

SOCIOLOGY 360m
Social Inequality: Class, Status and Power
Spring 2020
TTH 8-9:20 THH 214

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Why do some Americans have greater wealth than others do? Why do some people get a better education and ultimately better jobs? The aim of this course is to analyze the distribution of wealth, income, political power, and prestige in the United States. 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, race, and gender. Additionally, we will examine the relationship between the individual and the structure of opportunities. Finally, we consider social movements and social policies that seek to reduce social inequality and their consequences.

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.
5. **Develop critical thinking, research, data analysis, writing, presentation, and teamwork skills.**

Student evaluation:

Attendance and participation	15%
Tuesday in-class essays	5%
Take home midterm (due Thursday 3/12)	25%
Group project or JEP paper and presentation	25%
Take home final exam (due Wednesday 5/13 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. The course grading scale is posted on Blackboard.

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. Bring your book or a print out of the reading to class with you for discussion.

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 in their course grade. This grade is based on the percentage of class meetings you attend (you can't participate if you are not here!), 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 or use of any electronic device without approval), 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; **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. E-mails are typically answered within one business day. Be sure to check your USC email account periodically for course-related announcements. **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.

Cell phones must be turned off and put away during all class meetings, and laptops or electronic devices are forbidden except by special permission. Multitasking (web surfing, Facebooking, texting, studying for another class) is expressly forbidden.

Essays:

For five Tuesdays of the semester (from 1/28-3/10) 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 4/16). 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. This will allow you and your classmates to focus on an aspect of poverty that you are most curious about, and then teach the rest of the class about your findings.

The project will involve finding data from academic or government sources that address your specific topic, 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. **Your group must turn in a topic statement and a list of key data points your group will be presenting no later than one week before your presentation, worth 10 percent of your overall grade. Each participant must include a 1-2 page essay detailing their contributions and what they learned from the project.**

Each group's presentation should be between 8-10 minutes, highlighting the topic, 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 6-8 page written report highlighting the group's findings (in the style of an executive summary) must be turned in on **the day of your presentation** at the start of class. Your presentation must be uploaded to the designated discussion thread on Blackboard

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. *Students who do not contribute sufficiently to their groups may receive a grade of zero if their group members determine their participation was unacceptable. No late group projects or reports will be accepted. Full details are posted on Blackboard.*

JEP:

You may participate in JEP instead of participating in a group project. Students participating in the JEP program at CalFresh, Chrysalis, Homeboy Industries, Midnight Mission, or LIFT will write a 6-8 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 4/28. **Late papers will be reduced by 10% per day; 5% if turned in after the start of class. No papers accepted after 5/1. Full details are posted on Blackboard.**

Midterm & Final Exam:

The midterm and final exams are designed to help you synthesize the central course concepts. Both exams will be take home, essay format and should incorporate ideas from the readings and class discussions. Both exams will be distributed at least one week prior to their due date. 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 and must be turned in on Blackboard's turnitin site to generate an originality report in addition to turning in a hard copy (instructions will be provided). 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. **Please see Blackboard for USC Code of Ethics and student resources.**

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. Edin, Kathryn & Luke Shaefer. 2015. *\$2 A Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

These dates are estimates and subject to change at my discretion

I. Defining Inequality

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| 1 | T 1/14 | Introduction to course | |
| 2 | TH 1/16 | What is social inequality? | • Marger ch 1 “Introduction to Social Inequality” |
| 3 | T 1/21 | Why does inequality exist? | • Marger ch 2 “Theories of Class and Social Inequality” |
| 4 | TH 1/23 | How is social class defined? | • Marger ch 3 “The American Class System”
GROUP PROJECT SIGN UP |
| 5 | T 1/28 | How easy is it to move up in the U.S. today? | • Marger ch 7 “Stratification and Social Mobility”
FIRST IN-CLASS ESSAY |

II. Poverty in America: GROUP PROJECTS

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| 6 | TH 1/30 | What is poverty? | • Marger ch 6 “Poverty and the Poor” pp. 146-163 |
| 7 | T 2/4 | What causes poverty? | • Marger ch 6 pp. 163-182
SECOND IN-CLASS ESSAY |
| 8 | TH 2/6 | What is the feminization of poverty? | • Marger ch 11 “Gender Inequality” |
| 9 | T 2/11 | Policy and poverty | • Edin & Shaefer “Introduction” and “Welfare is Dead”
THIRD IN-CLASS ESSAY |
| 10 | TH 2/13 | Who are the working poor? | • Edin & Shaefer “Perilous Work”
GROUP PRESENTATION |
| 11 | T 2/18 | Housing and homelessness | • Edin & Shaefer “A Room of One’s Own”
GROUP PRESENTATION |
| 12 | TH 2/20 | Survival strategies | • Edin & Shaefer “By Any Means Necessary”
GROUP PRESENTATION |
| 13 | T 2/25 | Rural poverty | • Edin & Shaefer “A World Apart”
GROUP PRESENTATION |

III. The Shrinking Middle

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| 14 | TH 2/27 | The myth of the singular middle class | • Marger ch 5 “The Middle Classes” |
| 15 | T 3/3 | What is the middle class squeeze? | • Chapter from Louis Uchitelle, <i>The Disposable American: Layoffs and Their Consequences</i> (on Blackboard)
DISTRIBUTE MIDTERM/FOURTH IN-CLASS ESSAY |

IV. Wealth, Power, and Privilege

- 16 TH 3/5 Who are the wealthy? • Marger ch 4 “The Upper Class and the Power Elite”
- 17 T 3/10 Wealth, power and privilege **FIFTH IN-CLASS ESSAY**
• Chapter from Daniel Golden, *The Price of Admission* (Bb)
- 18 TH 3/12 Perceptions and realities of the wealthy **MIDTERM DUE**

V. Race and Class: Why race still matters

- 19 T 3/24 What are race and ethnicity? • Marger ch 10 “Racial and Ethnic Differentiation”
- 20 TH 3/26 Why does race still matter? • Feagan & Sikes Preface
• Feagan & Sikes ch 1, “The Continuing Significance of Racism”
- 21 T 3/31 How do middle-class African Americans deal with discrimination? • Feagan & Sikes, ch 2 “Navigating Public Places”
• Feagin & Sikes ch 7 “Contending with Everyday Discrimination: Effects and Strategies”
- 22 TH 4/2 How does race impact employment opportunities? • Feagan & Sikes ch 4 “Navigating the Middle-Class Workplace”
• Feagan & Sikes ch 5 “Building a Business”
- 23 T 4/7 Why are American cities still segregated? • Feagan & Sikes ch 6 “Seeking a Good Home and Neighborhood”
- 24 TH 4/9 Why do riots/rebellions happen? • Zelizer, Julian “Is America Repeating the Mistakes of 1968?” (Bb)

VI. Maintaining Inequality

- 25 T 4/14 Why is inequality so hard to eliminate? • Marger ch 8 “Ideology and the Legitimation of Inequality”
- 26 TH 4/16 How does our educational system replicate inequality? **JEP TOPIC STATEMENT/OUTLINE DUE**
• Feagan & Sikes ch 3 “Seeking a Good Education”
EXTRA CREDIT READING ASSIGNMENT & PRESENTATIONS DUE
- 27 T 4/21 The economics of higher education • Marger, pp. 206-210, 213-220

VII. Public Policy and Social Change

- 28 TH 4/23 What role do policies play in creating and reducing inequality? • Marger ch 9 “Public Policy and the Class System”
EXTRA CREDIT READING & PRESENTATIONS DUE
- 29 T 4/28 What policies can reduce inequality in the future? • Edin & Shaefer “Conclusion: Where, Then, From Here?”
JEP PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS DUE
- 30 TH 4/30 Challenging inequality and creating change • Feagan & Sikes ch 8 “Changing the Color Line: The Future of U.S. Racism”
W 5/13 **FINAL EXAM DUE AT 10am in HSH 314 - No late papers accepted**