, JEP participants will act as advisers to their classmates for their projects. Students participating at the same JEP site may collaborate on their papers and share a project grade and participate in a brief, informal presentation; *ten percent of the paper grade will be based on your JEP score*. The paper and presentation is due 12/3. **No late group projects or reports will be accepted. More instructions will be posted on Blackboard soon.**

#### **Midterm & Final Exam:**

Both the midterm and final exams will be take home, essay format and should incorporate your ideas with those in the reading and class discussions. Both exams will be distributed at least one week prior to their due date. All assignments (including extra credit work and group projects) must be submitted in hard copy and on Blackboard to ensure academic integrity (instructions will be provided). Late papers will be reduced by 10% per day (including weekend days); **no late final exams can be accepted.**

All assignments must reflect original work. Plagiarism will not be tolerated and consequences will be in accordance with university policy. Any papers that are dramatically different in style and content from in-class work will require an oral exam. Failure to appear or to successfully demonstrate that the work is your own within one week of notification will result in a failing grade and will be reported to Student Judicial Affairs.

Extra credit opportunities may arise at times; note that special individual opportunities for extra credit violate university policy and will not be considered. Finally, grades are earned, they are not given. It is your responsibility to do the best work you are capable of producing. *Nitpicking over points is discouraged, as it reveals a commitment to a grade rather than to learning.* **Continued enrollment in this course indicates acceptance of class policies.**

**\*\*Any special learning needs should be brought to my attention as soon as possible\*\***

#### **Required Reading:**

1. Marger, Martin. 2014. *Social Inequality: Patterns and Processes* 6th ed., McGraw-Hill.
2. Feagan, Joe & Melvin Sikes. 1995. *Living With Racism: The Black Middle Class Experience*, Beacon Press.
3. Kendall, Diana. 2011. *Framing Class: Media Representations of Wealth and Poverty in America Second edition*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

**\*\*These dates are estimates and subject to change at my discretion\*\***

## **I. Defining Inequality**

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|---|---------|--|---|
| 1 | T 8/27  | Introduction to course                       |   |
| 2 | TH 8/29 | What is social inequality?                   | • Marger ch 1 “Introduction to Social Inequality”   |
| 3 | T 9/3   | Why does inequality exist?                   | • Marger ch 2 “Theories of Class and Social Inequality”   |
| 4 | TH 9/5  | How do we think about inequality?            | • Kendall ch 1 “Class Action in the Media”<br>• Kendall ch 7 “Framing Class, Vicarious Living, and Consumption” |
| 5 | T 9/10  | How is social class defined?                 | • Marger ch 3 “The American Class System”<br><b>FIRST IN-CLASS ESSAY</b>  |
| 6 | TH 9/12 | How easy is it to move up in the U.S. today? | • Marger ch 7 “Stratification and Social Mobility”  |

## **II. Poverty in America: GROUP PROJECT**

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|----|---------|---|---|
| 7  | T 9/17  | What causes poverty?                                | • Marger ch 6 “Poverty and the Poor”<br><b>SECOND IN-CLASS ESSAY</b>                  |
| 8  | TH 9/19 | Who are the working poor?                           | • Kendall ch 5 “Tarnished Metal Frames: The Working Class and the Working Poor”       |
| 9  | T 9/24  | How do we think about the poor? About homelessness? | • Kendall ch 4 “Fragile Frames: The Poor and Homeless”<br><b>THIRD IN-CLASS ESSAY</b> |
| 10 | TH 9/26 | Realities of poverty in America                     | GUEST SPEAKER   |
| 11 | T 10/1  | Policy and poverty                                  | <b>GROUP PRESENTATIONS</b>  |

## **III. The Shrinking Middle**

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|----|----------|-----------------------------------|---|
| 12 | TH 10/3  | Are most Americans middle class?  | • Marger ch 5 “The Middle Classes”<br><b>GROUP PRESENTATIONS</b>  |
| 13 | T 10/8   | What is the middle class squeeze? | • Chapter from <i>The Disposable American: Layoffs and Their Consequences</i> (on Blackboard)<br><b>FOURTH IN-CLASS ESSAY</b> |
| 14 | TH 10/10 | The middle class squeeze, con’t   | • Kendall ch 6 “Splintered Wooden Frames: The Middle Class”   |

## **IV. Wealth, Power, and Privilege**

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|----|----------|--|--|
| 15 | T 10/15  | How are wealth and power related?<br><b>DISTRIBUTE MIDTERM</b> | • Marger ch 4 “The Upper Class and the Power Elite”<br><b>FIFTH IN-CLASS ESSAY</b> |
| 16 | TH 10/17 | Wealth and privilege   | • Chapter from <i>The Price of Admission</i> (Bb)                                  |

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|----|----------|--|---|
| 17 | T 10/22  | Can we all be rich someday?                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kendall ch 2 “Twenty-Four-Karat Gold Frames: Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous”</li> </ul> |
| 18 | TH 10/24 | Perceptions and realities of the wealthy<br><b>MIDTERM DUE</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kendall ch 3 “Gilded Cages: Stories of How the Mighty Have Fallen”</li> </ul>              |

**V. Race and Class: Why race still matters**

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|----|----------|---|--|
| 19 | T 10/29  | What are race and ethnicity?                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marger ch 10 “Racial and Ethnic Differentiation”</li> </ul>   |
| 20 | TH 10/31 | Why does race still matter?                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feagan &amp; Sikes Preface</li> <li>• Feagan &amp; Sikes ch 1, “The Continuing Significance of Racism”</li> </ul>   |
| 21 | T 11/5   | How do middle-class African Americans deal with discrimination? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feagan &amp; Sikes, ch 2 “Navigating Public Places”</li> <li>• Feagin &amp; Sikes ch 7 “Contending with Everyday Discrimination: Effects and Strategies”</li> </ul> |
| 22 | TH 11/7  | How does race impact employment opportunities?                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feagan &amp; Sikes ch 4 “Navigating the Middle-Class Workplace”</li> <li>• Feagan &amp; Sikes ch 5 “Building a Business”</li> </ul>                                 |
| 23 | T 11/12  | Why are American cities still segregated?                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feagan &amp; Sikes ch 6 “Seeking a Good Home and Neighborhood”</li> </ul>   |
| 24 | TH 11/14 | Why do riots/rebellions happen?                                 |  |

**VI. Maintaining Inequality**

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|----|----------|---|---|
| 25 | T 11/19  | Why is inequality so hard to eliminate?               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marger ch 8 “Ideology and the Legitimation of Inequality”</li> </ul> |
| 26 | TH 11/21 | Is education the great equalizer?                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feagan &amp; Sikes ch 3 “Seeking a Good Education”</li> </ul>        |
| 27 | T 11/26  | How does our educational system replicate inequality? | <b>EXTRA CREDIT READING ASSIGNMENT DUE</b>  |

**VII. Public Policy and Social Change**

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|----|---------|--|---|
| 28 | T 12/3  | What policies can reduce inequality?                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marger ch 9 “Public Policy and the Class System”</li> </ul> <p><b>JEP PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS DUE</b></p> |
| 30 | TH 12/5 | Challenging inequality and creating change                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feagan &amp; Sikes ch 8 “Changing the Color Line: The Future of U.S. Racism”</li> </ul>                    |
|    | T 12/17 | <b>FINAL EXAM DUE AT 10am in HSH 314 - No late papers accepted</b> |   |