SOC 451/551: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Professor Jim Elliott
Office: 618 PLC
Phone: 346-5267

Winter, 2007
T/R, 4:00-5:20pm

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00-3:00, or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION
Stratification is a core concept in sociology and reflects the fact that the human condition has long been a fundamentally unequal one. Indeed all known societies have been characterized by inequalities of one sort or another, with the most privileged individuals and groups enjoying a disproportionate share of the total wealth, power, and prestige in their societies. The central objective of this seminar is to move beyond what we think we already know about these familiar issues to develop a deeper, analytically sound understanding of different forms of inequality and why they persist despite our society’s professed commitment to egalitarian principles. In pursuing this objective, we will look beyond individual and cultural explanations for inequality to consider how social relations, contexts, and institutions create unequal opportunities and outcomes, focusing on stratification along class, racial and gender lines.

REQUIRED TEXTS
Fischer et al. 1996. *Inequality by Design.*

Grusky & Szelenyi 2006. *Inequality: Classic Readings in Race, Class and Gender.*


COURSE REQUIREMENTS
Attendance & Participation: 10%
Weekly Memos (Weeks 2-9): 5 memos @ 6 pts/memo, 30%
Group Research Presentation: 20%
Individual Research Project: 40%
  Phase 1 (5%) – statement of research question, its sociological relevance, with references
  Phase 2 (10%) – refined research question with annotated bibliography
  Phase 3 (25%) – final report
GRADES
Grades are assigned according to individual performance, not a curve. Please review the University Honor Code and take it seriously. Violations will be referred to the Student Conduct Office. Late assignments will not be accepted without a prior meeting with Prof. Elliott and verifiable and legitimate reason. Late assignments are subject to a 10% reduction for each day late. Computer problems do not qualify as a legitimate reason. Please plan ahead and do not wait until the last minute to complete assignments.

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COURSE SCHEDULE

I. Individual Talents & Social Structures

In this section we’ll review individual and social factors that shape contemporary inequality and our understanding of it, ending with a review of competing perspectives on social classes and status groupings, which constitute the basic building blocks of inequality, or stratification.

Week 1 (Jan. 9 & 11): Individual Talents & The “Bell Curve” Debate
Fischer et al.: *Inequality by Design*
- Appendix 1: Summary of the Bell Curve
- Chapters 1-3

Week 2 (Jan. 16 & 18): Societal Choices & State Policies
Fischer et al.: *Inequality by Design*
- Chapters 4-8

* Memo due on-line by Tuesday, noon
* Group assignments for in-class student presentations

Week 3 (Jan. 23 & 25): Structures of Inequality
Grusky & Szelenyi: *Inequality Reader*
- Chp 3, Marx “Classes in Capitalism & Pre-Capitalism”
- Chp 4, Weber “Class, Status, Party”
- On blackboard: Wright “Max Weber and the Problem of Exploitation”

* Memo due on-line by Tuesday, noon
* Phase 1 of Individual Research Project due on Blackboard by Thurs, midnight.
II. Racial & Ethnic Inequalities*

In this section we’ll investigate how racial and ethnic systems of stratification entwine with class and status inequalities to shape life chances, and how recent immigration is changing how we think about these intersections.

* Student Presentations begin.

Week 4 (Jan. 30 & Feb. 1): The Changing Significance of Race
Grusky & Szelenyi: Inequality Reader,
- Chp 11, W J Wilson “Declining Significance of Race...”
- Chp 8, W J Wilson “Jobless Poverty...”
- Chp 9, Massey & Denton “American Apartheid...”
* Memo due on-line by Tuesday, noon
* Student Presentations 1 & 2

Week 5 (Feb. 6 & 8): Race, Wealth & Opportunity
Conley: Being Black, Living in the Red (all)
* Memo due on-line by Tuesday, noon
* Student Presentations 3 & 4

Week 6 (Feb. 13 & 15): Ethnic/Immigrant Stratification
On blackboard
- Alba et al. 2005 “A Distorted Nation” Social Forces
* Memo due on-line by Tuesday, noon
* Student Presentations 5 & 6
* Phase 2 of Research Analysis due Thursday, in class.

III. Sex & Gender Inequalities

In this section we’ll investigate how gender stratification entwines with notions of biological difference, history and social institutions to shape life chances among men and women, particularly in paid employment.

Week 7 (Feb. 20 & 22): Deja Vu: Recent Debates over the Nature & Nurture of Gender
On blackboard:
- Udry (2000) “Biological Limits of Gender Construction”
- Criticisms (2001): Miller & Costello; Kennelly et al.; Risman
- Replies (2001): Udry; Firebaugh
- Udry “Importance of Being Beautiful: Reexamination & Racial Comparison”
* Memo due on-line by Tuesday, noon
* Student Presentations 7 & 8
Week 8 (Feb. 27 & Mar 1):
Grusky & Szelenyi: *Inequality Reader*
- Chp 13 H Hartmann “Unhappy Marriage of Marxism & Feminism”
- Chp 14 B Reskin “Labor Markets as Queues”
* Memo due on-line by Tuesday, noon
* Student Presentations 9, 10 & 11

Week 9 (Mar 6 & 8):
- All
* Memo due on-line by Tuesday, noon
* Student Presentations 12 & 13

IV. Research Presentations

Week 10 (Mar 13 & 15):
No Assigned Readings; instead, we’ll report and discuss our research projects in class. Please come prepared to share a 3-4 minute synopsis of your central research question and what you have learned thus far.

**Final Exam Period:** Phase 3 of Research Analysis due.

ASSIGNMENTS

Class Attendance & Participation
This seminar relies on active student participation. So a significant portion of your grade depends on your steady attendance and contribution. **Students with more than four unexcused absences will receive a failing grade.** Absences are excused when a student has spoken to Prof. Elliott prior to the date missed, has a compelling reason to miss class, and can provide written evidence of this compelling reason. Grades will be determined by attendance sheets and subjective evaluation of your contribution to the course.

Weekly Memos
Successful learning requires preparation for class. Writing regular memos is an important part of this process. These memos should be roughly 600-700 words in length (about 1 page, single-spaced) and are due by NOON TUESDAY of each week, posted to our course blackboard site. Each memo should summarize one or more key points from the assigned reading for that week, offer personal observation or clarification, and present any questions you would like to raise for class discussion. These memos will be shared with all class participants through the course blackboard site. You are required to write and post 5 memos during the term, with the first due
date on Tuesday, January 16th and the last due date on Tuesday March 6th.  (Note: there are 8 weeks in which to post memos; you may select your own “off” weeks.)

Grading is simple.  Write and post a thoughtful memo of required length on time and receive 4-6 points for that week.  Write and post a substandard memo on time and receive 2-3 points.  Post a reasonable memo later in the same assigned week and receive 1 point.  Post no memo at all and receive 0 point for that week.  (Note: If you complete more than 5 memos, your top 5 scores will be used to compute your final grade.)

**Group Research Presentation**
The U.S. system of higher education is one of the best in the world, but it falls short in a couple key areas.  First, it tends to devalue collective effort; second, it tends to produce inexperienced, ineffective communicators.  The objectives of in-class presentations are to address these weaknesses, tap your creativity, and allow you to take a more active role in your own and others’ learning.  A side benefit is that we get to use our collective numbers and talent to familiarize ourselves with a wide range of professional studies that would be difficult to cover on our own.  In this regard, think of your group as an Executive Advisory Committee charged with collecting, processing, and presenting state-of-the-art information on a particular subject.

Your tasks:
1) Form a group (size and date to be announced).
2) Collectively identify 2-3 sociological studies on a topic relevant to the assigned readings for the week you’re scheduled to present.  These studies should relate to one another and not be book reviews.
3) Meet with Professor Elliott at least 1 week prior to your presentation to discuss details.
4) Prepare your in-class presentation.
5) On your assigned presentation date:
   a) distribute a **1-page outline** of your presentation to classmates (~40 copies)
   b) deliver a 20-minute oral presentation on your research findings (must include visual aids and/or some interactive exercise or demonstration);
   c) be prepared to answer questions from the audience;
   d) complete and submit your confidential personal evaluation form.  (See back page of syllabus. I cannot assign your grades until I have these.)*

* Note: In all group work, there is a potential “slacker” problem.  To minimize this problem you will evaluate (confidentially) the performance of yourself and fellow group members.  Based on these peer evaluations I reserve the right to raise or lower individual grades for the assignment.

**Individual Research Project – 3 Phases**
Each student will design and conduct independent research on a narrowly-defined topic pertaining to some sociological aspect of stratification.  This project will give you an opportunity to develop your research skills and learn more about a particular dimension of social inequality.  The project has three phases, each with its own due date.  Your final report (Phase 3) should do
more than summarize others’ research. It should also report your own original analysis of the question raised. Late submissions will receive a 10% grade-reduction for each day late.

• Phase 1: Statement of research question, its sociological relevance, with references*

Reviewing the professional literature helps you learn about and refine your research question. Towards this goal, you will submit (in one page or less) (a) a clear statement of your research question; (b) a 1-2 paragraph justification of its sociological relevance; and (c) a list of references you will begin to explore on this topic. Undergraduates must list 5-6 references; graduate students must list 8-10 references. No more than half of these citations may come from newspapers, magazines or web sites. Otherwise, your references should come from professional sociological journals, chapters in edited books, or books. (References should conform to the American Sociological Association’s style guide: http://www.asanet.org/page.ww?section=Sociology+Depts&name=Quick+Style+Guide.)

* Submit Phase 1 to Blackboard by midnight, Thursday Jan. 25th

• Phase 2: Refinement of research question with annotated bibliography*

In this phase of your research project you are to refine and/or restate your central research question and provide an annotated bibliography of sources that will help you answer this question. An annotated bibliography is a list of citations to books, articles, and documents, each followed by a brief (usually about 150 words) descriptive and evaluative paragraph that comprises the so-called “annotation.” The purpose of the annotation is to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the source cited. Undergraduates should provide annotations of 5-6 sources; graduate students should provide annotations of 8-10 sources. These sources need not be that exactly the same as those listed in Phase 1, although they can be. Either way, no more than half of these citations may come from newspapers, magazines or web sites. Otherwise, your references should come from professional sociological journals, chapters in edited books, or books.

How do annotations differ from abstracts? Abstracts are purely descriptive summaries often found at the beginning of scholarly journal articles or in periodical indexes. Annotations are in your own words and are descriptive and critical; they expose the author's point of view, clarity and appropriateness of expression, and authority. Examples and guidance can be found at http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/AnnBib_content.html. Your annotations should emulate the “combination” style, which combines informative and evaluative elements. (References should conform to the ASA’s style guide, as in Phase 1.)

* Submit Phase 2 in typed, hardcopy, Thursday Feb. 15th, in class.
• Phase 3: Final Research Report*

In Phase 3 of the research project, you will submit a well-developed final report on your research question. This report will do the following:

(a) introduce your research question & establish its sociological relevance;
(b) review pertinent research related to this question, paying attention to theoretical assumptions and research methods in addition to key findings, and acknowledging weaknesses as well as strengths of specific sources;
(c) provide your own informed assessment, in light of what you’ve learned;
(d) indicate at least one area, or path, for future research on the subject;
(e) list at least 6-10 references reviewed and properly cited in your report.

Excluding the title page, references and any supporting tables and graphs, your final report should be 8-10 pages for undergraduates and 13-15 pages for graduate students. All papers are to be typed and double-spaced, with 1-inch margins.

* Submit Phase 3 in typed, hard copy during the final exam period.

GENERAL PROTOCOL

Blackboard Website: (https://blackboard.uoregon.edu/): You are automatically enrolled in the course blackboard site. Important announcements, links, grades, and presentation outlines will be posted here. Please check regularly.

Late & Missed Assignments: Learning in this course requires steady application. So please do required readings and preparation for presentations before class meetings. Assignments turned in after they are due will have their normally-assigned grade reduce by 10% per day. (Hand assignments directly to me. Do not leave on or under my office door.)

Classroom Etiquette: Practice the Golden Rule, especially during student presentations. Among other things, this means turning off your cell phones, paying attention, and generally showing the kind of respect you’d like to receive yourself.

Plagiarism: Using the work of others, with or without their permission is plagiarism if no indication of the source is provided. It is also a serious academic offense. Students frequently commit plagiarism when they fail to cite authors’ works or ideas that they have put into their own words. You must cite such borrowing whether you quote it directly or paraphrase it. If you are in doubt, it is better to “over cite” than to “under cite.” For more information and examples of plagiarism, visit http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/. Suspected cases of plagiarism will be referred directly to the Director of Student Judicial Affairs.
# CONFIDENTIAL REPORT FOR GROUP PRESENTATION

Your Name: 

Research Topic: 

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<th>You</th>
<th>Person #2</th>
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- Attended group meetings in & out of class (Rate: all, most, half, some, none)

- Contributed to general planning & suggested ideas (rate: 1-5, with 5=high contribution)

- Was enthusiastic about collaborative project (rate: 1-5, with 5=productive attitude)

- Did appropriate library and/or other research (rate: 1-5, with 5=much research)

- Helped organize/coordinate information for outline & presentation (rate: 1-5, with 5=much help)

- Played a valuable role (rate: 1-5, with 5=very valuable)

Comments about your project and/or the collaborative process: