

An Introduction to Social Inequality

SOCY 309:001

Fall 2022

Catalog Description

A sociological analysis of the distribution of wealth and income in selected societies.

Course Description

Everyone knows that some people have more of what matters – money, status, and power, among others – than others. Why? In this course you will learn about sociological accounts of inequality that go beyond individual factors like skills or effort. We will discuss inequalities across gender, race, class, and other social differences, and explore how social processes like exploitation, stereotyping, social influence, opportunity hoarding, segregation, and discrimination cause inequalities. In addition to looking at large-scale social trends, we will also examine how inequalities emerge in the kinds of organizations that most of us spend much of our lives in, like workplaces. Finally, students will apply the concepts in this course to analyzing inequalities revealed by in-depth ethnographic studies of every-day workplaces.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Describe the state of major inequalities and how those inequalities have changed over time.
- Distinguish between descriptive and causal arguments about inequality.
- Recognize different types of inequalities, e.g. in income, wealth, status, and power.
- Describe and analyze organizational inequality regimes, and the social processes that cause key inequalities in organizational contexts.
- Analyze experiences of inequalities in terms of sociological theories of status, power, and other social processes.
- Gain a greater understanding of sociological research methods, including surveys, experiments, and ethnography

Carolina Core Outcome

Students will be able to use the principles of the social sciences to explore diverse cultural identities and to analyze political and environmental issues.

Required Readings and Other Course Material

Readings and course materials will be organized in Course Content on Blackboard under the week for which they are assigned. You should complete the course readings early in the week for which they are assigned.

We will read many chapters from this book, so while I will provide pdfs. I would also recommend (but not require) that you purchase a copy. It is available for \$15-\$30 on Amazon.

- Tomaskovic-Devey, Donald, and Dustin Avent-Holt. 2018. [*Relational Inequalities: An Organizational Approach*](#). Oxford University Press.

Many of our shorter readings come from an excellent reader on inequality:

- Grusky David B., and Jasmine Hill, editors. 2018. *Inequality in the 21st Century: A Reader*. Routledge.

As part of the Book Club project, you will read ONE of the following ethnographies. All are available online for less than \$30, and used copies are often less than \$10.

Author	Year	Title
Mears	2020	<i>Very Important People: Status and Beauty in the Global Party Circuit</i>
Muñoz	2008	<i>Transnational Tortillas: Race, Gender, and Shop-Floor Politics in Mexico and the United States</i>
Neely	2022	<i>Hedged Out: Inequality and Insecurity on Wall Street</i>
Ribas	2015	<i>On the Line: Slaughterhouse Lives and the Making of the New South</i>
Rodriguez	2014	<i>Labors of Love: Nursing Homes and the Structures of Care Work</i>
Trotter	2020	<i>More Than Medicine: Nurse Practitioners and the Problems They Solve for Patients, Health Care Organizations, and the State</i>
Viscelli	2016	<i>The Big Rig: Trucking and the Decline of the American Dream</i>
Wilson	2020	<i>Front of the House, Back of the House: Race and Inequality in the Lives of Restaurant Workers</i>
Wingfield	2019	<i>Flatlining: Race, Work, and Healthcare in the New Economy</i>

Class Meetings

This course meets twice a week for 75 minutes each. Class meetings are meant to provide additional explanation and deeper discussion of course concepts and to provide time for class activities that demonstrate course concepts. Classes will generally be a mixture of lectures, class activities, and discussions. You are responsible for taking notes on lectures and class activities.

Expectations for Class Discussions

This class works best when students come to class having completed course materials for the week and ready to discuss them. You should feel free to bring your questions about course material to class for clarification and discussion with other students. You should also be curious about what other students think and how they react to the course – many of the best class discussions come out of students being interested in their peers as well as the readings.

However, discussions are NOT simply meant to be about sharing opinions and assumptions. I expect you to offer well-articulated arguments and questions, discuss scientific evidence for and against claims, be clear about your moral and scientific assumptions, and be open to the arguments of others in the course.

If something is worth saying, it is worth saying respectfully. No view is so important that it overrides the need for respectful, open, and empathetic dialogue. I will not tolerate harassment, verbal or otherwise, of any student in the classroom. Disrespectful, inflammatory, and harassing comments or actions will lead to disciplinary consequences. In short, I expect you to engage with this course and other students in good faith and with a spirit of intellectual curiosity and openness to different views.

Assignments and Course Grading

There are 200 points in this course. Your grade will be based on attendance and participation, essays, tests, and book club reports.

	Points per	Total % of Grade
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Individual Work		
Syllabus Quiz	10	5%
Quizzes x10	5 (50 total)	25%
Inequality Regime Report	25	12.5%
Reflection Paper	20	10.0%

Group Work		
Roundtable Summaries x2	5 (10 total)	5%
Concept Application Proposal	15	7.5%
Concept Application	30	15%
Book Presentation	20	10%
Peer Evaluation	20	10%

I use the scale below for the calculation of your course grade:

	Point Total	Percent
A	180-200	90-100%
B+	170-179.9	85.1-89.9%
B	160-169.9	80-85%
C+	150-159.9	75.1-79.9%
C	140-149.9	70-75%
D	120-139.9	60-69.9%
F	<120	<60%

Assignments

You can find more detailed information on assignments as it becomes available in the Assignments tab.

Syllabus Quiz

You will complete a short quiz on the contents of the syllabus and the overall structure of the course. You should complete the Syllabus Quiz outside of class by the end of Module 1.

Quizzes

Most weeks you will have a short quiz covering topics from the week's readings, lectures, and other materials. The quiz will consist of five multiple choice questions randomly drawn from a larger pool of questions so that each student is likely to randomly draw a somewhat different set of four questions than other students. In weeks that have quizzes, they will become available after class on Thursdays. They are due by the end of the next day (Friday). However, they will remain available through the weekend until midnight Sunday, until which time you will be able to complete the quiz with a 25% late penalty per day, up to 50%.

Once you begin the quiz, you will have 15 minutes to complete it. Quizzes must be completed in one sitting. Make sure that when you begin the quiz you are in a place with strong, reliable internet to minimize the chance of disruption.

You will be graded based on 10 quizzes. However, the schedule includes 11 quizzes, meaning that you can miss one quiz without it impacting your grade. If you complete all 11 quizzes, the quiz with the lowest score will be dropped from your grade.

Roundtable Summaries

In several weeks throughout the semester, we will hold student 'roundtables.' The week before the roundtables, I will assign you to one of several topics. You will then complete all the readings for that topic before class the next week. You must come to class having fully completed the readings!

On the first day of class in the roundtable weeks, you will form an 'Expert Group' with the other students in your topic group. In class, your Expert Group will gather to share notes, review prompts, answer each other's questions, and come to a shared understanding of the core arguments, evidence, and implications of your readings, and write a group review.

In the second day of class, you will form 'Jigsaw Groups' made of one student from each of the Expert Groups. The Experts will then take turns presenting their topic to the rest of the Jigsaw Group while other group members ask questions.

Finally, you must submit your written notes for this exercise, including notes on your topic and the other topics discussed in your Jigsaw Group, by the end of the week in order to receive credit.

Inequality Regime Report

In Module 7, you will turn in a 4-5 page report detailing the 'Inequality Regime' described in the book you selected to read. (This is a concept we will introduce early in the semester) You will complete this assignment by yourself.

Concept Application Proposal

This assignment, due at the end of Module 11, is the first assignment you will complete as part of your Book Club group. You and other students who read the same book as you will write a 3-5 page proposal detailing which of the social processes reviewed in the course you think is the best way to explain the inequalities documented in your book.

Reflection Paper

In this 5-6 page paper due at the end of Module 13, you will use the concepts covered in the course to reflect on and analyze a personal experience, such as an organization or event.

Concept Application

This 6-8 page paper is the fully realized Concept Application that you and your group outlined in the Concept Application Proposal. Using your proposal and instructor comments, you will develop a full articulation of how some theory or framework from this course describes and explains the key facts about inequality in your book.

Book Presentation

In the last week of the semester, you and your group will deliver a 20-minute presentation summarizing your book and the important social processes going on in it that generate or maintain inequality.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is not graded. However, quizzes and other course assignments will go over topics covered in class lectures as well as readings and other materials. Several assignments (the roundtable summaries and book presentation) also require your presence in class, and will not be valid if you do not take part in class.

Lecture Slides

Lecture slides for each week will be posted on Blackboard the week after the week we go over them. That means that you will need to rely on your own reading and notes for each Module Quiz, but the lectures will be an available resource for assignments after that.

Late Work/Make-up Policy

Both individual and group assignments will suffer a 10% late penalty every day past the due date (25% per day for quizzes). I will not accept any work more than a week after its due date (two days after for quizzes). If you have an excused absence for in-class assignments (e.g. roundtables or book presentations), I will work with you to create a make-up assignment.

Technology Policies

I permit technology in the classroom only for learning purposes. Though I prefer you to take notes the analog way (most research on studying techniques find that physically writing notes is better for learning and retention than typing), you may use a computer to take notes and consult course materials in class. There will also be a few occasions in class when I expect you to have access to a computer for a class activity. If you are not using technology for course-related purposes, I reserve the right to have you put it away.

Cellphones should be placed on silent and should be put away in your pocket or bag. If there is a serious need to leave your phone on vibrate (such as a family emergency), please let me know.

To participate in learning activities and complete assignments, you will need:

- Reliable Internet access and a USC email account;
- A current Internet browser that is compatible with Blackboard (Google Chrome is the recommended browser for Blackboard);
- Microsoft Word as your word processing program; and
- Reliable data storage for your work, such as a USB drive or Office365 OneDrive cloud storage.

If your computer does not have Microsoft Word, Office 365 ProPlus package is available to you free of charge [here](#). If you have problems with your computer, technology, IT-related questions, support, including Blackboard, please contact the Division of Information Technology (DoIT) Service Desk at (803) 777-1800 or submit an online request through the [Self-Service Portal](#).

Academic Responsibility, Integrity, and Ethics

The Carolina community holds that “It is the responsibility of every student at the University of South Carolina to adhere steadfastly to truthfulness and avoid dishonesty, fraud or deceit of any type in connection with any academic program. Any student who

violates this rule or who assists others to do so will be subject to discipline." Dishonesty will constitute:

- Giving or receiving unauthorized assistance, or attempting to give or receive such assistance, in connection with the performance of ANY academic work.
- Unauthorized use of materials or information of any type including the use of any obtained through electronic or mechanical means.
- Access to the contents of any test or examination prior to its administration.
- Unauthorized use of another person's work without proper acknowledgement of source, regardless of whether the lack of acknowledgement was unintentional.
- Intentional misrepresentation by word or action of any situation of fact, or intentional omission of material fact, so as to mislead any person in connection with any academic work.

To put the matter more bluntly: Do not turn in anything that is not 100% YOUR work. Violating this expectation is extremely unwise. If you experience circumstances which tempt you to engage in plagiarism, talk to me because I can help.

Students with Disabilities

[Student Disability Resource Center](http://www.sa.sc.edu/sds/) (<http://www.sa.sc.edu/sds/>): The Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) empowers students to manage challenges and limitations imposed by disabilities. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact me to discuss the logistics of any accommodations needed to fulfill course requirements (within the first week of the semester). In order to receive reasonable accommodations from me, you must be registered with the Student Disability Resource Center (1705 College Street, Close-Hipp Suite 102, Columbia, SC 29208, 803-777-6142). Any student with a documented disability should contact the SDRC to make arrangements for appropriate accommodations.

Additional Resources

I highly recommend using these university resources at any point in the semester if you want/need them:

- Library Services (http://www.sc.edu/study/libraries_and_collections)
- Writing Center (<http://www.cas.sc.edu/write>)
- Student Technology Resources (<http://www.sc.edu/technology/techstudents.html>)

Course Schedule

Note: Readings may be subject to change as the semester goes on. However, readings will NOT be altered readings less than two weeks before the week they are assigned.

Module	Topic	Quiz?	Assignments Due
0	Introduction to the Course		
1	Trends in Inequality	Y	Syllabus Quiz
2	Thinking Sociologically about Inequality	Y	
3	Inequality Roundtables 1		Roundtable Summary 1
4	Inequalities in Organizations	Y	
5	Power and Exploitation	Y	
6	Justice	Y	Inequality Regime Report
7	Inequality Roundtables 2		Roundtable Summary 2
8	Relational Claims-Making	Y	
9	Stereotypes	Y	
10	Social Status	Y	
11	Social Closure	Y	Concept Application Proposal
12	Segregation	Y	
13	Discrimination	Y	Reflection Paper
14	Thanksgiving Break		
15	Book Presentations		Concept Application Paper, Book Presentation

Module 0 – Introduction to the Course

Class Meetings

- Aug 18

Module 1 – Trends in Inequality

Class Meetings

- Aug 23, 25

Assignments

- Module 1 Quiz
- Syllabus Quiz

Readings

- [Trends in Income and Wealth Inequality](#). *Pew Research Center*
- Saez. "Striking It Richer: The Evolution of Top Incomes in the United States." in *Inequality in the 21st Century* ([watch](#))
- Piketty. "Capital in the 21st Century." in *Inequality in the 21st Century*
- [What You Need to Know About the Minimum Wage Debate](#). *Forbes*

Module 2 – Thinking Sociologically About Inequality

Class Meetings

- Aug 30, Sept 1

Assignments

- Module 2 Quiz

Readings

- Fischer et al. "Inequality by Design." in *Social Stratification*
- Rank et al. "Why is There Poverty?" in *Poorly Understood*
- Brady. "Theories of the Causes of Poverty." *Annual Review of Sociology*
- *Recommended*: Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt. "Generating Inequalities" in *Relational Inequalities*

Module 3 – Inequality Roundtables 1

Class Meetings

- Sep 6, 8

Assignments

- Roundtable 1 Summary

Roundtable Topics

Education

- Reardon. "The Widening Academic Achievement Gap Between the Rich and the Poor." in *Inequality in the 21st Century* ([watch](#))
- Torche "Does College Still Have Equalizing Effects?" in *Inequality in the 21st Century* ([watch](#))
- Brand and Xie. "Who Benefits Most from College?" in *Inequality in the 21st Century*

Family

- Hochschild. "The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work." in *Inequality in the 21st Century* ([watch](#))
- Edin, Nelson, and Reed. "Low-Income Fathers and the "Package Deal" of Family Life." in *Inequality in the 21st Century* ([watch](#))
- Lareau. "Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life." in *Inequality in the 21st Century* ([watch](#))
- Heckman. "Skill Formation and the Economics of Investing in Disadvantaged Children." in *Inequality in the 21st Century* ([watch](#))

Gender

- England. "The Gender Revolution: Uneven and Stalled" in *Inequality in the 21st Century* ([watch](#))
- England et al. "Progress Toward Gender Equality in the United States Has Slowed or Stalled." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*
- Blau. "The Sources of the Gender Pay Gap." in *Social Stratification*
- England. "Devaluation and the Pay of Comparable Male and Female Occupations" in *Social Stratification*

Jobs

- Williams. "Life Support: The Problems of Working for a Living." *American Sociological Review*
- Kalleberg. "The New Age of Precarious Work." in *Precarious Lives*

Poverty

- Rank et al. "Who Are the Poor?" in *Poorly Understood*
- "[Living in Poverty: Kathryn Edin](#)" *Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality*

Race

- Chetty et al "Executive Summary: Race and Economic Opportunity in the United States"
- Wilson. "Being Poor, Black, and American." in *Inequality in the 21st Century* ([watch](#))
- Patillo. "Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril Among the Black Middle Class." in *Inequality in the 21st Century*
- Portes and Zhou. "The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and Its Variants." in *Inequality in the 21st Century* ([watch](#))

Module 4 – Inequalities in Organizations

Class Meetings

- Sep 13, 15

Assignments

- Module 4 Quiz

Readings

- Acker. "Inequality Regimes: Gender, Class, and Race in Organizations." *Gender & Society*
- Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt. "Organizational Inequality Regimes" in *Relational Inequalities*
- *Recommended:* Meyers and Vallas. "Diversity Regimes in Worker Cooperatives: Workplace Inequality under Conditions of Worker Control." *Sociological Quarterly*
- *Recommended:* Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt. "Relational Inequality Theory" in *Relational Inequalities*

Module 5 – Power and Exploitation

Class Meetings

- Sep 20, 22

Assignments

- Module 5 Quiz

Readings

- Hegtvedt and Johnson. "Power Relations in Groups and Social Networks" in *Social Psychology: Individuals, Interaction, and Inequality*
- Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt. "Exploitation" in *Relational Inequalities*

Module 6 – Justice

Class Meetings

- Sep 27, 29

Assignments

- Module 6 Quiz
- Inequality Regime Report

Readings

- Hegtvedt and Johnson. "Justice Processes and Evaluations within Groups." in *Social Psychology: Individuals, Interaction, and Inequality*
- Zehr. "Restorative Principles." in *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*
- Podcast: "[The Transformative Power of Restorative Justice](#)." Vox Conversations

Module 7 – Inequality Roundtables 2

Class Meetings

- Oct 4, 6

Assignments

- Roundtable 2 Summary

Roundtable Topics

Business

- Lin and Neely. "The Financial Turn of Corporate America." in *Divested: Inequality in the Age of Finance*.

Economic Mobility

- Jonsson et al. "It's a Decent Bet That Our Children Will be Professors Too." in *Inequality in the 21st Century*
- Chetty et al. "Economic Mobility." in *Inequality in the 21st Century* ([watch](#))
- Chetty et al. "Executive Summary: The Fading American Dream: Trends in Absolute Income Mobility Since 1940." (or read full article)

Intersectionality

- Andersen and Collins. "Why Race, Class, and Gender Matter." in *Inequality in the 21st Century*
- Tatum. "The Complexity of Identity." In *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*
- Brannon et al. "Class Advantages and Disadvantages Are Not So Black and White: Intersectionality Impacts Rank and Selves." *Current Opinion in Psychology*

Labor

- Western and Rosenfeld. "Unions, Norms, and the Rise in U.S. Wage Inequality" in *Inequality in the 21st Century* ([watch](#))
- Rosenfeld. "Little Labor: How Union Decline is Changing the American Landscape" in *Inequality in the 21st Century*

Psychology

- Mullainathan and Shafir. "The Bandwidth Tax" in *Scarcity*

- Mullainathan and Shafir. "Packing and Slack" in *Scarcity*

Social Networks

- Granovetter. "The Strength of Weak Ties" in *Inequality in the 21st Century* ([watch](#))
- Fernandez and Fernandez-Mateo. "Networks, Race, and Hiring." in *Inequality in the 21st Century*
- Garip. "[Social Inequality and Network Effects](#)." *Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality*

Technology

- Goldin and Katz. "The Race Between Education and Technology" in *Inequality in the 21st Century* (or [watch](#))
- Liu and Grusky. "The Winners of the Third Industrial Revolution" in *Inequality in the 21st Century*
- Hanley. "Putting the Bias in Skill-Biased Technological Change? A Relational Perspective on White-Collar Automation at General Electric." *American Behavioral Scientist*

Module 8 – Relational Claims-Making

Class Meetings

- Oct 11
- Oct 13-14 – Fall Break

Assignments

- Module 8 Quiz

Readings

- Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt. "Relational Claims-Making" in *Relational Inequalities*
- Sauer et al. "Categorical Distinctions and Claims-Making: Opportunity, Agency, and Returns from Wage Negotiations." *American Sociological Review*

Module 9 – Stereotypes

Class Meetings

- Oct 18, 20

Assignments

- Module 9 Quiz

Readings

- Fiske. "Intergroup Biases: A Focus on Stereotype Content." *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*
- Fiske. "Stereotype Content: Warmth and Competence Endure." *Current Directions in Psychological Science*
- Eagly and Koenig. "The Vicious Cycles Linking Stereotypes and Social Roles." *Current Directions in Psychological Science*

Module 10 – Social Status

Class Meetings

- Oct 25, 27

Assignments

- Module 10 Quiz

Readings

- Storr. “Prestige Games” *The Status Game: On Social Position and How We Use It*
- Podcast: “[We Build Civilizations on Status. But We Barely Understand It.](#)” *The Ezra Klein Show*
- Ridgeway. “Why Status Matters for Social Inequality.” *American Sociological Review*
- Bendersky and Pai. “Status Dynamics” *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*

Module 11 – Social Closure

Class Meetings

- Nov 1, 3

Assignments

- Module 11 Quiz
- Concept Application Proposal

Readings

- Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt. “Social Closure.” in *Relational Inequality*
- Twine. “The Silicon Valley Caste System.” in *Geek Girls: Inequality and Opportunity in Silicon Valley*
- *Recommended:* Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt. “Organizational Surplus and Rising Inequality.” in *Relational Inequality*

Module 12 – Segregation

Class Meetings

- Nov 8 – Election Day
- Nov 10

Assignments

- Module 12 Quiz

Readings

- Rothstein. “Racial Zoning” from *The Color of Law*
- Rothstein. “Local Tactics” from *The Color of Law*
- Rothstein. “White Flight” from *The Color of Law*
- Kahler. “[The Evolution of Columbia’s Neighborhoods: 1900 to Present.](#)”

Module 13 – Discrimination

Class Meetings

- Nov 15, 17

Assignments

- Module 13 Quiz
- Reflection Paper

Readings

- Small and Pager. “Sociological Perspectives on Racial Discrimination.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*
- Bertrand and Mullainathan. “Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination.” in *Inequality in the 21st Century*
- Quillian et al. “Meta-Analysis of Field Experiments Shows No Change in Racial Discrimination in Hiring Over Time.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*
- Byron and Roscigno. “Relational Power, Legitimation, and Pregnancy Discrimination.” *Gender and Society*
- Tomaskovic-Devey and McCann. “Who Files Discrimination Charges?” [UMass-Amherst Center for Employment Equity](#)

Week 14 – No Class

Class Meetings

- Nov 22
- Nov 23-25 – Thanksgiving Break – No class

Week 15 – Book Presentations

Class Meetings

- Nov 29, Dec 1

Assignments

- Book Presentations
- Concept Application Paper