

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL STRATIFICATION
SOCIOLOGY 140 & 240

Instructor: David B. Grusky

Teaching assistants: Esha Chatterjee and Bethany Nichols

Class location: Building 200, Rm. 205

Class time: Monday & Wednesday, 2:30pm–4:20pm

Office hours: David Grusky, Bldg. 370 (Fridays, by appt., schedule with Alice Chou, aychou@stanford.edu); Esha Chatterjee, Bldg. 370 (Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30-3:00pm); Bethany Nichols (TBA)

Email addresses: grusky@stanford.edu, eshac@stanford.edu, nicholsb@stanford.edu

As income inequality and poverty continue to rise in many countries, some scholars, politicians, and commentators have argued that they are the key social problems of our time, perhaps even more pressing than climate change. The rise in inequality within the U.S., which is dramatic and historic, is of course partly in tension with our country's most cherished egalitarian commitments. The study of inequality has accordingly become an especially prominent subfield as social scientists attempt to make sense of why inequality is increasing and whether the increase might abate in the near future. We will be discussing questions and issues of the following kind:

- (a) What are the major forms of inequality in human history? Is inequality an inevitable feature of human life?
- (b) Why is income inequality increasing in so many countries? What are the effects of this increase on other domains of social life?
- (c) Did the recession increase income inequality? Wealth inequality? Which groups were most harmed by the recession? Most protected?
- (d) How many social classes are there? What are the principal "fault lines" or social cleavages that define the class structure? Are these cleavages strengthening or weakening with the transition to advanced industrialism?
- (e) How frequently do individuals cross occupational or class boundaries? Are educational degrees, social contacts, or "individual luck" increasingly important forces in matching individuals to jobs and class positions?
- (f) How are the lifestyles, attitudes, and personalities of individuals shaped by their class locations? Are there identifiable "class cultures" in past and present societies?
- (g) What types of social processes and state policies serve to maintain or alter racial, ethnic, and sex discrimination in labor markets? Have these forms of discrimination weakened or strengthened with the transition to late industrialism?
- (h) Will inequality regimes take on new and distinctive forms in the future? Are the inequality regimes of modern societies gradually shedding their distinctive features and converging towards some generic late industrial regime?

Intellectual ambition: We're committed to introducing students to serious scholarly work in the field of social inequality rather than some watered-down formulation. As we all know, issues of inequality are everyday fare in conventional journalism (e.g., newspaper, television), but such fare often rests on an unsatisfactory understanding of inequality. The objective of this course is to rise above such standard formulations and examine the powerful models, methods, and concepts that

scholars of inequality have developed and applied. While the assigned readings will require careful study, the class lectures will be devoted in large part to rendering the readings as clear as possible. There will also be ample time to address any questions that might emerge.

Student engagement: We strive for as much engagement among students as possible. The classes will take on a lecture form, but we encourage you to participate whenever necessary to raise objections, ask for clarification, and the like. If you need extrinsic motivation, we're here for you: Class participation will count for 10 percent of your grade.

Exams: We want to reduce the tension associated with grading. The two exams (which are in-class, closed-book) will involve answering one of the study questions that will be made available on the website and reviewed in the discussion sessions. Although you will not know which questions we shall select, you will see in advance all possible questions. For each of the two exams, one of these study questions will be selected, and your simple task will be to answer it (a simple task because hopefully you've prepared for it). The exams will also contain three short-answer questions (which will not be provided in advance) in addition to the essay question. The short-answer questions will each be worth 10 points, and the essay question will be worth 70 points. The first exam will occur in class on Wednesday, April 27, and the second exam will occur in class on Wednesday, May 25. The second exam will not be cumulative (i.e., it will only cover materials in the second half of the course).

Opinion pieces: But that's not all! In addition to the two in-class exams, you'll be expected to write two opinion pieces, each no more than 800 words. We are looking for a special type of opinion piece that's built around a pregnant fact, a fact that is underappreciated by a general audience yet has implications for the views they hold or positions they adopt. The assigned readings and lectures will provide some of these "pregnant facts," but you're free also to draw on facts available from outside sources. We're thus advocating here for a bit of a departure from a more typical approach to writing an opinion piece. The typical author of an opinion piece will *begin* with a commitment to a certain position (e.g., "there's just too much income inequality these days") and then scurry around to dredge up facts that might be construed as substantiating that view. We can't outlaw that conventional approach, and no doubt good pieces can be written in that way. If you do decide to take this conventional approach, it's absolutely essential that the featured facts (1) represent the best that science has to offer (i.e., come from the best possible research), and (2) are indeed central to the question at hand and not simply footnotes to the argument being made. The more creative way, however, to proceed is to actually *begin* with the fact and ask how it might inform our understanding of inequality. That is, instead of taking some predetermined commitment as the starting point, a more exciting and innovative piece might emerge if you instead begin with an unappreciated fact and think creatively about what it means. The first opinion piece is due on Friday, April 22 (by 5pm), and the second opinion piece is due on Friday, May 20 (by 5pm). The opinion pieces should be uploaded to the course website by those respective deadlines. Special bonus situation: If anyone gets their opinion piece accepted at a major outlet (e.g., San Jose Mercury News and up), it's an automatic A+ provided that you complete all the other course work adequately (i.e., a grade of B or higher). If you meet that standard and get accepted by a major outlet (and please pre-clear with us the definition of "major outlet" if you're unsure whether you're proposed outlet meets this standard), your overall course grade is a guaranteed A+.

Course readings: The course readings will all be drawn from *Social Stratification* (4th edition). This book is available at the Stanford University Book Store and all other usual outlets.

Grades: The grades for the course will be based on the two opinion pieces (20 percent each), the two exams (25 percent each), and participation (10 percent). We strongly encourage attending the lectures. The grading scheme is as follows:

97-100 points: A+

93-96 points: A

90-92 points: A-

87-89 points: B+

83-86 points: B

80-82 points: B-

77-79 points: C+

73-76 points: C

70-72 points: C-

67-69 points: D+

63-66 points: D

Under 63 points: F

Sociology 240 option: For students taking Sociology 240 (instead of Sociology 140), the requirements are the same except that, instead of writing the second opinion piece, you should write a 10-page research paper (which can be a review of the literature, a research proposal, or an actual piece of research). This paper is due by 5pm, Tuesday, June 7.

Website: The lecture notes, study questions, and other course information can be found on the course website.

Late work: It's fine to turn in your work late. There is no need to ask for permission! But the privilege comes with a price: If you do turn it in late, it will be graded in the usual way and after the grade is determined it will then be reduced by 10 points for every 24 hours it is late (prorated as necessary). If you think you can produce a significantly better piece by having a day longer than everyone else, then this may be the option for you.

Students with Documented Disabilities: Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (telephone: 650-723-1066, URL:

<http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oea>).

SCHEDULE

MODULE 1: *The many varieties of inequality*

Monday, March 28: Introductory comments

Wednesday, March 30: The variety of inequality regimes

Assigned Readings: Chs. 1 (both sections)-6

Task: Think about topic for first opinion piece

MODULE 2: *Trends in inequality*

Monday, April 4: Long-term trends in inequality

Wednesday, April 6: Why is income inequality taking off?

Assigned Readings: Chs. 7-13

Task: Work on opinion piece (and possibly talk to David and Esha about topic)

MODULE 3: *The building blocks of inequality: Class, status, and income*

Monday, April 11: No class

Wednesday, April 13: An introduction to class, status, and “class warfare”

Monday, April 18: Are there really social classes?

Assigned Readings: Chs. 14-16, 18-20, 22-23, 28

Task: Work on opinion piece

MODULE 4: *Inequality at the extremes*

Wednesday, April 20: Poverty, the underclass, and elites today

Assigned Readings: Chs. 30-35, 37-38, 40-42, 44, 46, 48-51

Task: Upload first opinion piece by 5pm, Friday, April 22

MODULE 5: *Review and exam*

Monday, April 25: Review session

Wednesday, April 27: Exam (in class)

Assigned Readings: Review Week 1 – 4 readings

Task: Study for first exam

MODULE 6: *Gender*

Monday, May 2: Sources of gender inequality

Wednesday, May 4: Trends in gender inequality

Assigned Readings: Chs. 93-100, 103-5, 108, 111-13

Task: Begin working on second opinion piece (for SOC 140) or paper (for SOC 240)

MODULE 7: *Racial and ethnic inequality*

Monday, May 9: No class

Wednesday, May 11: Racial and ethnic inequality

Assigned Readings: Chs. 79-91

Task: Work on opinion piece (for SOC 140) or paper (for SOC 240) ... and possibly talk with David and Esha about topics

MODULE 8: Generating inequality

Monday, May 16: Social mobility today

Wednesday, May 18: Why is there so much inheritance?

Assigned Readings: Chs. 52-55, 57-58, 61, 63, 65-68, 73-74

Task: Upload final opinion piece by 5pm, Friday, May 20 (for SOC 140)

MODULE 9: Consequences of inequality

Monday, May 23: Consequences of inequality ... and its future

Wednesday, May 25: Exam (in class)

Assigned Readings: Chs. 114, 116-19

Task: Study for second exam

NOTE: Paper due for SOC 240 students on Tuesday, June 7 (by 5pm).