



USC University of Southern California

SOCIOLOGY 360m

Social Inequality: Class, Status and Power

Spring 2021

TTH 8-9:20 On Zoom

Dr. Karen Sternheimer

Office hours: TTH 11:00-12:00 by appointment on Zoom

(other appointment times may be available)

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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. Identify concepts, theories, and empirical research that seek to explain social inequality.
2. Describe how American economic, political, educational, and cultural institutions perpetuate and reinforce inequality based on class, race, ethnicity, and gender.
3. Identify causes of poverty in America as well as possible solutions.
4. Assess 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:

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| Participation | 10% |
| Reflective Blackboard Journal Entries | 5% |
| Weekly essays | 5% |
| Take home midterm (due Thursday 3/18) | 25% |
| Group project or JEP paper and presentation | 25% |
| Take home final exam (due Wednesday 5/12 @10 am) | 30% |

Tracking your progress:

You are expected to seek more than a grade from this course. 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. You can access your grades regularly on Blackboard.

USC technology rental program

If you need resources to successfully participate in your classes, such as a laptop or internet hotspot, you may be eligible for the university's equipment rental program. To apply, please [submit an application](#).

USC Technology Support Links

[Zoom information for students](#)

[Blackboard help for students](#)

[Software available to USC Campus](#)

Technology Etiquette:

E-mail is a great resource but never takes the place of a conversation. Please include "SOCI 360" in the subject line. Lengthy questions or concerns should be addressed during office hours or a special appointment. Emails are typically answered within one business day. No assignments will be accepted via e-mail. We will be using Blackboard (<https://blackboard.usc.edu>) for all course content.

Even in an online platform, your complete focus is expected during live Zoom sessions. Please do not multitask during meetings. You are encouraged to attend class as if you would in person: sitting upright and ready to participate and share video and audio.

Synchronous session recording notice

Synchronous sessions will be recorded and provided to all students asynchronously. To access previous recordings, go to Blackboard, Zoom, and then Cloud Recordings. *USC prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.*

Participation (10%):

This class is based on active student participation in discussions and activities and is designed to be hands-on and experiential. Students are expected to attend class meetings prepared to discuss the assigned reading and participate in all activities. **If you are not able to attend a live Zoom session, you are expected to fully participate in the discussion board conversations on Blackboard that week. Discussion questions will be posted each week. You are encouraged to participate on the discussion board even if you *are* able to attend.**

Students are expected to welcome differing viewpoints and to respect the thoughts and ideas of all class participants, listen quietly while others are speaking, and join and leave meetings on time. Note that a great deal of information covered in class may not be in the readings, and vice versa. Students are responsible for getting notes or assignments from Blackboard and Zoom recordings.

A full rubric detailing how participation is graded is posted on Blackboard on the "Syllabus and Grading" tab. Active participation in activities, comments and questions that reflect knowledge of course material, as well as courteous attention to your professor and peers are expected.

Reflective Blackboard Journal Entries (5%):

Each week, you are asked to reflect on what you have learned during the week and what questions you have about the material and your project using Blackboard's Journal function. There will be ten journal entry requirements, each worth .5% of your grade. Only you and your professor can see these entries. They are due each week of the semester by 11:59 pm PST on Fridays. *You can miss up to 5 without penalty.*

Essays:

Before the midterm, there will be five essay assignments to ascertain your comprehension of the course material. 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. These essays will be posted on Blackboard by 5pm on the Thursdays they are scheduled, and due the following Tuesday before the start of class. In order to earn credit your writing must reflect awareness of central issues and ideas expressed by authors and in class (see rubric on Blackboard for more specific details). These assignments are graded

credit/partial 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 11/5). You will be required to briefly share your findings with the class 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 quantitative 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 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 4/27. **Late papers will be reduced by 10% per day; 5% if turned in after the start of class. No papers accepted after 4/30. 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 midterms will be reduced by 10% per day and 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. 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 previous 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 are built into this class; 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.* **Once assigned, grades will not be changed unless a mathematical error occurred.** 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. Feagin, 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 1/19 | What is social inequality? | • Marger ch 1 "Introduction to Social Inequality" |
| 2 | TH 1/21 | Why does inequality exist? | • Marger ch 2 "Theories of Class and Social Inequality" ESSAY #1 POSTED (due 1/26) |
| 3 | T 1/26 | How is social class defined? | • Marger ch 3 "The American Class System" GROUP PROJECT SIGN UP |
| 4 | TH 1/28 | How easy is it to move up in the U.S. today? | • Marger ch 7 "Stratification and Social Mobility" ESSAY #2 POSTED (due 2/2); JEP SIGN UP DL 1/29 |

II. Poverty in America: GROUP PROJECTS

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| 5 | T 2/2 | What is poverty? | • Marger ch 6 "Poverty and the Poor" pp. 146-163 |
| 6 | TH 2/4 | What causes poverty? | • Marger ch 6 pp. 163-182 ESSAY #3 POSTED (due 2/9) |
| 7 | T 2/9 | What is the feminization of poverty? | • Marger ch 11 "Gender Inequality" |
| 8 | TH 2/11 | How is poverty related to public policy? | • Edin & Shaefer "Introduction" and "Welfare is Dead" |
| 9 | T 2/16 | Who are the working poor? | • Edin & Shaefer "Perilous Work" GROUP PRESENTATION |

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| 10 | TH 2/18 | Housing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edin & Shaefer “A Room of One’s Own” GROUP PRESENTATION |
| 11 | T 2/23 | Homelessness | GROUP PRESENTATION |
| 12 | TH 2/25 | Survival strategies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edin & Shaefer “By Any Means Necessary” GROUP PRESENTATION ESSAY #4 POSTED (Due 3/2) |
| 13 | T 3/2 | Rural poverty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edin & Shaefer “A World Apart” GROUP PRESENTATION |

III. The Shrinking Middle

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| 14 | TH 3/4 | The myth of the singular middle class | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marger ch 5 “The Middle Classes” ESSAY #5 POSTED (Due 3/9) |
| 15 | T 3/9 | What is the middle-class squeeze? | Louis Uchitelle, <i>The Disposable American: Layoffs and Their Consequences</i> (on Blackboard) MIDTERM POSTED |

IV. Wealth, Power, and Privilege

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| 16 | TH 3/11 | Who are the wealthy? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marger ch 4 “The Upper Class and the Power Elite” |
| 17 | T 3/16 | Wealth, power and privilege | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter from Daniel Golden, <i>The Price of Admission</i> (Bb) |

V. Race and Class: Why race still matters

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| 18 | TH 3/18 | What are race and ethnicity? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marger ch 10 “Racial and Ethnic Differentiation” MIDTERM DUE |
| | T 3/23 | WELLNESS DAY | |
| 19 | TH 3/25 | Why does race still matter? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feagin & Sikes Preface • Feagin & Sikes ch 1, “The Continuing Significance of Racism” Extra Credit Essay #1 posted |
| 20 | T 3/30 | How do middle-class African Americans deal with discrimination? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feagin & Sikes, ch 2 “Navigating Public Places” • Feagin & Sikes ch 7 “Contending with Everyday Discrimination: Effects and Strategies” |
| 21 | TH 4/1 | How does race impact employment opportunities? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feagin & Sikes ch 4 “Navigating the Middle-Class Workplace” • Feagin & Sikes ch 5 “Building a Business” Extra Credit Essay #2 posted |
| 22 | T 4/6 | Why are American cities still segregated? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feagin & Sikes ch 6 “Seeking a Good Home and Neighborhood” |

- 23 TH 4/8 What leads to civil unrest?
- Zelizer, Julian “Is America Repeating the Mistakes of 1968?” (Bb)
- JEP TOPIC STATEMENT/OUTLINE DUE**
Extra Credit Essay #3 posted

VI. Maintaining Inequality

- 24 T 4/13 Why is inequality so hard to eliminate?
- Marger ch 8 “Ideology and the Legitimation of Inequality”
- 25 TH 4/15 How does our educational system replicate inequality?
- Feagin & Sikes ch 3 “Seeking a Good Education”
- Extra Credit Essay #4 posted**
- 26 T 4/20 The economics of higher education
- Marger, pp. 206-210, 213-220
- EXTRA CREDIT READING ASSIGNMENT & PRESENTATIONS DUE**
- TH 4/22 **WELLNESS DAY**

VII. Public Policy and Social Change

- 27 T 4/27 What role do policies play in creating and reducing inequality?
- Marger ch 9 “Public Policy and the Class System”
- JEP PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS DUE**
- 28 TH 4/29 What policies can reduce inequality in the future? Challenging inequality and creating change
- Edin & Shaefer “Conclusion: Where, Then, From Here?”
 - Feagin & Sikes ch 8 “Changing the Color Line: The Future of U.S. Racism”
- Extra Credit Essay #5 posted**
- W 5/12 **FINAL EXAM DUE AT 10am PST on Blackboard - No late papers accepted**