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Poverty and Inequality

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CUNY City College

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SOC 31130 – POVERTY AND INEQUALITY (3 credits)
Syllabus (Revised September 18, 2018)

INSTRUCTOR: Professor Yana Kucheva
Office:
Email: ykucheva@ccny.cuny.edu
Office hours:

TIME AND PLACE:

CLASS WEBSITE: Blackboard

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES: This course examines the nature and extent of inequality primarily in the contemporary United States but also with some reference to other times and places. The purpose of the course is to introduce students to the key scientific breakthroughs that are foundational to our current understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty and inequality. We will discuss the following questions:

- What are the major forms of inequality and is inequality inevitable?
- Why is income inequality increasing and what are the effects of this increase on other domains of social life?
- How likely are individuals to end up in the same social stratum as their parents?
- Does education equalize opportunities or widen the gaps between more and less successful people?
- What types of social processes and state policies serve to maintain or alter inequality along the lines of class, race, and gender?
- How do we measure poverty and inequality?
- What are the most frequent and most effective policy responses to reducing poverty and inequality?

PREREQUISITES: While this course has no formal prerequisites, it will draw on basic sociological concepts, ideas of classical social theorists, and means of presenting quantitative and qualitative information. Sociology majors should already have the required background from the following courses: SOC 105 Introduction to Sociology, SOC 232 Methods and Techniques of Sociological Research, and SOC 237 Foundations of Sociological Theory. Without these foundational courses, you will have difficulty with readings, lectures, and written assignments.

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

Class Attendance and Participation, 10 points. Students are expected to attend all class sessions and to complete all readings prior to the class for which they are assigned. Students are also expected to participate in class discussions and to be respectful of their fellow

classmates. I encourage you to participate in class whenever necessary to ask for clarification, raise objections, or connect the class material to current events.

Students should check their email and the class website at least twice a week for class announcements.

If you miss class, it is your responsibility to ask a fellow classmate for their notes. You are welcome, however, to come to office hours to discuss anything that is unclear. I will post all class PowerPoints to Blackboard to assist you in studying for the exams or in completing your assignments.

For every 3 classes that you miss, your total grade for the class will be reduced by 1 point. If you come to class more than 15 minutes late, you will not get attendance credit for that class.

Exams, 35 points.

Midterm exam 1 10 points.

Midterm exam 2 10 points.

Midterm exam 3 15 points.

All exams are open-note on Blackboard. I will not accept any late exams.

Assignments, 55 points. Students will write one op-ed piece and one policy brief related to the topics of the class. Students will also make in-class presentations based on their policy briefs. I am happy to help you with your assignments and will give you feedback at any stage of the work. If you want to talk to me, please come to class early or stay late. I will also be happy to see you during office hours or by appointment. If you request feedback by email, you have to email me your draft at least 4 days before the deadline. Please plan to work ahead. The assignments are much harder than they look.

All assignments should be submitted to Blackboard prior to 2pm on the due date. All assignments have to be double-spaced with a 12-point standard font (e.g. Arial, Times New Roman) and one-inch margins on all sides. Your assignments have to be submitted as either PDF files (with a .PDF extension) or Word files (with a .DOCX or .DOC extension). You are welcome to email me backup versions of your assignments and exams if you have technical difficulties with Blackboard, but you still need to submit all of your assignments to Blackboard. You will not get credit for an assignment unless it is properly uploaded to Blackboard. Please make sure that your Blackboard account is active, that you know how to access the class website, and that you know how to upload assignments to Blackboard. All assignments will be automatically checked for plagiarism. For full assignment prompts and grading rubrics, please check the Blackboard.

Op-Ed Piece (20 points)

You will write an opinion piece of no more than 800 words on a basic fact related to poverty or inequality. You are expected to present the best scientific research available on this fact and answer how this fact informs our understanding of inequality. You can draw on the readings, class lectures, or other scientific evidence when completing this

assignment. The key here is clarity and brevity while expressing an opinion based on scientific evidence.

Bonus: If anyone gets their opinion piece published in a news outlet, it is an automatic A+ for the class granted that they complete all the other coursework.

Policy brief (25 points)

You will write a policy brief of no more than 8 double-spaced pages on a topic of your choosing. You are encouraged to use your Op-Ed as a building block of the Policy Brief. You can draw on the readings, class lectures, or other scientific evidence when completing this assignment.

In-class presentation (10 points)

You will present your policy brief in class. I will assign presentation dates based on the topics of policy briefs.

Grade Scale.

A+	97-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D	60-69
A	93-96	B	83-86	C	73-76	F	below 60
A-	90-92	B-	80-82	C-	70-72		

Extra credit. You will receive an extra credit of 2 points for attending an event (either on-campus or off-campus) related to the topics of the class. After attending the event, you need to write a one-page essay relating the event to a topic we covered in class. Please let me know by email at least 3 days in advance what event you plan to attend. If you do not notify me of the event, you run the risk of not getting any extra credit should I deem the event not appropriate for the purposes of the class. You can get extra credit for a maximum of two events.

Late work. I will not accept any late exams. For all other assignments, there is no need to ask for permission to turn in work late. If you turn in your assignments late, your grade will be reduced by 3 points for every 24 hours your work is late. I will not give the grade “Incomplete” as a final grade. Please plan accordingly at the end of the semester.

Technology Policy. The use of laptops, tablets, and mobile phones is only permitted for note taking and other activities directly related to the class.

Academic Integrity. Please read CUNY’s policy on academic integrity. If you are found guilty of plagiarism or any other type of academic dishonesty, you will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, which may include a failure in the course, suspension, or expulsion.

<http://web.cuny.edu/academics/info-central/policies/academic-integrity.pdf>

Students with disabilities. Please contact the AccessAbility Center (AAC) if you require accommodation for a physical, psychological, learning, or other disability. I will work with AAC to provide you with reasonable accommodation that meets your needs.

<http://www.ccny.cuny.edu/accessibility/>

Counseling and Support Services. CCNY offers free counseling services and workshops to help students with studying strategies, time managements, stress, and emotional issues. I encourage you to take advantage of this resource.

<http://www.ccny.cuny.edu/counseling/>

Writing Center. The CCNY Writing Center can help you during all stages of the writing process. You can schedule one-on-one meetings for feedback on your writing. On their website, you can also find information on strategies to help with writing and revisions. Since a majority of your grade in this class is based on written assignments, I encourage you to take advantage of this resource.

<http://www.ccny.cuny.edu/writing/>

COURSE MATERIALS:

All course materials are available for free either through the class Blackboard page or through the CUNY library. Most materials will be posted as PDFs on Blackboard.

You can also access the following text for free as an e-book through the CUNY library website:

Iceland, John. 2013. *Poverty in America: A Handbook, 3rd Edition*. The University of California Press.

Readings should be done prior to each class.

SCHEDULE

Course overview
Why is there inequality? Does inequality serve a purpose? Readings: (1) Fischer, Hout, Sanchez Jankowski, Lucas, Swidler, and Voss, "Inequality by Design."
Long-term trends in inequality Readings: (1) Davis and Moore, "Some Principles of Stratification" (2) Grusky and Szelényi, "The Stories About Inequality That We Love to Tell."
Recent trends in income and wealth inequality Readings: (1) Ehrenreich, "Nickel-and-Dimed." (2) Edin and Lein, "Making Ends Meet at a Low-Wage Job." (3) Saez, "Striking It Richer."
Recent trends in income and wealth inequality Readings: (1) Grusky and Weeden, "Is Market Failure Behind the Takeoff in Inequality"
Midterm 1
The building blocks of inequality: class Readings: (1) Marx, "Classes in Capitalism and Pre-Capitalism." (2) Weber, "Class, Status, and Party"
The building blocks of inequality: class Readings: (1) Wright, "Class Counts"
The building blocks of inequality: gender Readings: (1) Lorber, "The Social Construction of Gender." (2) Blau and Kahn, "The Gender Pay Gap: Have Women Gone as Far as They Can?"
The building blocks of inequality: gender Readings: (1) Hochschild, "The Time Bind." (2) Correll, Benard, and Paik, "Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty?"
The building blocks of inequality: race Readings: (1) Omi and Winant, "Racial Formation in the United States." (2) Oliver and Shapiro, "Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality."
The building blocks of inequality: race Readings: (1) Portes and Zhou, "The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and Its Variants."

Midterm 2
Generating inequality: social mobility Readings: (1) Blau and Duncan, "The Process of Stratification." (2) Beller and Hout, "Intergenerational Social Mobility: The United States in Comparative Perspective."
Generating inequality: the family Readings: (1) Lareau, "Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life."
Generating inequality: educational institutions Readings: (1) Hout, "Social and Economic Returns to College Education in the United States." (2) Hamilton and Armstrong, "The (Mis)Education of Monica and Karen."
Generating inequality: educational institutions Readings: (1) Khan, "Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School."
Op-ed due
Generating inequality: neighborhoods Readings: (1) Sampson, "Neighborhood Effects: The Evolution of an Idea." (2) Sharkey, "The Inheritance of the Ghetto." (3) Pebley and Sastry, "Neighborhoods, Poverty, and Children's Well-Being."
Generating inequality: incarceration Readings: (1) Western, "Incarceration, Unemployment, and Inequality." (2) Pager, "Marked: Race, Crime, and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration."
Inequality at the extremes: history of poverty in the United States Readings: (1) Iceland, Chapter 1
Inequality at the extremes: measuring poverty Readings: (1) Iceland, Chapter 2
Midterm 3
The mechanics of a policy brief
Federal poverty policy Readings: (1) Iceland, Chapter 7
New approaches to reducing poverty and inequality Readings: (1) Heckman, "Skill Formation and the Economics of Investing in Disadvantaged Children" (2) Brooks, "The Harlem Miracle" (3) DeLuca and Rosenbaum, "Escaping Poverty: Can Housing Vouchers Help?"
New approaches to reducing poverty and inequality

Readings:

- (1) Grusky, David et al., "Why Is There So Much Poverty in California? The Causes of California's Sky-High Poverty and the Evidence Behind the Equal Opportunity Plan for Reducing It."

Student presentations

Policy brief due