

STRUCTURED INEQUALITIES

SOAN 265
Spring 2014

MW 3:00pm-4:20pm, BT 2226

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday, 11 am – 3 pm (or by appointment)

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"There should exist among the citizens neither extreme poverty, nor again, excessive wealth, for both are productive of great evil." – Plato

"There are those who believe that, if you will only legislate to make the well-to-do more prosperous, their prosperity will leak through on those below. The Democratic idea, however, has been that if you legislate to make the masses prosperous, their prosperity will find its way up through every class which rests above them.

-- William Jennings Bryan, 1896

"We can either have democracy in this country or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both." --Louis Brandeis

"It is not enough to tell me that you worked hard to get your gold. So does the devil work hard."

-- Henry David Thoreau

"Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance." - Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General

Course Description:

All complex societies - including those founded on the ideal of equality - are marked by considerable inequality in power, prestige, income and wealth. This course will explore the dimensions and dynamics of structured inequalities over time and across societies, with a particular emphasis on the growing gap between rich and poor in the US and worldwide. Some questions to be considered: Is inequality necessary or beneficial? What constitutes a social class, and how do classes form? How are structures of inequality shaped by race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality? What role do key social institutions, including the family, the labor market, the media, and the school system, play in generating and maintaining inequality and lack of mobility? How can we address the challenges of poverty (as it intersects with other forms of inequality) and unequal access to jobs, education, housing, and health care?

This course has the following goals:

1. To examine the major theories and concepts which give a clearer understanding of the multidimensional nature of structured inequalities, and how they are created and maintained in society.
2. To apply the concepts and theories learned to important contemporary issues related to structured inequalities, including educational opportunity, poverty, unemployment, and globalization, and in the process to give students an opportunity to think critically about social problems and possible solutions.
3. To build critical thinking and argument analysis skills through reading, analysis, and application of concepts.

Central design principles for all department courses are:

- 1) that being a successful participant in an academic discipline requires that students are taught the expectations of the discipline;
- 2) that it is necessary to have knowledge to think with;
- 3) that it is necessary to learn skills to read, evaluate, and craft arguments;
- 4) that it is necessary to learn skills to identify and collect appropriate data, perform analysis and report results; and
- 5) that it is important to encourage students to participate in activities that require them to apply and engage the knowledge and skills they learn in classes.

As a social science mode course, Structured Inequalities offers an opportunity for students to demonstrate competence in the following areas:

- § Thinking systematically about humans, societies, and/or organizations, and their interactions;
- § Applying critical thinking skills and analytical capabilities in the social sciences;
- § Understanding major generalizations, discoveries, principles, concepts, methodologies, technical language, and theories in at least one of the social science disciplines (Psychology, Political Science, Sociology, Anthropology, Economics, and Geography);
- § Understanding what constitutes evidence in the social sciences and how social scientists utilize empirical observations for drawing inferences and conclusions; and,
- § Connecting ideas in the social sciences to real world applications, and to the context of their historical development.

A **basic ground rule** is that everyone's contribution must be treated with respect. No one should have to fear being personally attacked, or worry about giving the "wrong answer." Everyone is expected to read with a critical eye - in other words, actively question and carefully analyze what you read and hear. Then share your questions and insights with the class so we can learn from one another. Discussion is not a matter of performing for the instructor - discussion is a way of actively learning.

Required Reading:

Kerbo, Harold. *Social Stratification and Inequality*. 8th Edition. McGraw-Hill, 2012.

Course Requirements:

1. **Tests:** There will be three online tests, each of which will consist of four or five questions designed to give students an opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of concepts presented in readings and class discussions and their ability to think critically about the course material.
2. **Concept Identification, Analysis, and Application:** For each chapter reading, students will answer a set of critical thinking questions that focus on key concepts, theories, and arguments. Answers are due at the beginning of the first class in which that chapter will be discussed. Students will work in groups for the first 5-10 minutes of class, identifying and discussing one or more of the most interesting ideas from the reading, along with areas that students found problematic or confusing. Each group will briefly share their comments with the class. In addition, films and class activities will give students a chance to apply key concepts and arguments to a variety of contemporary situations.
3. **Service Learning Project:** This project will provide an opportunity for students to learn first-hand about the impact of structured inequalities on the lives of ordinary people. In doing service learning, our goal is to work with community members as partners, and to work for social justice and community empowerment as we learn. The entire project will involve 10 hours of community service. 8 hours will be devoted directly to volunteer service at Headstart , Adult Basic Education or ESL at the Kirksville Area Technical Center, or the Rural Community Workers' Alliance in Milan, MO. 2 hours will be devoted to helping revise the "Kirksville Community Resources" booklet. At the end of the semester, students will submit documentation of their service learning hours and a 2-3 page reflection paper on how their volunteer service has contributed to their understanding of the causes and consequences of structures of inequality in society. Include your suggestions for changes needed in society to address the inequalities you have observed.
4. **Class Attendance:** Regular attendance and active participation in class discussions and assignments is essential for doing well in this course. I expect you to be in class every Monday and Wednesday unless you have a valid reason for not being there (family emergencies, illnesses, or pre-arranged, university-sponsored

activities). For an absence to be excused, you need to contact me (in advance, if possible) to let me know why your absence is necessary.

5. **Academic Honesty:** You should all be familiar with Truman State's policy on academic honesty (in the *General/Graduate Bulletin*). I expect you to do your own work, and to give proper credit when you borrow from the work of others. This means that when you copy or closely paraphrase someone else's work you should use quotations and/or give them credit as a source.
6. **ADA Compliance:** The university is committed to making every possible effort to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If you have a recognized disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and the Disability Services office (x4478) as soon as possible.
7. **Some advice:** The Writing Center in McClain 303B (x4484) is open from 8 am to 5 pm, Monday through Friday, and is a very good resource for improving your writing. Also, please note that we will be making use of the Blackboard website for email messages, announcements, etc. You need to be sure that the email address listed for you on the Blackboard website is an address that you check regularly. If you use an email address other than your Truman email address, you need to find out how to change the address listed for you on Blackboard.

Your course grade will be calculated in the following way:

Three On-Line Tests (60 points each)	180 points
Chapter Critical Thinking Questions (16 x 5 points)	80 points
In-Class Applications	40 points
Service Learning Project	40 points
TOTAL	340 points

A	=	90% or above
B	=	80%-89%
C	=	70%-79%
D	=	60%-69%
F	=	less than 60%

NOTE: This course meets the intercultural requirement and is a social science mode course.

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE

(Please note that the class schedule is tentative and may be modified over the course of the semester.)

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Readings/Films</u>
1/13	Introduction	
1/15	Perspectives and Concepts	Chapter 1 "People Like Us"
1/22	Dimensions of Inequality in the US: Class, Race, and Gender	Chapter 2 "Sociopoly"
1/27, 1/29	History of Inequality	Chapter 3, 21 st Century Slavery "Capitalism Hits the Fan"
2/3	Classical Stratification Theory	Chapter 4, theory articles

2/5	Modern Stratification Theory	Chapter 5, theory articles
2/10, 2/12	The Upper Class	Chapter 6 “The American Ruling Class”
2/17, 2/19	The Corporate Class	Chapter 7 “The Corporation”

TEST #1 available online from 2/19 to 2/26

2/24, 2/26	The Middle and Working Classes	Chapter 8
3/3, 3/5	Poverty and the Political Economy of Welfare	Chapter 9 “Take it from Me”
3/17, 3/19	Gender Stratification and Inequalities	Chapter 10
3/24, 3/26	Inequalities of Race and Ethnicity	Chapter 11

TEST #2 available online from 3/26 to 3/31

3/31, 4/2	Social Mobility: Class Ascription and Achievement	Chapter 12
4/7, 4/9	The Process of Legitimation	Chapter 13 “Myth of the Liberal Media”
4/14	The World Stratification System	Chapter 14
4/16, 4/23	Social Stratification in Japan and Germany	Chapter 15 and 16 “Challenge to America”
4/28, 4/30	World Stratification and Globalization	Chapter 17 “Life and Debt”

4/30 – Reflections on Service Learning projects due

TEST #3 available online from 4/30 to 5/2

5/3 – 3:30 pm **Final Discussion: What Can We Do?** (Identify one social change movement and/or grassroots organization that you believe has the potential to have an impact on reducing poverty and inequality in the US and globally, and come prepared to discuss it with the class.)