

Sociology 350: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

CATALOG DESCRIPTION:

Analysis of the distribution of wealth, prestige and power. Examines various approaches to the study of the causes of poverty, life chances of the poor, lifestyles of the wealthy, upward and downward mobility, and class and group conflict in society.

ABOUT THE COURSE:

Stratification and social class are key economic and structural concepts in sociology and, along with the master statuses of race and sex, shape the dynamic of inequality in societies. In the last few years, as a nation and as individual citizens we have struggled to understand the role of global inequality in acts of domestic and international terrorism, in the continuing violence in Iraq, as well as in a domestic economic downturn that focuses our attention on issues of inequality at home. More than ever, studying social class is a practical as well as an academic exercise.

Your text for this course, edited by Peter Kivisto and me, is an effort to bring together in one place some of the most important historical and contemporary thought on social inequality to help us address current problems in inequality. We include classical sociological thinkers like Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, Max Weber and Thorsten Veblen, to modern scholars such as William Julius Wilson, Barbara Reskin, Roger Waldinger and Cecilia Ridgeway. We also include social commentators from other disciplines such as Katherine Newman from anthropology, journalist Barbara Ehrenreich and historian David Landis. We'll be covering most of the articles included in the collection, and I'll be very interested in your response to them.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the semester, you should be able to do the following:

- 1) Identify key ideas and debates on the nature of inequality from at least two, and hopefully more, theoretical perspectives;
- 2) Have a clear sense of what inequality looks like in Ventura County;
- 3) Attend and participate in Michael Pollan's April campus visit,
- 4) Be able to critically assess and present challenging but interesting scholarly work on inequality;
- 5) Be able to critically assess and evaluate other students' presentations;
- 6) Be able to write briefs that "abstract" the main ideas of the author and accept or challenge those ideas;
- 7) Be able to answer the question for yourself, "Is inequality inevitable?"

Sociology 350 is a junior/senior-level required course in the sociology major. After the first month or so, I'd like us to run the class like a seminar as much as possible. That is, this class won't be primarily lecture-driven. Each of you will be responsible for: 1. carefully doing the reading for each week in advance of class meetings; 2. providing four short reaction papers over selections in **the reader**; 3. bringing your personal interpretation of the reading to class and analyzing each student team presentation of the readings; 4. leading a discussion of the readings in class; and 5. participating in a group analysis of a local neighborhood. Your attendance is

expected. Missing four sessions (two weeks of class) or more will have a serious and adverse effect on your grade.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

To pass the class you will need to:

- Satisfactorily complete two midterms (one at the 8th week and one during final exams). 50 points each = 100 points total;
- Make one formal presentation to the class over the one of the readings in Kivisto and Hartung beginning in the second month of class. 25 points;
- Beginning with the second or third week of classes, provide 4 reaction papers over one or several of the assigned readings for that week. You may not wait until the last 4 weeks of class to complete this assignment! Reaction papers each have a specific theme to address as noted on the readings and topics syllabus. Final deadlines for each set of papers are stipulated on the syllabus. 25 points each for 100 total;
- Examine and present information on inequality/measuring inequality/and photographing social class in a neighborhood in Ventura county as part of the Photographing Ventura assignment. 50 points total Group grade for written commentary and in-class presentation.
- Additional in-class writing may be requested over the reading or discussion on any given day;
- Participate in class discussion.
- Be in class.

Exams: Essay format and Objective item format. Prior to each exam, I'll provide a review sheet and some possible essay options.

In-class presentations: Each student will choose several topic areas within stratification that interests him or her. I will try to assign you your first or second preference. Students will work in small teams of 3 or 4 but will be graded individually. For the presentation, each presenting student should prepare a one page abstract of the reading s/he is presenting. An abstract summarizes the author's main points in text form. It is not an outline. In addition, student presenters should provide discussion questions for the group on the week prior to their week's presentation. Each week, two groups will be responsible for a "formal" presentation lasting approximately 30 minutes where the team assumes the role of expert as we talk about the readings. 25 points per presentation.

Reaction papers: Four times during the semester, each student will turn in a response to the readings in the text assigned for discussion that week. The paper must be turned in for the class period in which we are discussing that particular reading. **Keep a copy of your response paper for your own records.** Your response paper should address the following points:

- 1) *summarize* what you understand the author is saying: that is, identify the thesis and 4 or 5 key points the author(s) makes.
- 2) *why* do you feel these are the main ideas in the article; *how* do the ideas connect to each other. Include *your own reaction* to the ideas you read.
- 3) How can you apply these ideas to current events, discussion in class, etc.?

Your reaction should not exceed 500 words, or 2 typed pages. I will evaluate reaction papers based on both content and mechanics, so please proof for spelling and grammar errors and make

sure your ideas are adequately developed.

Inequality in Ventura: In the next two weeks, we'll be talking about what inequality looks like in this area. You should begin thinking about this now. What neighborhoods are rich? Poor? In what communities? Why? You'll work in groups to photograph the public and private spaces in various neighborhoods that we'll select as a group.

Participation: Students not presenting in a given week are responsible for a careful evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of their fellow student presenters. The evaluation should assess how well the student presented the material. Did the presentation clarify your questions? Did the student interpret the material in the same way you did? I'll provide a standard form for doing this. Additionally, active participation involves raising questions, making points, active listening, etc.

Grading Scale: Grades will follow the standard university scale where 97% and above = A+; 93-96% = A; 90-93% = A- and so on. An "A" represents exceptional work; a "B", very good work; a C, good work/average; a D, poor but passing; and an "F" is a failing grade. All sociology majors are expected to maintain a GPA of 2.0, or C, in their major course work.

300-270 = A

269-240 = B

239-210 = C

209-180 = D

179 and below = F

COURSE POLICY: (UNIVERSITY)

STUDENTS SHOULD BE FAMILIAR WITH UNIVERSITY POLICIES AS OUTLINED ON PAGES 61 FF IN THE 2006-2007 CATALOG. PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT ARE POLICIES ON **NONDISCRIMINATION** (RACE, SEX, GENDER, PHYSICAL DISABILITY), ON **PRIVACY RIGHTS** OF STUDENTS, STUDENT **DISCIPLINE** (OR REASONABLE STANDARDS FOR BEHAVIOR), AND THE POLICY ON **ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**. STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES NEEDING ACCOMODATION SHOULD CONTACT THE OFFICE OF DISABILITY ACCOMODATION SERVICES, BELL TOWER, EAST WING, ROOM 1796 (805-437-8528). ALL REQUESTS FOR ACCOMODATION REQUIRE ADVANCE NOTICE. PLEASE DISCUSS APPROVED ACCOMODATIONS WITH ME.

OTHER POLICY

CLASS POLICY ON **CELL-PHONES, BEEPERS, AND OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES** IN CLASS: DON'T BRING THEM OR TURN THEM OFF! I EXPECT STUDENTS WHO ATTEND TO BE ATTENTIVE – THIS MEANS NOT READING THE NEWSPAPER, CARRYING ON A CONVERSATION, DOING WORK FOR OTHER CLASSES, EATING, DRINKING, SLEEPING, GUM POPPING, PACKING UP BEFORE CLASS IS OVER, ETC.

YOU ARE EXPECTED TO BE IN CLASS ON TIME, AND CLASS WILL ALWAYS END

Week of April 10 Sex/Gender and Sexuality: Presentations Group 3
Read: Chapter 4: England; Hondagneu-Sotelo; Ehrenreich; Kendall; Badgett and King
REACTION PAPER #3 Due April 12: How does Race, Sex and/or Sexual Identity Shape
Inequality? Reaction to: Boyle AND Oliver and Shapiro; Massey and Denton; Wilson;
Waldinger and Lichter; Newman; Quadagno; Hondagneu-Sotelo
England, Kendall; Badgett and King

Week of... April 17 Social Class, Culture and Consumption: Presentations Group 4
Read: Pollan; Bourdieu; Other, TBA

Week of April 24 Global Inequality: Group 5
April 26 Michael Pollan (Special Presentation)
Read: Winant; Firebaugh; Landes; Norris; Bales

Week of.... May 1 What is to be Done? Treating Inequality: Group 6
Read: Faux, Sen, Green, Wallerstein

Week of May 8 Course Wrap-Up and Review
REACTION PAPER #4 Due Tuesday, May 8: On Class and Consumption **or** Global
Inequality. Reaction to: Pollan, Bourdeiu, Winant, Firebaugh, Landes, Norris, Bales, Faux, Sen,
Green, Wallerstein

Final Exam: **Tuesday, May 15, 1-3 p.m.**

Final exam preparation & faculty consultation days: Thursday and Friday, May 10 and 11

** Syllabus is tentative and subject to change