Economic inequality in the United States has reached levels unseen since prior to the Great Depression. In this course we will explore economic inequality trends, analyzing the key theories that account for the decades-long increase in economic disparities. We pay particular attention to patterns in educational attainment, political developments, and the role of technological change. We will also compare recent movements in economic inequality and macroeconomic performance in the U.S. to other advanced industrialized nations. This course has no specific prerequisites but completion of an introductory course in sociology is recommended before enrollment.

MAJOR ASSIGNMENT SEQUENCE

This is a writing-intensive course, and revisions will play a significant part in your grade. For the first and second essays you will submit a rough draft that will account for 1/3 of the assignment grade. You will receive comments on these drafts and then submit a revised essay that will account for the other 2/3 of the assignment grade. Your revised essays should show substantial improvement over the original draft. Revisions that are the same as the draft will be treated as an incomplete assignment. In addition to these essays, you are responsible for completing minor writing assignments (some in-class, others take-home) throughout the semester.

Assignment #1: Lens reading essay (4-5 tightly argued pages)

Apply Polanyi’s theory of the “double movement” to recent trends in economic inequality in the U.S. Was Polanyi right?

Assignment #2: Comparison essay (5-6 tightly argued pages)

Apply the skill-biased technological change (SBTC) theory of inequality to other explanations of current inequality trends. How well does the theory account for the major economic changes we’ve covered? What does the theory leave out?

Assignment #3: Research Paper (6-7 tightly argued pages)

Compare and contrast explanations for the U.S.’s inequality trends with that of a peer industrialized nation. What accounts for differences or similarities in economic inequality trends over the past decades?

Major Assignment Due Dates

Essay #1: Mon Oct 10 in class (rough draft due Wed Sep 28)
Essay #2: Wed Nov 16 in class (rough draft due Mon Nov 7)

1 This is a provisional document subject to change throughout the semester.
Essay #3: Mon Dec 19 by noon

REQUIRED READINGS

Readings listed for a particular day on your syllabus must be completed prior to coming to class. Please print out all readings and bring them to class. Many of the course readings are available on your Blackboard course website. There is one required text for the class that is available at the bookstore:


Make sure to leave every course meeting with an idea about how and where to obtain the readings for the following class.

COURSE POLICIES

*Participation and small writing assignments*

This is a seminar, therefore your active participation in class discussions is essential to the success of the course. Additionally, as we approach the major essay assignments, you will be assigned small building-block writing exercises, some of which will be completed in class. These assignments will be graded (see “Breakdown of Final Grades” section for more).

*Essay format (non-negotiable!)*

- Use Times 12 font, or – on very rare occasions – you can choose Times’ more ornate cousin, Garamond. Don’t even think about Courier.
- Use 1” margins and leave the righthand margin unjustified.
- We do not spend much class time discussing grammar, punctuation, or other more stylistic errors. They are still important – please proofread all of your work carefully; repeat offenders will see their grade drop.
- Save your work frequently!

*Breakdown of Final Grades*

The goal of the course is for you to express original ideas in interesting, engaging ways. Your essays should please and enlighten your readers and give them a sense of why your essay is important—why what you have to say needs to be said.

The majority of your final grade (85%) comes from your three essays. The other 15% comes from your participation and performance on the smaller assignments. Here is the grade breakdown:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Essay #1</td>
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<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Essay #2</td>
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<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Essay #3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Participation, small writing assignments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Essay Grading Standards*
When grading, I evaluate the words on the page before me, and do not factor in “improvement” or “effort,” or use other subjective criteria. The effort you put into an assignment will most certainly be evident in the essay you submit. Below are the general standards to which I hold essays; point variations within these broad ranges represent shades of difference.

- An “A” range essay (3.5 – 4.0) is both ambitious and successful. It presents a strong, interesting argument with grace and confidence.
- A “B” range essay (2.8 – 3.4) is one that is ambitious but only partially successful, or one that achieves modest aims well.
- A “C” range essay (1.8 – 2.4) has significant problems in articulating and presenting its argument, or seems to lack a central argument entirely.
- A “D” range essay (0.7 to 1.4) fails to grapple seriously with either ideas or texts, or fails to address the expectations of the assignment.
- An “F” essay (0.0) is like a “D” essay but is significantly shorter than the assigned length, or doesn’t actually exist.

**Late Work and Extensions**

If your essay is late, your revision will be docked 0.2 of a grade per 24-hour period beginning one minute after the draft’s deadline. So, if you turn in your essay a day late, you’re starting with a 3.8.

All deadlines in this course are firm. Except in the case of medical or family emergency or religious observance, I give no individual extensions. If, due to such an emergency, you cannot meet a deadline, please contact me as soon as possible so that we may work out an alternative schedule of due dates and times.
The New Inequality
Fall Semester 2016 Syllabus

*Unless otherwise noted, readings are available on your course website*

Week 1: Course Overview

Mon Aug 29  • Introduction to the course and to each other; overview of current trends in inequality

Wed Aug 31  • Reading Assignment: Krugman, “Why We Are in a New Gilded Age”
• Listening Assignment: This American Life, “The Giant Pool of Money”
• Writing Assignment: None

Week 2: The Current Economic Scene

Mon Sept 5  • NO CLASS; Labor Day
• Recommended Reading Assignment: Geoghegan, Which Side Are You On? Trying to Be for Labor When It's Flat on Its Back

Wed Sep 7  • Leicht, “Getting Serious About Inequality”; Bruder, “The End of Retirement”
• Writing Assignment: In-class exercise on critical summaries

Week 3: The Polanyian trilogy, take 1

Mon Sep 12  • Reading Assignment: Polanyi, Chs. 3-5
• Writing Assignment: In-class handout and discussion of Harvey, “Elements of the Academic Essay”

Wed Sep 14  • Reading Assignment: Polanyi, Chs. 6-8
• Writing Assignment: In-class Polanyi thesis exercise

Week 4: The Polanyian trilogy, take 2

Mon Sep 19  • Reading Assignment: Polanyi, Chs. 9; 11-12
• Writing Assignment: In-class exercise on motive examples

Wed Sep 21  • Reading Assignment: Polanyi, Chs. 13-14
• Writing Assignment: Response paper

Week 5: The Polanyian trilogy, final take; Education and technology, take 1

Mon Sep 26  • Polanyi, Chs. 17-18 & 21
• Writing Assignment: Draft thesis and motive paragraphs due in class

Wed Sep 28  • Reading Assignment: Kean, “The Real Reason for Income Inequality”; Tavernise, “Education Gap Grows Between Rich and Poor, Studies Say”; Noah, Ch. 5
• Writing Assignment: Drafts of Essay #1 due in class

Week 6: Education and technology, take 2

Mon Oct 3  • Reading Assignment: Goldin and Katz, Ch. 1
• Writing Assignment: Keep working on those essays!

Wed Oct 5  • Reading Assignment: Hull, “In Rust Belt, A Teenager’s Climb from Poverty”; Mishel, “The Overselling of Education”
• Writing Assignment: Finalize those essays!

Week 7: Globalization

Mon Oct 10  • Reading Assignment: NONE! Enjoy the break
• Writing Assignment: Paper #1 due in class

Wed Oct 12  • Reading Assignment: Autor, Dorn, and Hanson, “The China Shock”
• Writing Assignment: Response paper

Week 8: Globalization, take 2

Mon Oct 17  • NO CLASS FALL BREAK

• Writing Assignment: In-class exercise on “claims, evidence, and analysis”

Week 9: Shareholder capitalism; the role of the state

Mon Oct 24  • Reading Assignment: Schwartz, “How Wall Street Bent Steel,” Pearlstein, “When Shareholder Capitalism Came to Town”
• Writing Assignment: In-class exercise on Essay 1

Wed Oct 26  • Reading Assignment: Hacker & Pierson, Ch. 2
• Writing Assignment: Thesis brainstorm exercise

Week 10: The role of the state

Mon Oct 31  • Reading Assignment: Hacker & Pierson, Ch. 3
• Writing Assignment: Motive brainstorm exercise; response paper

Wed Nov 2  • Reading Assignment: Hacker & Pierson, Ch. 4; Edwards, “He Who Makes the Rules”
• Writing Assignment: Draft thesis and motive paragraphs due in class

Week 11: The decline of the labor movement and workplace fissuring

Mon Nov 7  • Reading Assignment: Rosenfeld, Laird, and Denice, “Union Decline Lowers Wages of Nonunion Workers”; Rosenfeld, Ch. 8
• Writing Assignment: Draft of Essay #2 due in class

Wed Nov 9  • Reading Assignment: Weil, Chs. 1 & 4
• Writing Assignment: Continue working on Essay #2; response paper

Week 12: The sharing economy

Mon Nov 14  • Singer, “In the Sharing Economy, Workers Find Both Freedom and Uncertainty”
• Writing Assignment: Finalize those essays!

**Wed Nov 16**  
• Reading Assignment: NONE! Enjoy the break  
• Writing Assignment: **Paper #2 due in class**

**Week 13: What’s happening overseas, take 1**

**Mon Nov 21**  
• Reading Assignment: Bermeo and Pontussan, Ch. 1; Gornick and Milanovic, “Income Inequality in the United States in Cross-National Perspective: Redistribution Revisited”  
• Writing Assignment: Comparison country due in class; response paper

**Wed Nov 23**  
• NO CLASS THANKSGIVING

**Week 14: The situation overseas, take 2**

**Mon Nov 28**  
• Reading Assignment: Huber and Stephens, “Income Inequality and Redistribution in Post-Industrial Democracies: Demographic, Economic, and Political Determinants”  
• Writing Assignment: In-class exercise on source use; response paper

**Wed Nov 30**  
• Reading Assignment: Alderman and Greenhouse, “Living Wages, A Rarity for U.S. Fast-Food Workers, Served Up in Denmark”  
• Writing Assignment: Thesis brainstorm for Essay #3

**Week 15: Where We Are**

**Mon Dec 5**  
• In-class viewing assignment: “Inequality for All”  
• Writing Assignment: Draft thesis and motive paragraphs due in class

**Wed Dec 7**  
• Reading Assignment: NONE – enjoy the break!  
• In-class: presentations on comparison country

**Reading Period / Exams** (Dec 15-21)

**Mon Dec 19**  
• **Paper #3 due at noon**
Essay #1:

Apply Polanyi’s theory of the “double movement” to recent trends in economic inequality in the U.S. Was Polanyi right?

Goals:

- Identify a problem worth writing about, motivate it, and formulate a thesis in response to this problem.
- Structure the essay “organically,” avoiding plot summary, on the one hand, and the five-paragraph essay, on the other. When arguing for your interpretation of a particular theory or set of theories, you should structure your essay according to your thesis about the theories, not necessarily according to the flow of the work itself. Note that your thesis should be both unified and worth arguing.
- Orient your reader. You should address your essay to readers who have read the assigned materials and have a basic understanding of the contemporary state of inequality in America. You still will need to orient them with appropriate reminders (quick summaries of key ideas, explanations of the context of quotations), always making sure those explanations serve a purpose in your essay as a whole (not just summary for its own sake). Your readers should always know where you are in the text, through the material you provide to jog their memories. Never assume (1) that readers know what to look for, (2) that they’ll read a passage in the same way that you do, and (3) that they’ll draw the same conclusions. Your analysis of the evidence should persuade your readers of the validity of your claims.
- Demonstrate a facility with the source material. Show your reader you understand Polanyi, and have wrestled with his ideas.

Essay #2: Comparison essay (5-6 tightly argued pages)

Apply the skill-biased technological change (SBTC) theory of inequality to other explanations for current inequality trends. How well does the theory account for the major economic changes we’ve covered? What does the theory leave out? (5-6 tightly argued pages)

Goals of the Essay

- All lessons from Essay #1!
- Synthesize various theories, weighing them against the evidence covered in class and in your readings.
- Formulate a multi-dimensional thesis that draws on elements from the various perspectives of inequality we’ve covered.

Essay #3: Research Paper (6-7 tightly argued pages)

Compare and contrast explanations for the U.S.’s current economic situation (especially regarding our levels of inequality) with that of a peer industrialized nation. What accounts for differences or similarities in inequality trends over the past decades?

Goals of the Essay
• All lessons from Essay #1 and Essay #2!

• Conduct original research using appropriate scholarly resources.