

Spring 2008
11:00–12:15pm
Global Center 1005
TA: Arseniy Gutnik
gutnik@email.unc.edu

Neal Caren
neal.caren@unc.edu
Hamilton 225
Hours: Wednesday, 10am-12
and by appointment

Sociology 412
Social Stratification
Economic Inequality in Contemporary America

Why we are here

This course is about why some people are rich and why some are not. It is about what it means to be working class, and why children of the powerful usually have pretty good lives. We'll talk about why people with high status jobs live longer than others. We will compare the immigrant experience of today with that of earlier generations. We will look at why men work in certain kinds of jobs while women work in other types. We will explore whether the US is a classless society or not. We'll compare the amount and kinds of inequalities in the US today with other periods in our country's history, and with other countries around the world. This is a course about the various forms of social inequality that exist in our country today. In sum, we will look at the shape and size of inequality in modern America, how inequalities are reproduced and evolve, the consequences of our current system of inequalities, and what people have done to challenge or reduce inequalities.

My hope is that from this class you will learn many new facts about inequality in contemporary America. You'll also learn where to find these sorts of statistics and how to evaluate them. More important, in my opinion, is that you get a sense of how our society came to be so unequal, what the consequences of that inequality are, and what you can do about it.

Stuff you have to do

Students are expected to do the assigned reading, to attend class, and to participate actively in class discussions. Class time will usually build on the readings, sometimes review them, but never replace them. Often, there will be in-class group assignments which require the readings to have been completed. You will sometimes be tested on readings at the start of class (as discussed below). You should always bring the

assigned reading(s) to class. This way when I ask a question, instead of staring blankly, you can flick through the pages, looking for an answer. It makes the silence much less uncomfortable for all of us.

The graded elements of the course include a midterm, final, four response papers, twelve microassignments, and a writing assignment. The grading system for this course heavily rewards those who keep current with the readings, attend class, and pay attention. To get an A, you have to do all that, plus demonstrate an ability to apply stratification theories to new situations; find, evaluate and summarize academic research on inequality; and present your finds in a coherent and convincing way.

Exams

The midterm and final exams will be of the normal sort, consisting of a mixture of short answers, terms for you to define, and short essays showing your ability to apply the material to new circumstances. These exams are to ensure that you have mastered the basic concepts of the class and can apply the information to new situations. If you are happy with your grade before the final exam, you can elect to not have the final exam count towards your course grade. While attendance during the final exam period is mandatory, you must decide before you see the exam whether or not you would like the grade to count.

Microassignments

Twelve small assignments or quizzes will be given throughout the semester. Assignments will either be an in-class exercise, a tiny homework assignment to bring to class the next day, or a quiz on the day's reading. These microassignments are designed to reward those who attend class and stay current with the material. These are usually pass/fail assignments, each worth one point towards your final grade. These assignments will not be accepted late, but you can miss two and still get a perfect grade. You can not make these up.

Response Papers

You are required to write four short (300-400 word) reading response papers. These should be handed in at the end of class on the day they are due. These are to demonstrate that you are reading and thinking about the assigned materials before you come to class. In order to receive full credit for this assignment, you will need to actively participate in class at least once on the due date. Due dates are based on your last name, and are listed in the syllabus. You will have five opportunities to hand these in, which means that you can drop or miss one. You can not make these up.

Wikipedia Edits

The writing assignment is to improve the quality of Wikipedia articles related to social inequality and stratification. In general, Wikipedia is awesome. Coverage of sociology in general and stratification in specific, however, is not as impressive. The mission of our class is to improve this. You will be expected to contribute substantially to Wikipedia by creating and improving articles. The effort you spend on this should be equal to that of an 8–10 page paper. The goal of this assignment is similar to that of a term paper: providing you an opportunity to demonstrate the ability to apply course learning to a new subject, but has the advantage that the final product will not be immediately thrown away by me or you, but rather will live on in a publicly available format as long as it is useful and accurate.

The Wikipedia assignment is broken down into a series of parts to make it easier for you.

1. Review and summarize 15 Wikipedia articles related to stratification. Value: 10% of Wikipedia grade. Due: February 28th.
2. Select three possible articles to create or edit, listing your plan of action for them. Value: 5% of Wikipedia grade. Due: March 6
3. Find five or more academic resources for use in constructing your articles. Value: 5% of Wikipedia grade. Due: March 27.
4. Edit at least one word on Wikipedia. Value: 5% of Wikipedia grade. Due: April 3.
5. Add 1,000 or more words to Wikipedia. Value: 70% of Wikipedia grade. Due: April 15.
6. Edit two stratification articles, written by other members of the class. Value: 5% of Wikipedia grade. Due April 24.

You can't take either of the exams late or early unless you have a really good reason. If you think you have a good reason, contact me ahead of time. Other late work will receive a grade somewhere between a zero and full-credit.

Stuff I have to do

I'm responsible for giving you the opportunity to learn all you can about social stratification. I'll try to make coming to class worth your time and money. If you email me, I'll try to respond quickly. If want to chat, stop me after class, come by my office hours, or set up an appointment. I'll do my best to communicate clearly

Table 1: The final grade is composed of the following elements:

Task	Option A	Option B
Microassignments and Quizzes	10%	12.5%
Reading Response Papers	20%	25%
Midterm exam	20%	25%
Final exam	20%	0%
Wikipedia Assignment	30%	37.5%
Total	100%	100%

what my expectations are for receiving good grades for each assignment and for the course overall. I'm also responsible for making sure that your grade is fair, although Arseniy, the TA, will be doing most of the grading. Arseniy and I will work to let you know your grades quickly so that you know how your are doing in the course throughout the semester. Arseniy will be available to meet with you to discuss why you got a specific grade, or anything else related to the course.

Readings

There is a lot of reading for this class. To compensate for that, I tried to make all of the readings pretty interesting, even if you not that into sociology. Seven books are required. You will be expected to do the readings for each day prior to class. The books are available at the Student Store and other places. They are also on on reserve. Any editions will work, and none are textbooks or otherwise outrageously expensive.

Edwards, John, Marion Crain, and Arne L. Kalleberg. 2007. *Ending Poverty in America: How to Restore the American Dream*. New York: New Press.

Lardner, James and David A. Smith, editors. 2005. *Inequality Matters: The Growing Economic Divide in America and its Poisonous Consequences*. New York: The New Press.

Lareau, Annette. 2003. *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Marmot, Michael. 2004. *The Status Syndrome: How Social Standing Affects Our Health and Longevity*. New York: Owl Books.

Shapiro, Thomas M. 2004. *The Hidden Cost of Being African American. How Wealth Perpetuates Inequality*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Western, Bruce. 2007. *Punishment and Inequality in America*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Yates, Michael D. 1998. *Why Unions Matter*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Additional readings will be on the course's Blackboard website.

Academic Integrity

Don't cheat, plagiarize or otherwise engage in academic misconduct. Familiarize yourself with the University policy on Academic Dishonesty. If in doubt, ask me or the TA. Transgressions will be reported.

Course Schedule

This is our current plan. If we get ahead, behind, or change directions, updated schedules will be made available.

Thursday, January 10

Topic: Introductions

Tuesday, January 15

Topic: Overview

Readings: Boushey and Weller in *Inequality Matters* pages 27–40; Shieler in *Ending Poverty* pages 13–22

Response Memo Group A-Cb

Thursday, January 17

Topic: Class and Status

Readings: Yates's *Why Unions Matter*, Chapters 1,2

Response Memo Group Cc-G

Tuesday, January 22

Topic: Wealth Inequality

Readings: Shapiro's *The Hidden Cost*, Introduction, Chapters 1,2,3

Response Memo Group H-K

Thursday, January 24

Topic: Wealth Inequality

Readings: Shapiro's *The Hidden Cost*, Chapters 4,5

Response Memo Group L-P

Tuesday, January 29

Topic: Wealth Inequality

Readings: Shapiro's *The Hidden Cost*, Chapters 6,7; Kahlenberg in *Inequality Matters* pages 54–64

Response Memo Group R-Z

Thursday, January 31

Topic: Race and Gender

Readings: Yates's *Why Unions Matter*, Chapter 6; Reskin, online; Wilson, online; Lui in *Inequality Matters* pages 65–76

Response Memo Group A-Cb

Tuesday, February 5

Topic: Culture

Readings: Veblen online; Bourdieu online.

Response Memo Group Cc-G

Thursday, February 7

Topic: Education

Readings: Draut in *Inequality Matters* pages 89–101; Mincy and Pouncy in *Ending Poverty* pages 191–204; Orthner in *Ending Poverty* pages 218–229; Holzer in *Ending Poverty* pages 125–135

Response Memo Group H-K

Tuesday, February 12

Topic: Education

Readings: Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods*, Chapters 1,2,3,5

Response Memo Group L-P

Thursday, February 14

Topic: Education

Readings: Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods*, Chapters 6,7

Response Memo Group R-Z

Tuesday, February 19

Topic: Education

Readings: Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods*, Chapters 8,10,12

Response Memo Group A-Cb

Thursday, February 21

Topic: Mobility

Readings: Bernstein in *Ending Poverty* pages 23–37; Frank in *Inequality Matters* pages 138–149; Hacker in *Ending Poverty* pages 66–76; Warren in *Ending Poverty* pages 38–52

Response Memo Group Cc-G

Tuesday, February 26

Topic: Midterm Review

No reading

Due: Wikipedia Assignment 1 (15 Wikipedia Topics)

Thursday, February 28

Topic: Midterm

Tuesday, March 4

Topic: Low Wage Jobs

Readings: Jenks in *Inequality Matters* pages 129–137; Ehrenreich in *Inequality Matters* pages 41–53; Shulman in *Ending Poverty* pages 114–124

Response Memo Group H-K

Thursday, March 6

Topic: Low Wage Jobs

No readings

Due: Wikipedia Assignment 2 (3 Potential Topics)

Tuesday, March 11

No Class, Spring Break

Thursday, March 13

No Class, Spring Break

Tuesday, March 18

Topic: Health

Readings: Marmot's *The Status Syndrome*, Introduction, Chapters 1,2,3

Response Memo Group R-Z

Thursday, March 20

Topic: Health

Readings: Marmot's *The Status Syndrome*, Chapters 4, 5

Response Memo Group A-Cb

Tuesday, March 25

Topic: Health

Readings: Marmot's *The Status Syndrome*, Chapters 7,8, 10

Response Memo Group Cc-G

Thursday, March 27

Topic: Health

Readings: Williams and Lardner in *Inequality Matters* pages 102–114

Response Memo Group H-K

Due: Wikipedia Assignment 3 (Five Resources)

Tuesday, April 1

Topic: Networks

Readings: Granovetter, online; Burt, online; Marmot's *The Status Syndrome*, Chapter 6

Response Memo Group L-P

Thursday, April 3

Topic: Mass Imprisonment

Readings: Western's *Punishment and Inequality*, Introduction and Chapters 1,2

Response Memo Group R-Z

Due: Wikipedia Assignment 4 (One Edit)

Tuesday, April 8

Topic: Mass Imprisonment

Readings: Western's *Punishment and Inequality*, Chapters 3,4,5

Response Memo Group A-Cb

Thursday, April 10

Topic: Mass Imprisonment

Readings: Western's *Punishment and Inequality*, Chapters 6,7 and Conclusion

Response Memo Group Cc-G

Tuesday, April 15

No Reading

Due: Wikipedia Assignment 5 (Entries)

Thursday, April 17

Topic: Politics and Policies

Readings: Domhoff, online.; Skocpol in *Inequality Matters* pages 178–187; Lewis in *Inequality Matters* pages 115–125

Response Memo Group H-K

Tuesday, April 22

Topic: Politics and Policies

Readings: Franklin in *Inequality Matters* pages 237–246; Kuttner in *Inequality Matters* pages 228–236; Leondar-Wright in *Inequality Matters* pages 217–227; Bakan in *Inequality Matters* pages 188–202

Response Memo Group L-P

Thursday, April 24

Topic: Politics and Policies

Readings: Wilson in *Ending Poverty* pages 88–98; Newman in *Ending Poverty* pages 101–113; Oliver and Shapiro in *Ending Poverty* pages 139–150

Response Memo Group R-Z

Due: Wikipedia Assignment 6 (Edits)

Tuesday, May 6

Final, 8am, Global Center, Room 1005