

Social Inequality

Liberal Studies Program
Georgetown University
LSHV-447-01
Wednesday 6:30-8:40
Location: TBA

Professor William McDonald
Fall 2008
Office: 589 ICC
Phone: 687-3689
Hrs: Wed 5:00-6:00 & by appt.
wfm3@georgetown.edu

wfm3@georgetown.edu

I. NATURE OF THE COURSE

Why do some people have more of the good things in life than others? Why are the poor poor? How did inequality in society begin? What does inequality look like in America? Are we a classless society? How do you recognize social class? How differently do people of different social classes experience and react to the world? What are your chances of moving up or down in the class order? Is there a ruling class in America? Is there a new class war underway in America? Do the Soviets have more or less inequality than we have? How does the international economic order affect inequality in the third world?

These are some of the questions we will explore in this course. We will also review the major social theories of inequality. The course combines historical, cross-cultural and contemporary American perspectives.

II. GRADING

1. Choosing A Fair Grading System: An Exercise in the Ideologies of Equality

The grading system will be determined on the basis of one of the following rationales after discussion in class. (Graduate students, please see the additional requirements for you in section below.)

A. Communist

Everyone will get the same grade which will be based on the average grade earned by the whole class according to the following tasks:

Final exam	40%	(400 points)
Term-paper	40%	(400 points)
<u>Class Participation</u>	<u>20%</u>	<u>(200 points)</u>
Base grade	100%	(1000 points)

Final grade per student = sum of each student's base divided by the number of students.

B. Need-based

Grading will be according to the need of the student. This will be based on offsetting prior disadvantages. Students will submit accounts of the disadvantages they have suffered in life and a social reconstruction committee of one, me, will determine who needs the highest grade and who deserves to get the least. Desert will not be determined arbitrarily but rather on the basis of status characteristics with known disadvantages in contemporary American society, such as being on the disadvantaged side of any of the following status characteristics: gender, race, ethnicity, economic class, religion, IQ, physical beauty.

C. Liberal-Capitalist

Grading will be based on the performance of individual students on the above-listed tasks; but, in addition bonus points will be awarded to each student corresponding to their social statuses. Rich white Anglo-Saxon, Protestant males will be given an additional 300 points. Underclass black males with more than one prior arrest will have 220 points deducted from their scores. In between these two extremes a scale of differing numbers of points (positive and negative) will be assigned to individuals based primarily on ascriptive factors such as gender, religion, ethnicity, and economic class. This will be done fairly and impartially and without intentional meanness by the invisible hand of the professor.

D. Reformist

Grading will be based on the description given in C except that status groups that would otherwise have had points deducted will each be given an extra 10 points a piece.

E. Quota, With Random Sampling

Grading will be based on quotas which in turn will be based on the proportions that particular status group represents in the larger population. A normal curve of grades from A through F will be created and the proportion of each letter grade will be awarded on a random basis until the quotas for each group are filled.

F. Truly Egalitarian-Meritocratic

Grading will be based on two grounds. First, all advantages and disadvantages that students have will be neutralized by the leveling hand of the professor who will add or subtract points to offset initial differences. Then the final grade will be determined by the performances of the individual students on the tasks listed in A above.

G. The "Fair" Way

Grades will be based on the performances of individual students without additional effort to make the contest more equal. The required tasks and relative weights are those listed in A above.

2. The Term Paper

DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ON THE TERM PAPER!!!! USE YOUR ID

A term paper of a certain length (see below) plus references in some standard format (such as Turabian or Chicago or MLA), type-written, with neat cover page, and clearly labeled sections and subsections. For graduate students the paper should be between 13-20 pages; for undergraduates, between 8-10 pages.¹

One of the following three topics may be used for the focus of your term-paper.

A. Social Mobility, A Personal Case Study

TERM PAPER SHOULD BE DELIVERED IN A CLOSED ENVELOPE!

In considering doing this project, be sensitive to your family's possible reluctance to have you explore this issue.

Write an analysis of the social mobility of your own family. The exact format and content of the analysis is up to you. But, you should include the different perspectives of Marx and Weber on your social position. You might begin by explaining the differences in those perspectives using your family as an example. Then address the social mobility of your family using some appropriate measures like determining your paternal grandfather's occupation and comparing it to your father's according to some scales (e.g., Census Bureau; Blau and Duncan; Kerbo; or Eric Ohlin Wright's).

You might check the mobility of your mother and her side of the family. Also, examine the impact of class and status (Weber) on your family's life style and life's choices. Did class affect your parent's choice of marriage partners? (Are they from the same class?) Does it seem to affect their beliefs about equality, affirmative action, welfare, general contentment with the world; health; degree of creativity and freedom on their jobs? What classes are your closest friends from? Have you ever danced with a person from the upper class?

The purpose of this exercise is to demonstrate your knowledge of the scope of the impact of class and status by tracing their significance in your own life; and simultaneous to show your command of the literature and ability to correctly apply alternative understandings of the meanings of "class". You must make clear what theoretical perspective(s) you are using and you should use at least two different perspectives. That is, do not loosely talk about your family's "class position" as if there is no debate over how to define class. Instead talk about your family's class position as it would be defined according to this theorist or that.

Your paper will be treated with strict confidence.

¹ For keeping track of citation references, compiling research notes and formatting your citations into any one of about 500 different formats (including MLA, University of Chicago, Turabian, etc.), I recommend a program called Citation (Standard version). Go to <http://citationonline.net/> Does not work on MacIntosh.

B. Popular Culture and Social Class

Select two or three popular television programs and examine them from the perspective of what they say about social class in America. What class behaviors, attitudes, life-chances, political participation, etc. do they depict? Link your analysis to the discussion in Chapter 13 of Kerbo. What larger view of social class in America do they seem to support (class conflict? egalitarian classlessness?)? How would Marxist-oriented theorists account for the view of social class depicted by the shows you have analyzed? How would that differ from a functionalist theorist like Parsons or Davis and Moore?

C. Book Review Essay

Select a book related to social inequality from Kerbo's or Fussel's or McLeod's bibliographies (or a book of your choice for which you get my permission in advance) and write a review essay on it.

NOTE ! This is NOT a book review! The essay should include a statement of the topic and argument(s) made in the book; but, you must then "critique" the work. You must apply as many of the concepts and theories of the course to interpreting and explaining the thesis of the book. Where possible this should include an account of what theorists with alternative views might say about the work. Not more than 40% of the paper should be simply a "book review".

The book **MUST** be approved **IN ADVANCE** by me.

D. Statistical Analysis of Stratification Issues Using General Social Survey (GSS)

Students familiar with statistical analysis may choose to do a study of correlates of social class or of social mobility or other topics using a secondary analysis of the GSS. That data set is available to students in the GU computer labs (in ICC and other buildings but NOT the one in Lauinger). See me for more details.

E. Other

If you have some topic related to inequality that you would like to research and write an essay about, discuss it with me for possible approval.

3. Honor Code Applies

In this course the Georgetown Honor Code will be followed. Please be sure to consult it. Be sure you understand the rules about plagiarism.

III. GU E-Mail & BLACKBOARD (BB)

All students are given an e-mail account by the University. If you have your own email address and prefer to use it, then you MUST have your messages forwarded from your University account to your personal email address. For instructions as to how to forward your messages, go to:

<http://www.georgetown.edu/email/routing.html>

Georgetown now has a software program called BLACKBOARD (BB) which can be used for communications between faculty and students in various ways. Please check out your BB account and familiarize yourself with the folders in the account. We will not make extensive use of BB. But we may use the announcements page.

IV. TEXTS

H. Kerbo, Social Stratification and Inequality, 6th ed.

P. Fussell, Class

J. McLeod, Ain't No Makin It

B. Landry, The New Black Middle Class

Optional Additional Reading (very limited supplies may be ordered)

S. Rose, Social Stratification

E.D. Baltzell, Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia (the value of inequality)

L. B. Rubin, Worlds of Pain (working class lifestyles)

J. Kozol, Savage Inequalities (educational inequalities)

D. Brooks, Bobos in Paradise (humorous look at new yuppie class)

L.O. Graham, Our Kind of People: Inside America's Black Upper Class

V. Learning Supplements

The following films are a few of the many that deal within equality. They can be rented at local video stores and some are available in the Georgetown Audio Visual Department in Lauinger.

Reds, a long film about the Communist Revolution in Russia in 1917 and the involvement of Jack Reed, an American.

Metropolitan. 1991. Romantic comedy, light weight chatter among upper class New York City debutantes and their escorts.

Gosforth Park. 2001. Comedy about British upper class between the world wars at the end of the empire.

People Like Us. Web-based Public Broadcasting System's Program on Social Class in USA (based on Fussell's book) Go to: <http://www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus/>.

VI. Other Matters

1. We will use GU's BlackBoard (hereinafter, BB) for occasional announcements plus links to online websites relevant to the course. Please check it out.
2. Please be sure that your electronic address (email) is properly registered with GU. All students have an email account from the University. If you prefer to use your private email address rather than the one supplied by GU, please set your GU account to forward messages to the account you regularly use. Students are responsible for keeping their electronic addresses in proper condition so that messages from the University and faculty can reach them. Instructions for forwarding messages can be found on the GU network. UIS will help you find them.
3. I recommend that you consider purchasing and begin using a bibliographic database manager, especially graduate students. There are several programs on the market. I have been using Citation since 1988 and I recommend it highly. You can get it cheaper if you order the on-line downloadable version. Go to <http://citationonline.net/store.asp>.

4. Disabilities Statement:

If you believe you have a disability, then you should contact the Academic Resource Center (arc@georgetown.edu) for further information. The Center is located in the Leavey Center, Suite 335. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.

VII. Schedule of Topics

(Changes will be sent via email & posted on BB)

Part A. Values, Theories & History

- 9/3 Values & Inequality
Choosing a "Fair" Grading System--An Exercise in the Ideologies of Egalitarianism.
Handout: Historical Views on Equality
- 9/10 Systems of Stratification & Their Evolution
Kerbo, 1 & 3
BB > External Links > examine the frescos of Lorenzetti. Several different links will get you to these frescoes. Read the questions below and then examine the links to find the answers. Only look at his frescoes titled, The Allegory of Good Government and the Allegory of Bad Government.

When and where was The Allegory of Good Government painted. Examine it closely especially the Lady Justice on the far left holding the scale of justice. Notice also the little helpers in the scale's pans. Are they blindfolded? Why or why not? Can you see the social class structure of this society? What are the classes in the frescos and how can you tell them apart? Look around at the other frescos by Lorenzetti regarding the effects of good and bad government. What are the effects? What message is that supposed to send? To Whom?

9/17 Systems of Stratification & Their Evolution (Continued)
Kerbo, 1 & 3

9/24 Theories: Classical: Marx & Weber & Davis-Moore Hypothesis; (2) Alternative Views of Social Class; (3) Occupational Prestige

Kerbo, 4 & 5

Part B. Dimensions of Inequality in America

10/1 Social Mobility: Class Ascription and Achievement
Kerbo, 12 & 13

10/8 Economic Inequality
Kerbo, 2
Rose et al, Graphic on US Stratification (optional)

10/15 The Upper Class & The Corporate Class
Kerbo, 6 & 7

10/22 The Middle and the Working Classes
-29 Kerbo 8

Alexis de Tocqueville (selection to be distributed)

Fussell (entire book) _____

Landry (entire book) _____

11/5 The Poor
Kerbo 9
McLeod, (entire book)

11/12 No Class

Part C. Comparative & World Inequality

11/19 World Stratification & Globalization

Kerbo 14 & 17

11/26 No class (Thanksgiving eve)

Part D. Final Exam & Term Paper

12/3 Oral Final Exam, Potluck Dinner, Students Present Their Grand Syntheses

12/5 Term Papers DUE at 589 ICC by 3:00 pm NO Emails please.

Part E. Feedback

Students who want feedback on their term papers can pick them up from the Liberal Studies Office and arrange to review the papers with me during the spring semester. Please call me to arrange an appointment once the Spring semester begins (687-3689). Bring your paper.
