

Sociology 340: Social Stratification

Instructor: David B. Grusky

Class Time: Tuesdays, 4:30pm – 6:20pm

Class Location: Conference room, Bldg. 370

Meetings: Fridays (contact Alice Chou, aychou@stanford.edu, to schedule appt.)

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This course reviews classical and contemporary approaches to understanding the differential distribution of valued goods and the social processes by which such inequality comes to be seen as legitimate, natural, or desirable. Although egalitarian values are a fundamental feature of our post-Enlightenment heritage, these values exist in tension with the extreme and often increasing levels of inequality that are part and parcel of the contemporary late-industrial experience.

The foregoing changes invite fresh study of the structure of social inequality and how it varies by time and place. 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) Is the recession increasing income inequality? Wealth inequality? Which groups are 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?

Structure of course: The twofold objective of this course is to review contemporary theorizing and research on these issues and to identify areas in which new theories, hypotheses, and research agendas might be fruitfully developed.

Questions: Although the course will be in lecture format, the class will likely be most productive if many questions or comments are ventured. These questions may take the form of clarification or of provocation (i.e., questions that consider how prevailing conceptualizations, models, or research literatures have led us astray or might usefully be supplemented).

Research proposals: The course is nominally built around the sociology qualifying exam, but this organization should prove to be a more generally useful device for learning the field even for those not taking this exam.

Deliverables: As for course requirements, students may choose from two options, a qualifying exam option or a research paper option.

Qualifying exam option: For some of the students, the course is being used for the purpose of preparing for a qualifying exam, and it may be useful for such students to write practice exams. I will distribute two exam questions, the first on April 19 during the class (due on Sunday, April 24, 5pm, and the second on Tuesday, May 24 during the class (due on Sunday, May 29, 5pm). Each essay should be limited to 3000 words (or approximately 10 double-spaced pages).

Research paper option: The second option takes the form of a bona fide research paper or research proposal. If the proposal form is chosen, it's more useful if it pertains to a project that might practically be achieved within the time and resource constraints that you face (i.e., a realistic proposal for a project that might truly be taken on). The paper should be limited to 6000 words (or approximately 20 double-spaced pages) and is due on Sunday, May 29, 5pm.

Grades: The course grades will, for those students taking the qualifying exam option, be based on (a) the first exam essay (40%), (b) the second exam essay (40%), and (c) class participation (20%). For students taking the research paper option, the course grades will be based on (a) the paper (80%), and (b) class participation (20%).

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

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1: Forms and sources of inequality (Tuesday, March 29)

Readings: Chs. 1 (both sections) – 6

Week 2: Trends in inequality (Tuesday, April 5)

Readings: Chs. 7-13

Week 3: The building blocks: Class, status, and income (Reschedule class for Wednesday, Apr. 13; Thursday, Apr. 14; Saturday, Apr. 16; Sunday, Apr. 17)

Readings: Part III

Week 4: Inequality at the extremes (Tuesday, April 19)

Readings: Part IV

NOTE: Exam questions distributed at end of class and due on Sunday, April 24, 5pm

Week 5: Exam question (Tuesday, April 26)

Discussion of exam question

Week 6: Gender (Tuesday, May 3)

Readings: Part VIII

Week 7: Race and ethnicity (Tuesday, May 10)

Readings: Part VII

Week 8: Generating inequality (Tuesday, May 17)

Readings: Part VI

Week 9: The consequences of inequality ... and its future (Tuesday, May 24)

Readings: Part IX and X

NOTE: Exam question distributed at end of class and due on Sunday, May 29, 5pm. For those opting for the paper option, it is likewise due on Sunday, May 29, 5pm.