Portland State University
Sociology 423
SOCIAL STRATIFICATION
FALL 2019
ONLINE COURSE

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

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.

● “Stratification” is the common label for the sociological specialization that studies inequality: The causes, the correlates, and the consequences of inequality. Stratification research seeks to clarify both which human institutions cause the unequal distribution of valued resources and opportunities, and how these institutions cause inequality. To a degree, the field also studies the “why”—the motives and justifications behind inequality.

● Inequality in the United States is the primary focus of the course, but at some critical points we will consider how and why U.S. patterns of inequality differ to the experiences in other affluent societies.

● During this class, we will ask three main questions: How much inequality? In what areas? What causes this inequality? In answering these questions, we will review empirical patterns (“the data”) and some of the more plausible theories that try to explain these patterns.

● 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 2 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.

**COURSE STRUCTURE**

This class does not have any quizzes or tests. Instead, students will be evaluated on their rigorous engagement with the readings and completion of two papers, one short and one longer, final paper. Students are expected to thoroughly and critically read and take reading notes on every assigned reading and then engage their peers through writing discussion prompts and responding thoughtfully and critically in online discussions. Students must demonstrate a thorough and critical understanding of the material through each of these online activities, and they will be graded on each. Students will also complete weekly fact lists and the two research papers.

As an online course it is imperative that students read all materials closely and engage with each piece of the weekly learning modules and assignments. The week begins at 12:01 am Monday morning (i.e. late Sunday night) and ends at 11:59 pm the following Sunday. This weekly structure may not be consistent with other online courses you have taken, so be sure to note this schedule and plan accordingly.

**Each weekly module includes:**

1. **Reading and Video Assignments**
   - Students are required to read the assigned readings and videos, which will include chapters from the required books and/or materials that will be posted or can be accessed online. Students are expected to take reading notes and notes of the videos, which will guide them in their “Weekly Facts” and “Group Discussion” assignments.
   - Supplemental Information may be posted each week. The supplemental/recommended information is **not** required, but it may be helpful for your Weekly Reflections.

2. **Readings, Reflections, Weekly Assignments (55%)**
   - Each week, students are required to write a 1.5-2 page response paper in which they reflect on posted discussion prompts based on that week’s readings and videos.
   - Reflections are due on D2L each Sunday night by 11:59pm, which is when each week’s module officially closes. No late posts will be accepted.
   - Format: 1.5 to 2 pages, double spaced, 12pt font, 1”-1.25” margins, Times New Roman, full heading including name, course name and number, assignment name, and date, and full references in ASA format. Word or PDF files only.
   - You should follow Dr. Stepick’s Hierarchy of Knowledge, posted on D2L under Rubrics, in writing your reflections. This hierarchy is also discussed in the online lecture for Module 1. The more advanced you are in the hierarchy, the more points you earn on your reflections. An example of an excellent reflection is posted on D2L under Rubrics.
   - Do not exceed page limits. Be succinct. Edit all papers for grammar and clarity before submitting. See the writing center for assistance if needed, prior to the due date of all assignments. http://www.writingcenter.pdx.edu/
   - It is best to bring at least two readings ‘into conversation’ with one another. This can be accomplished in several ways. For example:
- Ask how one author's conceptual categories could be applied (or not) to another author's empirical findings. You can then reflect on how this may be applicable to the data you are collecting for your final project on Portland.
- Relate the current week’s readings to those of the previous weeks: How do the analytical and methodological approaches differ? What is added by the approaches in the current week’s readings? What is missing/could be added to strengthen the argument? How do the current week’s readings extend our understanding of sociological stratification?
- Please avoid summarizing the readings and please avoid simply stating if you liked/didn’t like a piece, though if you have strong feelings on a reading that is welcome so long as you connect it to your argument.

- Since it is vital that you complete the readings (and reflect on them) before class, no late reflection posts will be accepted. However, your lowest score will be dropped; it is recommended that you save this “drop” for emergencies.
- See D2L for an example of a well-written reflection and guidance on how to provide feedback to others’ postings.

3. Online Group Discussions (15% of grade)
   - Each week students must post a discussion response in the discussion forum to a question that we, the instructors, post and which will be based on the readings and/or lecture by Friday at 11:59pm.
   - Students must then also post at least one response to another students’ discussion post. These are due by Sunday night at 11:59 pm.
   - Responses should reflect engagement with the material, not just an opinion. In participation, listening and being able to synthesize and form a thoughtful response (not just making sure you write something) is critically important. As some people say, 'throw glitter not shade.'
   - Further, you must follow the guidelines described in D2L under Etiquette and Communicating Online. In particular you must be: Be polite and respectful; Be tolerant of views expressed by others; When reacting to someone else's message, address the ideas, not the person; and, be careful when using sarcasm and humor, and do not include any obscenities in your messages.
   - In other words, try your best to add something to the discussion. If you criticize someone, make sure it is constructive criticism, how something might be rephrased to be clearer or to add nuance.

4. Dr. Stepick’s Lecture (5%)
   - Students are expected to read and/or watch all of the written and/or video material posted and take notes.
   - After the first week, Dr. Stepick’s lecture will be posted on Monday afternoons or evenings so that he can read your reading reflections from the previous week and incorporate general feedback into his lecture.
   - Your grade for this will be determined by examining D2L to ascertain if you watched or listened to the lecture.

5. Final Exam (25%)
   - There will be a Final Exam on both the data and theories concerning stratification. It will be a take-home exam.

Required Readings: There are no books to buy: All the required readings will be available as pdf files either through direct web addresses or via D2L (http://d2l.pdx.edu). If you do have a great interest in this
subject, I do recommend the books below, which are the source for the readings, but you are under no obligation to purchase them.

**Recommended:**


- Barbara Ehrenreich. *Nickel and Dimed*. Ehrenreich moved from Florida to Maine to Minnesota, taking the cheapest lodgings available and accepting work as a waitress, hotel maid, house cleaner, nursing-home aide, and Wal-Mart salesperson. She soon discovered that even the "lowliest" occupations require exhausting mental and physical efforts. She found out one job is not enough; you need at least two if you intend to live indoors.

- Sudhir Venkatesh. *Gang Leader for a Day*. This is the story of the young sociologist who studied a Chicago crack-dealing gang from the inside. Sudhir Venkatesh managed to gain entrance into the gang. He learned how the crack game works and how many in the community have their fingers in the pie and need life to remain the way it is. He observed violence, corruption, near homelessness, good cops, bad cops, a lot of neglect, and politics-as-usual.

- The Inequality Reader, Edited by David B. Grusky and Szonja Szelenyi. 2011. Cambridge: Westview. This reader is a tour through the highways and byways of recent and classical studies of inequality in its wide variety of forms.


There are also a number of websites that have excellent information that you may find interesting or even useful:

- Inequality.org is excellent and has a weekly email update that you can subscribe to.
- Thesocietypages.org goes beyond inequality and covers many sociological topics

**Weekly Checklist:**

- Read and/or watch lecture and take notes.
- Read posted required readings and take reading notes.
- Post a discussion question to the discussion forum by 11:59pm Friday.
- Post at least one response to another student’s discussion questions on the discussion forum by 11:59pm Sunday.
- Submit Reflections on the week’s readings/videos by 11:59pm Sunday.
**SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS**

Reflections are **due each Sunday night**.

**Week 1 (September 29-October 6): Defining Inequality**

Reading:
- Wright & Rogers, American Society: How It Really Works: Prologue
- Ehrenreich, Nickeled and Dimed, Chapter 1 (Introduction) and Chapter 2 (Serving in Florida)

Recommended Reading:
- Class Cultures Comparison. Read and think about the table. How does it compare to your own understanding of class.

**Reflections and Assignment 1, Your Social Class due Sunday, October 6th @ 11:59pm on D2L**

**Week 2 (October 7-13) : Considering Inequality: What does it mean?**

Reading:
- Wright & Rogers, American Society: How It Really Works: Ch. 10
- Edin and Shaefer, $2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America, Introduction and Perilous Work
- Wright & Rogers, American Society: How It Really Works: Ch. 12
- Video: Kathy Edin, Johns Hopkins University, presents her book, $2.00 a Day. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2LKAVUdNbiQ
- Income Inequality Is Changing How Parents Invest In Their Kids, Widening Class Divides In The U.S.

**Reflections and Begin Assignment 2, Budgeting Exercise. Do Steps 1 & 2. due Sunday, October 13th @ 11:59pm on D2L**

**Week 3 (October 14-20): Capitalism & Class**

Reading:
● Wright & Rogers, American Society: How It Really Works: Ch. 3 & Ch. 4
● Watch and take notes on the documentary by former Secretary of Labor under Bill Clinton Robert Reich: Inequality for All.
   ○ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_LkMWP2Q2A
● Wright & Roger, American Society: How It Really Works: Ch. 11
● A taxonomy of how we talk about class and wealth in the United States today

Reflections and Assignment 2: Steps 3-5  Finish Budgeting Exercise.
due Sunday, October 20th @ 11:59pm on D2L

Week 4 (October 21-27):  Race
Reading:
● Wright & Rogers, American Society: How It Really Works: Ch. 14
● Venkatesh, Gang Leader for a Day, Chapters 1 and 3
● Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro. Disrupting The Racial Wealth Gap
● Steele: “The Age of White Guilt” available on D2L
● Ted Thornhill. We Want Black Students, Just Not You: How White Admissions Counselors Screen Black Prospective Students

Recommended:
If you are particularly interested in race in Portland and especially gentrification. Check out: Bates, Lisa K. 2013. "Gentrification and Displacement Study: implementing an equitable inclusive development strategy in the context of gentrification.” City of Portland, Bureau of Planning and Sustainability.

For background on the practice of redlining that kept Blacks from getting mortgages, see https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=5/44.11/-119.567&text=intro

Reflections and Assignment 3, Social Explorer: Class Divides, D2L Discussion on Budget findings due Sunday, October 27th @ 11:59pm on D2L

Week 5 (October 28-Nov3):  Gender
Reading:
● Wright & Rogers, American Society: How It Really Works: Ch 15
● Pascoe, “Dude, You’re a Fag” available on D2L
● Ttrautner, “Doing Gender, Doing Class” available on D2L
● Marche, “Home Economics: The link between work-life balance and income inequality” available on D2L

Reflections and Assignment 4  Social Explorer: Race due Sunday, November 3rd @ 11:59pm on D2L
Week 6 (Nov 4-10): Public Health and the Environment
Reading:
- American Society: How It Really Works: Chps. 5&8
- Hochschild, Arlie. Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right, Chapters 1&2.
- Inequality & Health at Inequality.org, particularly the section on Inequality and Health in the United States
  - Click on link or go to: https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-032315-021606
- Lume Sociology. Reading: Environmental Racism. Click on Title or go to:
  - Make sure you watch the embedded videos.

Reflections and Assignment 5 Social Explorer and Gender due Sunday, November 10th @ 11:59pm on D2L

Week 7 (Nov 11-17): Current Policy Topics Addressing Inequality
Reading:
- Inequality.org. Blogging Our Great Divide. Click on Title or go to
  - https://inequality.org/blog/our-great-divide/
  - There are a number of short pieces here. Read one of them.

Reflections due Sunday, November 17th @ 11:59pm on D2L

Week 8 (Nov 18-24): Class War? Conflict and Agreement over Inequality
Reading:
● Video: Moyers & Company: The New Robber Barons. This film is available online via the PSU Library. To view it, you must be either on campus or go to Library.pdx.edu and sign-in as a student. Then in the search bar type in “The New Robber Barons” and follow the links for video, online access and finally “Films on Demand.”
● Is the Gig Economy Working. http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/05/15/is-the-gig-economy-working
● Excerpts from Vance, J.D. Hillbilly Elegy.

Reflections What do you stand for? Your suggestions for reducing inequality. Due Sunday, November 24th @ 11:59pm on D2L

Week 9 (Nov 25-Dec 1): Class War? Solutions and Their Costs
Reading:
● Video: Changemakers: Thomas Piketty and Naomi Klein. This film is available online via the PSU Library. To view it, do the same as you did above: go to library.pdx.edu, sign in as a student, in the search bar search for Changemakers: Thomas Piketty and Naomi Klein and follow the link for evideo, online access and finally Films on
● Video: TEDTalks: Ian Goldin—Navigating Our Global Future. This film is available online via the PSU Library using the same procedure as above, but with the TEDTALKS: Ian Goldin” in the subject line.
● Reflections Reducing poverty and reducing inequality. How are they different and do we need separate policies for them. Critiquing Plans and Revisions of What do you stand for?

Reflections Due Sunday, November 31st @ 11:59pm on D2L

Week 10 (Dec 2-8): Conclusion
Final Exam due during Finals Week

Office Hours:
If you have any questions about the class, the readings, the discussions, or anything else, I will be more than happy to meet with you either during office hours (Tuesdays 1-2pm in CH 217J) or at some other time. To schedule another time please email me (Stepick@pdx.edu). In your subject line of the email please write SOC 423.
Luis Nuñez will also be happy to meet with you during his office hours or at some other time.

Email Policy:
Email stepick@pdx.edu or lununez@pdx.edu with the subject line: SOC 423. On weekdays one of us will generally respond within 24 hours. Please do not email questions about an assignment the night before it is due. we will not be able to respond. Please be respectful and practice professional email etiquette in your correspondence, which includes addressing the recipient and signing your full name on each email.

Accommodations and Disability Services:
PSU values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to fostering mutual respect and full participation for all students. My goal is to create a learning environment that is equitable, useable, inclusive, and welcoming. If any aspects of instruction or course design result in barriers to your inclusion or learning, please notify me. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) provides reasonable accommodations for students who encounter barriers in the learning environment.

If you have, or think you may have, a disability that may affect your work in this class and feel you need accommodations, contact the Disability Resource Center to schedule an appointment and initiate a conversation about reasonable accommodations. The DRC is located in 116 Smith Memorial Student Union, 503-725-4150, drc@pdx.edu, https://www.pdx.edu/drc.

- If you already have accommodations, please contact me to make sure that I have received a faculty notification letter and discuss your accommodations.
- Students who need accommodations for tests and quizzes are expected to schedule their tests to overlap with the time the class is taking the test.
- Please be aware that the accessible tables or chairs in the room should remain available for students who find that standard classroom seating is not useable.

**Academic Integrity:**
Students are expected to engage in academic honesty in all forms of work for this course. Collaborating with other students is a great idea if you are exchanging rough drafts for constructive criticism, studying for an exam together, brainstorming ideas for a homework assignment, etc.; however, it is NOT okay to take ideas from other students or from their work and call them your own, or to write homework assignments or take-home exams together. It is NOT okay to take ideas from the Internet or from any source without putting them in quotations or paraphrasing them and citing them thoroughly. When in doubt, cite! If you use another person’s ideas or words in your writing, you must acknowledge the original source. The university defines plagiarism as “the taking of another’s words or ideas as if they were your own.” It is a serious offense, and can lead to suspension or expulsion from the university. Do not be afraid to use other people’s words or ideas – just provide proper citation for your sources. The simplest way to avoid plagiarism is to use common sense: use quotation marks where necessary and give credit where credit is due.

PSU has adopted a formal Code of Student Conduct and Responsibility which is administered by the PSU Office of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs. The Student Conduct Code (SCC), which applies to all students, prohibits all forms of academic cheating, fraud, and dishonesty. These acts include, but are not limited to, plagiarism, buying and selling of course assignments and research papers, performing academic assignments (including tests and examinations) for other persons, unauthorized disclosure and receipt of academic information, and other practices commonly understood to academically dishonor. The code of conduct also describes standards of behavior for all student members of the campus community. Violation of the SCC may lead to disciplinary action. Students may obtain copies of the Student Conduct Code by contacting the campus judicial officer or by visiting her office in the Smith Memorial Center.

**Writing Resources:**
I highly encourage you to take advantage of the resources on campus to work on writing skills. The **PSU Writing Center** can be found in 188 Cramer Hall, and reached by telephone at 725-3570. Their online appointment system allows you to set, change, or cancel appointments twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Online they also have a Guided Tour to Writing Papers, Frequently Asked Writing Questions, and Instructional Videos.

**PSU Prohibited Discrimination and Harassment Policy:**
The PSU Office of Equity and Compliance has adopted a formal Prohibited Discrimination and Harassment Policy. Discrimination or harassment on the basis of age, disability, national origin, race, color, marital status, veteran status, religion, sex, sexual orientation, genetic information or in the use of Worker's Compensation, Federal Family Medical Leave Act, or the Oregon Medical Leave Act is strictly prohibited by PSU policy.