Sociology 157 -- SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Syllabus – Winter 2013 (Revised 2/2/2013)


CLASS WEBSITE: https://classes.sscnet.ucla.edu/course/view/13W-SOCIOL157-1

INSTRUCTOR: Professor Robert D. Mare
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             Office hrs: Wed. 2-3, Thurs. 11-12, and by appt.

DISCUSSION SECTIONS:
347637201 DIS 1A T  3:00P 3:50P BUNCHE 2178
347637202 DIS 1B T  4:00P 4:50P BUNCHE 2181
347637203 DIS 1C R  8:00A 8:50A PUB AFF 1256

TEACHING ASSISTANT: Isaac Speer
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                     Office hrs: Tues. 12:30-2:30, Haines A54.

SUBJECT MATTER AND RATIONALE: Social stratification is the unequal distribution of scarce resources, and of the processes by which these resources are allocated to individuals, groups, and positions. The study of stratification encompasses income and wealth inequality, occupational and class hierarchies, inequality of educational opportunity, poverty, social mobility between and within generations, gender and race-ethnic inequality, and the consequences of inequality. It asks such questions as: How likely are individuals to end up in the same social stratum as their parents? How much inequality of opportunity is there and is this inequality increasing over time? Does education equalize opportunities or widen the gaps between more and less successful people? Is there growing inequality in the United States and, if so, why? In this class we cover the concepts, theories, facts, and methods of analysis used by sociologists to understand social stratification. This course takes most of its examples from the contemporary United States, but pays some attention to other times and places as well.

Understanding social inequality is part of being an informed citizen. This course may also be useful for students planning careers in fields such as law, marketing, social work, and teaching since these professions often deal directly or indirectly with people from widely varying socioeconomic circumstances. Stratification is a central topic in sociology, with ramifications for many other topics in this field, and thus it is especially important for sociology majors.

PREREQUISITES: This course will draw on basic sociological concepts, ideas of classical social thinkers, and means of dealing with quantitative information. Sociology majors would ordinarily have acquired that background early in their studies, in the following courses:
Introductory Sociology (Soc 1 or equiv.).
Introductory Statistics (One of Stat 10, 11, 13, Psych 100A, or equiv.).
Classical Social Theory (Soc 101 or equiv.).

Introductory sociology and statistics are required parts of the preparation for the Major in Sociology, and classical theory is required for the Major itself. Any Sociology student who has not yet completed these requirements is strongly advised to complete them this quarter, before taking this or other upper division sociology courses. (Students majoring in other disciplines may wish to consult the professor about the suitability their backgrounds.)

The statistics prerequisite is important. Central to social stratification are such quantitative resources as wealth, income, education, and prestige and quantifiable concepts as mobility and inequality. Stratification studies use such statistical tools as contingency tables, correlation coefficients and regression equations to show how and why some get more and others get less of those scarce but desired resources. Without some prior experience with elementary statistics, you will have difficulty with readings, lectures, and written assignments.

**REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:** Grading is based on three take home essay exams (20% each), one group project (paper and oral presentation) (20%), and class and discussion section attendance and participation (20%).

*Take home essays* will be answers to questions about reading and lecture materials. Students will answer these individually (i.e., not in groups). Questions posted on the class website on a Wednesday will be due before the following Monday’s class. Posting dates and deadlines are included in the class schedule below. Further guidelines about these essays will be provided after the quarter begins.

*Group Research Projects.* Each member of the class will join one of six groups, each of which will take on a research project. The project will consist of developing a report on a contemporary social issue related to social stratification. The instructor will provide these topics and students can assign themselves to the topic of their choice on a first come first served basis. The group will be responsible for making a 35-minute in-class presentation and submitting a research report of approximately 25 double-spaced pages. Students are expected to grade the effort and contributions of each of their team members. The instructor will combine these grades with his evaluation of the oral and written research report.

*Discussion section.* Students are expected to read the assignments before their discussion section meetings and to be prepared to discuss the content of those readings. Participation in discussion sections is required.

*Except in cases of extraordinary personal hardship, late work will not be accepted. The grade “Incomplete” will not be given.*
COURSE MATERIALS: Students should purchase each of the following books, which should be available at the ASUCLA bookstore in Ackerman Union:


Additional readings to be covered in lectures may be posted on the class website. Readings should be done for section discussion on the same schedule as other texts. Check this site prior to every lecture, print whatever supplements have been posted, and bring them to class. This will reduce the amount of note taking required in class.

SCHEDULE AND READINGS (Subject to Revision)

Jan. 8: Preliminaries; Course Overview; Why is there Inequality?
Reading:
  Grusky and Szelényi, “The Stories About Inequality That We Love to Tell.” Pp. 2-14 in GS.
  Fischer, Hout, Sanchez Jankowski, Lucas, Swidler, and Voss, "Inequality by Design." Pp. 20-24 in GS.

Jan. 10: Theories of Stratification – Classics: Marx and Weber
Reading:
  Marx, "Classes in Capitalism and Pre-Capitalism." Pp. 36-47 in GS.

Jan. 15: Theories of Stratification – Modern and Contemporary
Reading:
  Davis and Moore, "Some Principles of Stratification." Pp. 16-19 in GS.
  Mills, "The Power Elite." Pp. 100-111 in GS.
  Wright, "Class Counts.” Pp. 48-55 in GS.
Jan. 17: Economic Competition and Inequality I

Reading:
Frank and Cook, Ch. 1-3 in WTAS.
Morris and Western, "Inequality in Earnings." (Posted at class website)

Jan. 22: Economic Competition and Inequality II

Reading:
Frank and Cook, Ch. 4-7 in WTAS.

Jan. 24: Economic Competition and Inequality III

Reading:
Frank and Cook, Ch. 8-11 in WTAS.

Jan. 29: Education and Inequality

Reading:
MacLeod, "Ain’t No Makin’ It." Pp. 567-583 in GS.

Jan. 31: Family-Based Inequalities I; EXAM #1 Posted

Reading:
Lareau, Ch. 1-4 in UC

Feb. 5: Family-Based Inequalities II; EXAM #1 DUE AT NOON AT TURNITIN.COM

Reading:
Lareau, Ch. 5-9 in UC

Feb. 7: Family-Based Inequalities III

Reading:
Lareau, Ch. 10-15 in UC

Feb. 12: Race and Ethnic Stratification

Reading:
Omi and Winant, "Racial Formation in the United States." Pp. 222-227 in GS
Bertrand and Mullainathan, “Are Emily and Greg More Employable Than Lakisha and Jamal?” Pp. 254-259 in GS
Feb. 14: Space, Race, and Socioeconomic Inequality – Low and Mixed Income Housing

Reading:
- Venkatesh and Celimli, “Tearing Down the Community.” Shelterforce Online 138 (Nov/Dec 2004). (Posted at class website)
- Rosin, “American Murder Mystery.” The Atlantic Online (July/August 2008 Atlantic Monthly) (Posted at class website)

Feb. 19: Income and Wealth

Reading:
- Morris and Western, "Inequality in Earnings." (Posted at class website, January 17/19) (reread)
- Oliver and Shapiro, "Black Wealth/White Wealth." Pp. 296-303 in GS.

Feb. 21: Income and Poverty; EXAM #2 POSTED

Reading:
- Edin and Lein, "Making Ends Meet at a Low-Wage Job." (Posted at class website)

Feb. 26: Inequality of Opportunity: Genes and Other Influences; EXAM #2 DUE AT NOON AT TURNITIN.COM

Reading:
- Conley, Ch. 1-3 in PO.
- Jonsson, Grusky, Di Carlo, and Pollak, “It’s a Decent Bet That Our Children Will be Professors Too.” Pp. 499-516 in GS.
Feb. 28: Groups 1 & 2 Oral Reports

Mar. 5: Inequality of Opportunity: Social Mobility

Reading:
Conley, Ch. 5 in PO.
Pp. 553-556 in GS.

Mar. 7: Groups 3 & 4 Oral Reports

Mar. 12: Inequality of Opportunity: Effects of Circumstance

Reading:
Conley, Ch. 4, 6-8 in PO.

Mar. 14: Groups 5 & 6 Oral Reports (Last Class); EXAM #3 POSTED

Mar. 19: GROUP WRITTEN REPORTS DUE AT 9:30 A.M., 264 HAINES HALL AND AT TURNITIN.COM. (One hard copy and one electronic copy per group are sufficient.)

Mar. 19: EXAM #3 DUE AT NOON AT TURNITIN.COM
GROUP PROJECTS

The class will be divided into six groups, two in each of the three sections. Each project consists of writing an essay and making an oral report to the class that address the issues described below. For each topic, the group should marshal relevant facts, discuss relevant literature, and apply sociological concepts and arguments from this course or elsewhere. Essays should consist of roughly 25 pages of text (double-spaced, 12 pt. font, one inch margins) plus graphs and tables as needed.

Much of the empirical information relevant to these topics is statistical. Many students do not have experience with writing about this type of information. An excellent source of advice about this is *The Chicago Guide to Writing about Numbers* by Jane E. Miller (U. of Chicago Press, 2004). The instructor and teaching assistant will be available during office hours to provide advice about the projects. The papers and oral presentations will be evaluated on their accuracy, cogency, creativity, coherence, and effectiveness of presentation.

**Group 1 (Section 1A): Gender Stratification in Education**
A remarkable trend during the past 25 years has been the elimination of traditional disparities between men and women in college attendance (and overall educational attainment) and the emergence of a "female advantage" in higher education. Document these trends and discuss their causes, consequences, exceptions, and implications.

**Group 2 (Section 1B): Marriage and Inequality**
Single parent families struggle compared to two-parent families. Men and women of similar socioeconomic background, ethnicity, and educational attainment tend to marry one another. Middle and upper class families have tended to have fewer children than their lower class counterparts. How are these factors causes and consequences of social inequality? How have demographic trends in marriage, divorce, and childbearing affected social inequality? How has social inequality affected these trends?

**Group 3: (Section 1C) The Socioeconomic Implications of the Great Recession**
The great recession of 2007-12 has caused enormous hardships for large parts of the American population. These hardships, however, are not borne equally by all groups. Document and discuss the disparate trends in hardship leading up to and during the recession among socioeconomic and demographic groups. Aspects of hardship include (but need not be restricted to) unemployment, poverty, loss of housing, and ill-health. Socioeconomic and demographic groups include those defined by educational attainment, occupation, industry, age, gender, race and ethnicity, and geographic location. Discuss the reasons for these disparities and the ways that public policies may ameliorate them.

**Group 4: (Section 1A): Socioeconomic and Class Effects on Political Behavior**
How do individuals who vary in their socioeconomic levels (whether defined by education, income, social class, or other dimensions) differ in their political beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (such as voting)? A classic view is that political views and behaviors are governed by social class or socioeconomic position. An alternative view, typified by the argument in
What’s the Matter with Kansas?, is that non-economic, cultural factors play a larger role and may cause individuals to vote against their economic self-interest. Yet another view is that the effects of socioeconomic position may vary over time or across different socioeconomic dimensions. Which of these views best characterizes political behavior in the United States today? How do various dimensions of socioeconomic status affect electoral participation and voting? How have these patterns changed over time? What role did they play in the 2012 elections?

Group 5: (Section 1B) Socioeconomic Disparities in Health, Morbidity, and Mortality
How do persons at varying socioeconomic levels (whether defined by education, income, social class, or other dimensions) differ in average health, sickness, and length of life (in the United States)? What are the reasons for these disparities? What are some of the problems in interpreting data on health disparities? What are the most promising social policies for reducing these disparities?

Group 6: (Section 1C) Economic Residential Segregation
To what degree do people at varying socioeconomic levels (whether defined by education, income, social class, or other dimensions) live in separate neighborhoods and communities and to what degree are they segregated from one another? What are the recent trends in socioeconomic residential segregation? What are the causes of socioeconomic segregation? What are the consequences of segregation for individuals and families? For communities? What are the most promising social policies for reducing socioeconomic segregation and for mitigating its harmful consequences?