Columbia University
Department of Sociology

Sociology 3914: Inequality, Poverty, and Mobility

Spring, 2016
201 80 Claremont.

Class times: Tuesdays, 2:10-4pm

Instructor: Thomas A. DiPrete
Office location: 601B Knox Hall
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Office hours: Tuesday, 4-6pm

Course Description:

This is an undergraduate senior seminar in social stratification. The course focuses on the current American experience with socioeconomic inequality and mobility. The goals of the course are to understand how inequality is conceptualized and measured in the social sciences, to understand the structure of inequality in the contemporary U.S., to learn the principal theories and evidence for long term trends in inequality, to understand the persistence of poverty and the impact of social policies on American rates of poverty, and to understand the forces that both produce and inhibit intergenerational social mobility in the U.S. Given the nature of the subject matter, a minority of the readings will sometimes involve quantitative social science material. The course does not presume that students have advanced training in statistics, and any readings sections that contain mathematical or statistical content will be explained in class in nontechnical terms as needed. In these instances, our focus will not be on the methods, but rather on the conclusions reached by the author concerning the research question that is addressed in the text.

Class will meet once per week for a seminar-length period. Attendance is required and class discussion of the readings is a major component of the course. Class members will be assigned to write three short papers (2-3 pages) during the semester. These short papers summarize important aspects of the readings for a given week and frame questions that will be the basis for discussion during that week. A seminar paper of about 20 double-spaced pages with standard margins is required by the end of the spring semester. A paper proposal of about one page in length should be turned in at least a month before the semester ends, and I will provide feedback on the proposal.

The short papers and related class presentations will contribute 30% of the grade, the term paper will contribute 60% of the grade, and class participation will contribute the final 10% of the grade for this course.
It is assumed that all class members are aware of the Columbia University policies on academic integrity, and pledge to follow them in the work they do for this course. Please consult http://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/academicintegrity to see the CU undergraduate guide to academic integrity.

Class Calendar:

1 Introduction

Week 1 Overview and a background presentation.

2 How Much Inequality is Just?


3 How Unequal is the U.S. and Why is it Becoming More Unequal?


Week 6  continue with Piketty and discussion of earlier readings.


4 Poverty & the American Welfare State


5 Social Mobility and Social Reproduction


