In this course we will study class inequality in modern (mostly American) society. Because *Inequality in America* is a core course, we will consider the perennial questions of social justice and fairness that American citizens face. On the one hand, Americans strongly endorse an egalitarian rhetoric. On the other, inequalities of class, race, and gender are significant dimensions of our society. In this course students will be helped to develop a personal analysis and philosophy for thinking about and responding to persistent forms of inequality. The intellectual framework for this course stresses the consequences of class inequality - that is, the inequality that arises from the fact that some (few) people privately own the productive forces of our society (factories, businesses, media, etc.) while most others must sell their labor in order to survive. Within a class framework, the role of race, religion, ethnicity, and gender will also be considered - giving rise to an analysis that emphasizes the culturally diverse ways inequality is experienced and resisted.

The contents of this course are arranged as an overview of the critical questions about inequality: How much is there? What forms does it take? Who benefits? How do they secure their advantage? Who loses? What options for resistance do they have?

We will begin with a historical perspective, looking at patterns of income distribution over the last half century, allowing us to ask: "How much has changed between 1915 and 2015?" The sociologist David Harvey, provides a sense of the ways in which capitalism has shaped our history at least since World War II.

To answer questions about inequality fully we will have to consider not only what sociologists know, but also how they go about doing research - i.e. we will raise the methodological question: How do we know what we know?

Students will get a taste for a variety of sociological research methods by choosing a topic of concern to them (perhaps inequalities in health care, or in juvenile justice or in college athletics, perhaps the role of racial or ethnic elites within their communities, or the resilience of people seen as victims of inequality) and discovering what can be learned from quantitative reports (also noticing what is NOT counted), from observations, interviews, and simulations.

Almost all of the class readings are available via the library’s on-line reserves or over the internet.

Your final grade will be computed as follows:

- Written and oral reports: = 60%
- class participation = 30%
- Final paper = 10%
Academic Integrity
Academic integrity is a standard of utmost importance in this class. Guidelines for academic integrity in written work are posted on the Boston College website at: www.bc.edu/integrity

If you have any questions pertaining to the academic integrity guidelines, please come and talk with me. If you are caught violating Boston College’s policies on academic integrity, you will receive a failing grade for the assignment and the appropriate Dean will be notified in accordance to the rules set forth by Boston College. Deans may prescribe a failing grade for the class or even expulsion, depending on the circumstances.

A schedule of assignment dates is attached below. Students will be REQUIRED to attend classes, to participate in class discussions and organized presentations, and to write several 3 - 5 page papers. ABSOLUTELY NO LATE WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED FOR CREDIT UNLESS AN EXTENSION HAS BEEN GRANTED BY ME BEFORE THE DUE DATE OF THE ASSIGNMENT. Assignment sheets will be distributed separately.

Week One: Asking good questions:

Reading:


Week Two: The Patterns of Inequality: Death by 10,000 paper cuts

Reading:

David Harvey “Crises of Capitalism” on RSA Animate at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOP2V_nP2c0

Week Three: Finding a Social Problem or Issue to Research

Reading:
Find three articles that address your research topic for the semester, and that give a variety of information about it, from a historical, a quantitative and an interview perspective. Be thoroughly familiar with their contents.

Written Assignment:
Using the work of Blumer, McIntosh, etc. to frame your paper, write the introduction to your research report. What is the problem/issue you will be studying. What have you learned about its historic development and origins? What, according to quantitative data, is its extent and distribution in society? How do participants in this problem/situation describe their own life experiences?
Week Four: Qualitative Aspects of Inequality: Observations and Interviews

Readings:
Maria Jahoda, Paul Lazarsfeld, Hans Zeisel *Marienthal: The Sociography of an Unemployed Community*

Week Five: Artistic and Media Representations of Your Social Problem/Issue
Find three media presentations that touch on your social problem or subject, using popular magazines, YouTube, films of television shows. Please bring examples (especially YouTube and popular magazine pieces) to class for discussion.

Week Six, Week Seven: Participants and Observers’ Views of Inequality

Class Presentations:
Please share the information you have developed about your issue/problem: From observational and interview data, how do participants understand the issue/problem. From your historic and quantitative readings, how do you understand the issue/problem. How is this issue/problem portrayed in the media?

Writing Assignment
Using Jahoda, Lazarsfeld and Zeisel’s book as a model, summarize the issues covered in your class presentation

Weeks Eight - Ten: Individual Meetings

Week 11: Changing Social Inequalities
Please find at least three articles from scholarly and popular sources about possible ways to change or improve the situation you are studying

Weeks 12 -13: Making Society more Egalitarian

Readings: Peter Berger and Richard Neuhaus *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy*

Student Presentations:
Pulling it all together – so what’s the problem/issue, how did you find out about it, and what should we do now?

Week 14: Dinner at my house

Written Assignment
Final Paper addressing the questions in your oral report. *Please be sure to use the assigned readings to frame your paper.*