Introduction

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal…”

-Preamble of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, 1776

While Jefferson was not referring to economic equality per se, his famous words express a commitment to the equal worth of all citizens (at least as they were defined at the time) that is a part of the American creed. In contrast to the rigid class systems (and ferocious class struggles) of Europe, America has always been seen as a place where the divisions between rich and poor were narrower and more permeable. This is one of the reasons Jefferson and his contemporaries believed that the new nation could be effectively governed by the people rather than by royals and nobles.

In 2013, it is questionable whether this vision still holds true. Over the past three-plus decades, income inequality in the United States has been rising, in stark contrast to the pattern of the mid-20th Century when America’s middle class increased in size and prosperity. The share of income going to the richest members of our society has reached levels unseen in almost 90 years, while the incomes of middle class Americans have stagnated. Internationally, while inequality has also risen in many other places, the level of inequality in the U.S. more closely resembles poor countries like Mexico than the advanced (and now relatively egalitarian) European economies usually considered to be our peers. The “Occupy” movement exemplifies what may be a growing animosity toward the super-rich or “the 1%,” but such protests are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the profound effect these shifts may have on our politics.

Inequality is an economically, politically, socially, and morally complex phenomenon. How
do we conceptualize and measure equality and inequality? What has caused the recent growth in inequality? What are the consequences for our society and our politics? What can be done to address these consequences, and the phenomenon of inequality itself? In this course, we will seek to answer these questions through readings in the scholarly and mainstream literature on inequality, in-depth discussion, and hands-on research and writing.

**Objectives**

Successful students will be able to:

• **Describe** the nature and trends of income inequality in the United States and **assess** the validity of various indicators or measures of these trends.
• **Evaluate** extant theories of the causes of inequality growth and **make arguments** about these proposed causes.
• **Analyze** the impact of growing inequality on society and politics and **evaluate** causal hypotheses and theories about these linkages.
• **Evaluate** policy proposals designed to mitigate inequality.
• **Research** and **write** a well-structured scholarly paper that applies and tests theories and/or hypotheses.

**Assignments and Grades**

Student performance will be judged on the basis of written assignments and in-class participation as detailed below. There will be no exams or quizzes.

*Weekly discussion questions* - Each week, you are required to submit three or more discussion questions on the readings to me via email by **5pm on Thursday**. As the term suggests, these questions should be intended to stimulate discussion about the subject matter or the readings themselves. These questions may be normative (i.e., about right and wrong) or empirical (e.g., “Does X really cause Y?”). Some of your questions may focus on one particular reading, but at least one must bridge two or more readings and deal with a central theme from the week. These questions will be evaluated on the basis of their thoughtfulness, their creativity (non-obvious questions encouraged!), and the extent to which they demonstrate comprehension of the key themes in the readings. Good questions will be thorough and involved, quoting specific passages from the readings or citing current or historical events where appropriate. By formulating your own discussion questions, you will help to direct our class discussions in the directions most interesting and helpful to you, and sharpen your ability to think critically about the assigned
In-class participation - You will be graded on your in-class participation as well. Again, the key criteria here include thoughtfulness, creativity, and comprehension of the readings. I will also evaluate the extent to which you listen and respond to one another and work together, where applicable. Communication (including dialogue and discussion) and collaboration are important but often neglected skills that both researchers and practitioners must develop to be successful.

In-class presentation on additional readings - You will notice that the schedule includes additional readings each week that are not required reading for the entire class. Each week, a different student will be assigned to read and present on one of these readings. These presentations should go beyond simple summaries to make connections to the assigned readings and provoke discussion among classmates. Presenters are encouraged to consult with me in advance of class to discuss ideas.

Neighborhood research project - The readings assigned for this course make assertions about cause and effect (e.g., what causes inequality, the effects of inequality on politics, etc.). How would you go about testing these theories or using them to explain the world around you? This project, which encompasses several assignments, will require you to do so using the neighborhoods of greater Washington, DC. The project will consist of (1) a short initial comparison of two neighborhoods using publicly available statistics, (2) a comparison involving in-person observation of each neighborhood, and (3) a scholarly research paper that applies theories from the relevant literature to your neighborhoods. Throughout the semester, we will have workshops to help you develop the skills necessary to frame, research, and write pieces like these.

1) Initial comparison paper (due Monday, February 18) - For this assignment, you will make simple statistical comparisons between your neighborhoods, look up relevant information about their political characteristics (i.e., the elected representatives, voting information, etc.) and write a brief (3-5 page) summary that highlights some of the disparities or similarities you find most interesting and proposes some possible research questions (along with hypothesized answers) for the final paper (though you are not bound to stick with these questions if you change your mind). Remember, this is a WID course, so the way you communicate this information is important. Many research projects in the social sciences start out as brief memos, proposals, etc. Like any written work in social science, these documents must convey information (including quantitative information) and ideas clearly and in a well-organized way.
2) In-person comparison paper (due Monday, March 25) - The next step is to actually visit your neighborhoods for some observational research. You will observe indicators of the quality of life in each neighborhood, including things like the type of housing, the police presence, the mixture of businesses, the availability of public transportation, and the prices of food and other products. You will then write up your findings, with remarks on what is consistent with your initial statistical research and what was surprising. You may also revise and update your proposed research questions for the final paper. Again, we will focus on developing your political science writing skills. Additionally, we will create a class blog where you will post condensed summaries of your neighborhood reports, hopefully with photos to illustrate what you’ve seen for me and your classmates. Blogging is becoming a bigger and bigger part of academic research (see http://themonkeycage.org/), so being able to summarize your work in blog post form is an important skill.

3) Scholarly research paper (first draft due Monday, April 22; peer review comments due Thursday, April 25; revised draft due Friday, May 3) - This paper will build on your initial research to answer research questions and test hypotheses suggested by the class readings and by outside sources. It should begin (after some preamble) with a concise but thorough review of the relevant literature bearing on your research question(s). It should incorporate the research you have already done, where appropriate, and augment that research with additional data collection, historical research, and/or interviews with public officials and other notable neighborhood figures. Above all, it should clearly define the research questions and make effective arguments backed up by appropriate data (whether qualitative or quantitative). It should be around 20 pages. Your first draft will be reviewed by a classmate and by me, and you will revise the paper based on those comments. You will be graded on the quality of your final draft (not the first draft) and on the quality of your comments on your classmate’s paper. In order to be published by a respected journal or university press, scholarly research must pass a rigorous process of peer review that virtually always requires revisions. Thus, revising your work in response to feedback and commenting on the work of others are both important parts of a good social scientist’s skill set.

Grading breakdown

• Discussion questions and in-class participation: 20%
• Presentation on additional readings: 10%
• Initial comparison paper: 10%
• In-person comparison paper & blog post: 15%
• Scholarly research paper: 40%
• Research paper peer review: 5%


Course Policies

- All late assignments will be docked ten points (out of 100) per day. No late discussion questions will be accepted. I will grant extensions under some circumstances (e.g., family or medical emergencies), but you must confer with me in advance of the due date and provide appropriate documentation if I request it.
- There will be no extra credit or makeup assignments.
- Discussion questions may be submitted to me via email. All other assignments must be submitted online via SafeAssign on our course Blackboard page. The peer review portion of the research paper assignment will be handled electronically. If there are any software compatibility issues, we will hopefully be able to work around those on a case-by-case basis.
- There is no strict attendance policy, in that you will not lose a predetermined amount of points for missing class. That said, you will see that participation is a significant portion of the grade for this course, and participation is impossible if you are not present. In a 12-person class, I will notice who is missing. It is good policy on your part to inform me ahead of time if you will miss class for a specific reason.
- I will use email and the Blackboard page to communicate with you outside of class. The most current version of this syllabus will always be available on Blackboard. Students are responsible for keeping up with these communications and any updates to the syllabus.

Required Reading

Assigned readings for each class are listed in the schedule below. There is one required book for this course:


This book (referred to simply as “Noah” in the schedule below) should be available in the campus store and is also easily purchased via Amazon.com and, I am sure, other online book sellers. All other readings will be available in one of three ways: freely online, via JSTOR or other online database for which Gelman Library has a subscription, or as PDF files on the Blackboard page.

The designated “additional readings” for each class are not required for all students, though you may certainly read them if you are interested. Each student will be assigned to read and present on one of the “additional readings” during the semester (see Assignments and Grades). Subsequent
versions of this syllabus will include the last names of students assigned to particular readings for your reference.

**Schedule**

This schedule includes all required and additional readings for each class session as well as relevant due dates. The schedule is subject to change, and you will note that it is currently incomplete in some places, so be sure to refer to the most current version on Blackboard.

**Part I - Introduction to Inequality**

1. January 18
   Course introduction and discussion of syllabus

2. January 25
   **Ideas About Equality and Inequality**
   Thomas Jefferson, 1776, Declaration of Indendence (http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html)

3. February 1
   **Measuring and Conceptualizing Inequality**
   Noah, Introduction & chapter 1, plus pp. 76-77 in chapter 5
   Additional reading: Noah, chapter 10.

   **Poverty and Economic Mobility**
   Noah, chapter 2

4. February 8

**Race, Ethnicity, Gender and Economic Inequality**

Noah, chapters 3 and 4


Charles Tilly, 1998, *Durable Inequality*, University of California Press, excerpt

**Part II - Causes of Inequality**

5. February 15

**Economic and Technological Change**

Noah, chapters 5 and 6.


Tyler Cowen, May 9, 2011, “The Great Stagnation,” TEDx Talk: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_93CXTt2K7c

6. February 22

**Decline of Labor Unions**

Noah, chapter 7.

7. March 1

**Political and Policy Causes I**

Noah, chapter 7.


Bartels *Unequal Democracy* excerpt

8. March 8

**Political and Policy Causes II**

Glazer public opinion pieces

Page and Jacobs *Class War* excerpt


Additional reading: piece on federalism and devolution (Soss et al?)

---

March 15 - SPRING BREAK, NO CLASS

---

**Part III - Impacts and Implications of Inequality**

9. March 22

**Quality of Life**

Barbara Ehrenreich, 2001, *Nickel and Dimed* excerpt


Additional reading: piece on distribution of goods within cities - maybe this needs a separate unit

10. March 29

**Political Participation**


Voting Behavior
Andrew Gelman, 2008, Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State: Why Americans Vote the Way They Do, excerpt
McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal, 2006, excerpt

11. April 5
Representation in Parties and Government
Bartels, Unequal Democracy, excerpt

April 12 - NO CLASS

12. April 19
Representation in the Interest Group Community
Pluralist excerpt
Schattschneider 1960 excerpt
Unheavenly Chorus excerpt
Piece on money in politics

Policy Outcomes

Part IV - Solutions

13. April 26
Noah, chapter 11
Stone, Samaritan’s Dilemma, chapter 8
14. Tuesday, April 30 (Make-Up Day)
   Catch up if needed