

**Yale University**

**Undergraduate Seminar, Spring 2009**

## **SOCIAL INEQUALITY**

**Course outline (Subject to revision! Please check V2 server for updates)**

Course number: SOC 314b

Department: Sociology

Instructor: Juho Härkönen

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Meeting Time: Wednesdays 3.30 to 5.20 pm

Class Location:

### **Course description**

Economic inequalities have increased in the United States and several other countries during the last decades. This has not gone unnoticed in recent political and public debates. This seminar introduces students to various aspects of social inequality by focusing on empirical findings from social-scientific research and on theoretical foundations of inequality research.

The course covers recent developments in economic inequality in the US, other industrialized nations, and globally; theoretical and empirical foundations of class, gender, and race inequalities; topics on the causes and consequences of inequality; and considerations of why inequalities are important.

At the end of the seminar, you should be familiar with basic aspects of the extent of and trends in economic inequality in the United States and elsewhere, have a general understanding of how sociology has approached these inequalities, understand how class, gender, race, and welfare states shape inequality in modern countries, and have basic familiarity research on consequences of inequality on children's outcomes and on health.

You are expected to read the required material for each meeting and participate in active discussion. This is the best way that we can address the problems encountered and engage in an active learning process. The recommended material are meant to offer deeper insights for each topic and are useful for the written assignments.

The wide majority of the readings are very approachable (and generally short), so you shouldn't be discouraged by what might at first glimpse look like a lot of readings!

## Assessment

Four papers, approximately 3,000 words each (see below) 75 %

Possible topics for the papers will be discussed during the first meeting. Please feel free to contact me to further discuss the topic of your choice! I can recommend additional material that can be helpful. Each paper has a deadline that must be observed. Each day beyond the deadline will cost 20 % of the maximum grade.

Class participation 25 %

Class participation:

- a) *Reading reaction*: For each meeting, please write a brief reading reaction, in which you can raise questions, discuss your reactions, and give comments or criticism. These are meant to prepare for and direct the classroom discussions. The response can be anything from a few sentences to a page, depending on your reactions! These reactions will not be graded individually. You can, however, improve your class participation grades with insightful reading reactions. Please post these reactions one day before each meeting before or at 5 pm to the seminar's V2 server.
- b) *Presentation*: Each student will be required (at least once) to give a brief presentation based on the additional material assigned for each week and lead further discussion on the topic. Topics will be discussed during the first meeting.
- c) *General participation*: Please don't be shy, there are no stupid questions. You can raise any issues you may have had with reading the material: please keep in mind that you most likely were not the only one finding some specific question problematic or difficult!

*Attendance policy*: If for any reason you cannot attend some of the meetings, please inform me beforehand. You can be absent from two meetings without sanctions. Beyond that, please provide a doctor's certificate or letter from your dean explaining the reason for the absence. Otherwise, half a letter grade will be reduced from your final grade for each absence.

## Core readings (pickup location TBA, please keep up to date or contact me)

Grusky, David B. (2008) *Social Stratification. Class, Race, and Gender in Sociological Perspective*. Third Edition. Westview Press, Boulder (CO).

Iceland, John (2006) *Poverty in America. A Handbook*. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Massey, Douglas (2007) *Categorically Unequal. The American Stratification System*. Russell Sage Foundation, New York.

Mishel, Lawrence, Bernstein, Jared and Allegretto, Sylvia (2007) *The State of Working America 2005/6*. Economic Policy Institute, Washington DC.

OECD (2008) *Growing Unequal: Income Distribution and Poverty in OECD Countries*. OECD, Paris. Available from the OECD website through <http://titania.sourceoecd.org/vl=7603149/cl=12/nw=1/rpsv/cw/vhosts/oecdthemes/99980045/v2008n10/contp1-1.htm>

Wilkinson, Richard (2006) *The Impact of Inequality. How To Make Sick Societies Healthier*. The New Press, NY.

Wright, Erik Olin (2005) *Approaches to Class Analysis*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

You are recommended to become familiar with the Pathways magazine published by the Stanford Poverty and Inequality Center. It can be delivered home for free! Check out [http://www.stanford.edu/group/scspi/media\\_magazines.html](http://www.stanford.edu/group/scspi/media_magazines.html)

## I INTRODUCTION

### 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting (1/14/2009) Introduction, course outline

*Description:* The first meeting introduces the course and some basic concepts in social inequality and stratification research.

#### *Background readings*

Grusky, David B. and Ku, Manwai (2008) Gloom, Doom, and Inequality. Ch. 1 in Grusky: Social Stratification.

Massey, Douglas S. (2007) Categorically Unequal, Ch. 1.

*New York Times:* Shadowy Lines That Still Divide  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/15/national/class/OVERVIEW-FINAL.html>

*Take the CIQLE and Cornell inequality quizzes!*

CIQLE: <http://www.yale.edu/ciqle/quizintro.html>

Cornell: <http://inequality.cornell.edu/~webmaster/cgi-bin/inequiz?FORMID=quiz-2008;next=1>

## II ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AT HOME AND ABROAD

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting (1/21/2009) Economic inequality in the United States and other advanced economies

*Description:* In this session, we look into the basic features of the evolution of economic inequality (earnings, household incomes, wealth) in the United States and compare it to trends in other advanced economies.

#### *Required readings*

Mishel, Lawrence, Bernstein, Jared and Allegretto, Sylvia (2007) *The State of Working America*. Chs. 1 & 5

OECD (2008) *Growing Unequal*. Ch. 1

Grusky, D. *Social Stratification*, Ch. 8 (Piketty and Saez).

**Also**, see latest update to US figures from <http://elsa.berkeley.edu/~saez/saez-USstopincomes-2006prel.pdf>

#### *Recommended readings:*

Danziger, Sheldon and Gottschalk, Peter (1995) *America Unequal*. Harvard University Press.

Morris, Martina and Western, Bruce (1999) Inequality in Earnings at the Close of the Twentieth Century. *Annual Review of Sociology* 25: 623-657. Summary in Grusky, Ch. 7

Neckerman, Kathryn M. and Torche, Florencia (2007) Inequality: Causes and Consequences. *Annual Review of Sociology* 33: 335-357.

Spilerman, Seymour (2000) Wealth and Stratification Processes. *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 497-524. <http://arjournals.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.497>

For time-series on income inequality and poverty in advanced economies, please visit the Luxembourg Income Study homepage at [www.lisproject.org](http://www.lisproject.org)!

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting (1/28/2009) Poverty in the United States and other advanced economies

*Description:* In this session we deepen the analysis of the previous class by focusing on the bottom of the income distribution, the poor. How is poverty measured? How has US poverty evolved and what are the characteristics of the poor population? How does US poverty compare with poverty in other advanced economies?

#### *Required readings*

Iceland, John (2006) Poverty in America. Chs. 1, 3-6.

Smeeding, Timothy (2008) Poverty, Work, and Policy: The United States in Comparative Perspective. Ch. 36 in Grusky: Social Stratification.

*Recommended readings*

Grusky: Social Stratification, Ch. 35, 37, 44

OECD (2008) Growing Unequal. Chs. 5-7.

UNICEF 2007. *Child Poverty in Perspective: An Overview of Child Well-Being in Rich Countries*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.  
<http://www.unicef.org/media/files/ChildPovertyReport.pdf>

**4<sup>th</sup> Meeting (2/4/2009) Global inequalities**

*Description:* In this session, we look at the main features of the global development of economic well-being and human development, inequalities, and poverty, also touching on the question of globalization and global development and inequality.

*Required readings*

UNDP (2005) Human Development Report. Chs. 1 and 2.  
[http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR05\\_chapter\\_1.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR05_chapter_1.pdf)  
[http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR05\\_chapter\\_2.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR05_chapter_2.pdf)

Neckerman, Kathryn M. and Torche, Florencia (2007) Inequality: Causes and Consequences. *Annual Review of Sociology* 33: 335-357: Please read pp. 346-8.

*The Economist* (2004) Global Economic Inequality: More or Less Equal?  
<http://www.columbia.edu/~xs23/papers/worldistribution/Economist%20March%202004.htm>

Grusky, Chs. 109, 110

*Recommended readings*

Sala-i-Martin, Xavier (2006) The World Distribution of Income: Falling Poverty and... Convergence, Period. *Quarterly Journal of Economics* CXXI(2): 351-397.

Firebaugh, Glenn (2003) *The New Geography of Global Income Inequality*. Harvard University Press.

IMF (2007) World Economic Outlook: Spillovers and Cycles in the Global Economy. Ch 5: The Globalization of Labor <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2007/01/pdf/c5.pdf>

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**Paper assignment I:** Write a paper on your chosen topic (discuss with me beforehand) related to economic inequality and poverty in the United States, other advanced economies, or globally.  
**Deadline:** 2/18/2009  
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### III CLASS, GENDER, AND RACE/ETHNICITY

#### 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting (2/11/2009) Social Class: Marxists and Weberians

*Description:* This session introduces Marxist and Weberian accounts of social class, which are the two most prevalent theoretical standpoints. We examine their theoretical foundations, differences and similarities, and uses in current sociology.

#### *Required readings*

Grusky, David. 2008. Social Stratification. Pp. 79-90, 98-110, 114-132

Wright, Erik Olin. 2005. Approaches to Class Analysis, Introduction + Chs. 1-2 (by Wright and Breen) + Pp. 119-128.

#### *Recommended readings*

Wright, Erik Olin. 2005. Approaches to Class Analysis, Conclusion

Grusky, David. 2008. Social Stratification. Pp. 74-142.

Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich (1848) The Communist Manifesto.  
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/manifest.pdf>

#### 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting (2/18/2009) Are there (big) social classes?

*Description:* In this session we look at some critiques of common sociological conceptualizations of (big) social classes, which claim that these have lost salience in the (post)modern societies.

#### *Required readings*

Wright, Erik Olin (2005) Approaches to Class Analysis. Chs 3, 5 (by Grusky and Pakulski)

Grusky, Chs. 17, 107

Lareau, Anette and Conley, Dalton (2008) Social Class, Ch. 16.

*Recommended readings*

NOTE: These recommended readings deal with much of the approaches to class and other socioeconomic measures that were not discussed in the two sessions

Wright, Erik Olin (2005) Approaches to Class Analysis.

Grusky, Chs 19-27.

**7<sup>th</sup> Meeting (2/25/2009)      Gender inequalities in labor market**

*Description:* The purpose of this session is to introduce literature on gender inequalities and segregation, with a focus on the labor market.

*Required readings*

Grusky, David. Social Stratification, Chs. 77, 81-84, 89, 91.

Van der Lippe, Tanja and van Dijk, Liset (2002) Comparative Research on Women's Employment. *Annual Review of Sociology* 28: 221-41.

*Recommended readings*

Buchmann, Claudia, DiPrete, Thomas A. and McDaniel, Anne (2008) Gender Inequalities in Education. *Annual Review of Sociology* 28: 509-542.

Sorensen, Annemette (1994) Women, Family, and Class. *Annual Review of Sociology* 20: 27-47.

Hochschild, Arlie (1989) *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*. Viking Penguin, New York.

**8<sup>th</sup> Meeting (3/4/2009)      Economic inequalities by race**

*Description:* This session introduces to the extent and form of economic race inequalities in the United States.

*Required readings*

Massey, Douglas (2006) Categorically Unequal. Ch 3

Grusky: Social Stratification, Chs. 65, 70-75.

*Recommended readings*

Jencks, Christopher and Phillips, Meredith (1998) America's Next Achievement Test: Closing the Black-White Test Score Gap. *American Prospect*  
[http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=americas\\_next\\_achievement\\_test](http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=americas_next_achievement_test)

Oliver, Melvin L. and Thomas M. Shapiro. 1997. *Black Wealth, White Wealth*. NY: Routledge.

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**Paper assignment II:** Write a paper on a chosen topic (discuss with me beforehand) related to class, gender, or race.

**Deadline:** 3/25/2009  
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---- Spring break ----

#### IV INEQUALITY CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

##### 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting (3/25/2009) Intergenerational mobility

*Description:* This session examines social scientific approaches to the study of social mobility across generations and offers an overview of the level of such mobility in the United States and other advanced economies, and its recent trends.

*Required readings*

Erikson, Robert and Goldthorpe, John H. (1992) Intergenerational Inequality: A Sociological Perspective. *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 16(3): 31-44.

Breen, R. and Jonsson, J.O. 2005. Inequality of Opportunity in Comparative Perspective. Recent Research on Educational Attainment and Social Mobility. *Annual Review of Sociology* 31: 223-243.

<http://arjournals.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev.soc.31.041304.122232>

OECD (2008) *Growing Unequal*, Ch. 8.

Beller, Emily and Hout, Michael (2006) Intergenerational Social Mobility: The United States in Comparative Perspective. *The Future of Children* 16(2): 19-36  
[http://www.futureofchildren.org/usr\\_doc/02\\_5563\\_beller-hout.pdf](http://www.futureofchildren.org/usr_doc/02_5563_beller-hout.pdf)

Mishel, Lawrence, Bernstein, Jared and Allegretto, Sylvia (2007) *The State of Working America*. Ch. 2

*Recommended readings*

Grusky, Chs. 45-52.

Corak, Miles (2004) *Generational Income Mobility in North America and Europe*. Cambridge University Press.

Adam Swift. 2004. Would Perfect Mobility be Perfect? *European Sociological Review* 20: 1-11.

**10<sup>th</sup> Meeting (4/1/2009) Unequal childhoods and its consequences**

*Objective:* To deepen understanding of the processes through which socioeconomic status is transmitted across generations, with a particular emphasis on cognitive skills, noncognitive traits and behaviors, and the role of childhood conditions in their production.

*Required readings*

Brooks-Gunn, Jeanne and Duncan, Greg J. (1997) The Effects of Poverty on Children. *The Future of Children* 7(2): 55-71.

[http://www.futureofchildren.org/usr\\_doc/vol7no2ART4.pdf](http://www.futureofchildren.org/usr_doc/vol7no2ART4.pdf)

Mayer, Susan (2002) What Money Can't Buy. In Conley, Dalton (ed.) *Wealth and Poverty in America: A Reader*.

Lareau, Anette (2003) *Unequal Childhoods*, UC Press. Chs. 1, 12

McLanahan, Sara (2004) Diverging Destinies: How Children are Fairing Under the Second Demographic Transition? *Demography* 41(4): 607-27.

*Recommended reading*

Cunha, Flavio, Heckman, James J., Lochner, Lance and Masterov, Dimitriy (2005) Interpreting the Evidence on Life Cycle Skill Formation. Working Paper 11331, NBER, Cambridge (MA).

<http://www.nber.org/papers/w11331>

NOTE: This paper is rather technical in parts, but you may well skip the equations without losing the main message.

McLanahan, Sara and Percheski, Christine (2008) Family Structure and the Reproduction of Inequalities. *Annual Review of Sociology* 34: 257-76.

Mayer, Susan (1997) *What Money Can't Buy. Family Income and Children's Life Chances*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA).

Duncan, Greg and Brooks-Gunn, Jeanne (1997) *Consequences of Growing Up Poor*. Russell Sage, New York.

### **11<sup>th</sup> Meeting (4/8/2009) Welfare states, social policies, and social inequalities**

*Description:* In previous sessions, we found how social inequalities vary cross-nationally in extent and structure. In this session, we look into how welfare states (re)structure social inequalities. The required readings discuss the stratifying role of welfare states at a general level, whereas the recommended readings focus on some effects of US social policies, especially welfare reform.

#### *Required readings*

Esping-Andersen, Gøsta (1990) *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Pp. 9-12, 18-29, Ch 3.

Esping-Andersen, Gøsta (1999) *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies*, Ch 3. On the web through Yale Library.

Orloff, Ann (1996) Gender in the Welfare State. *Annual Review of Sociology* 22: 51-78.

#### *Recommended readings*

Jencks, Christopher (2005) What Happened to Welfare? *New York Review of Books* <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/18565> and reply Fred Block (2006) <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/18852>

Shields, Margie and Behrman, Richard E. (2002) Children and Welfare Reform: Analysis and Recommendations. *The Future of Children* 12(1): 5-25 [http://www.futureofchildren.org/usr\\_doc/analysis.pdf](http://www.futureofchildren.org/usr_doc/analysis.pdf)

Grusky, Chs. 41, 43

### **12<sup>th</sup> Meeting (4/15/2009) Health inequality**

*Description:* As a specific outcome of social inequality, we look at inequalities in health and mortality, how they relate to socioeconomic position and to social inequality at the societal level, and explanations for social gradients in health.

#### *Required readings*

Wilkinson, Richard (2006) *The Impact of Inequality*. Chs. 1 (pp. 1-24), 4

Williams, David R. and Collins, Chiquita (1995) US Socioeconomic and Racial Differences in Health: Patterns and Explanations. *Annual Review of Sociology* 21: 349-386.

*Recommended readings*

Capriano, Richard M. Link, Bruce G. and Phelan, Jo C., Ch. 8 in Lareau, Anette and Conley, Dalton (2008) *Social Class*.

WHO (2008) *Closing the Gap in a Generation. Health Equity Through Action on the Social Determinants of Health*. [http://www.who.int/social\\_determinants/final\\_report/en/](http://www.who.int/social_determinants/final_report/en/)

Marmot, Michael and Wilkinson, Richard G. (2003) *Social Determinants of Health*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Case, Anne and Paxson, Christina (2006) Children's Health and Social Mobility. *The Future of Children* 16(2): 151-173. [http://www.futureofchildren.org/usr\\_doc/08\\_5563\\_Case-Paxson.pdf](http://www.futureofchildren.org/usr_doc/08_5563_Case-Paxson.pdf)

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**Paper assignment III:** Write a paper on a chosen topic (discuss with me beforehand) intergenerational mobility and childhood conditions, welfare states and social policies, or health inequalities.

**Deadline:** 4/22/2009  
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## V CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

### 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting (4/22/2009) Inequality: So What?

*Description:* Why bother about inequality? In this final meeting we confront explicitly the question that has remained implicit throughout the class. What ethical and practical issues are involved? Do people care about inequality? We also discuss what increasing inequality might mean for American democracy and what could be done about it.

Rawls, John & Nozick, Robert. *TBA*

Osberg, Lars and Smeeding, Timothy (2006) "Fair" Inequality? Attitudes Toward Pay Differentials: The United States in Comparative Perspective. *American Sociological Review* 71(3): 450-473. *Focus on the substantive message*

Jencks, Christopher. 2002. Does Inequality Matter? *Daedalus*, Winter 2002, 49-65.

Grusky, Ch. 6.

APSA Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy (2004) American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality. <http://www.apsanet.org/imgtest/taskforcereport.pdf>

Lijphart, Arend (1997) Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma. *American Political Science Review* 91(1): 1-14.

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**Paper assignment IV:** President Obama has heard that you are taking a class on social inequality at Yale and wants your advice. He wants to know what, in your view, is the main inequality related problem in the United States today and why? How would you use social scientific findings to improve our understanding of this problem? Provide President Obama insightful answers based on what we have learned, complemented with other material (theory, research, public discussions, etc.). You can also give policy recommendations.

**Deadline:** 4/27/2009

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