

**Sociology 072: Inequality in America**  
**Spring 2006**  
**Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30-2:45**  
**Campion 204**

**Instructor: Jeff Langstraat**

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**Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2:45 – 4:00; Thursdays, 2:45-3:30**

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**Course Description:**

This course will explore how inequality is produced, maintained, and lived in the United States. We will be looking particularly at four social systems of inequality: class, race, gender/ethnicity, and sexuality. While looking at these systems, we will try to understand how they operate at societal, organizational, and individual levels, and how they interact with each other to produce different life opportunities for those in different social locations. Of central importance throughout the course will be the idea that people in different social locations, and different social groups, exist only in relationship to each other. Our starting point will be the understanding that inequality is socially produced.

As a core course, there are several themes that will be woven into the course:

- We will be concerned with the *perennial questions* surrounding the study of social inequality that we face as both analysts and citizens. For instance, How does a society such as ours, with a proclaimed ideal of equality, deal with social inequality? How do social forces impact individual actions and opportunities (and outcomes)? How do different forms of inequality interact with each other? What would a just society look like?
- Throughout the course, we will be looking at the different *methods* sociologists use to study inequality. This will be a central focus of one of your assignments (see below). Different questions are best answered by using different analytical tools, and one of the goals of this course will be to help you understand some of the issues that make some methods more appropriate than others.
- *Cultural Diversity* will be a major focus of the course. We will be concerned with how different social groups are treated within society, how those groups' cultures are produced within the context of the larger society (and its systems of inequality), and the role that cultural differences play in the (re)production of inequality.
- This course will be *writing intensive*. The written assignments will provide you an opportunity to explore different aspects of inequality in more depth than the course readings. There will be a variety of assignments (see below), all of which are intended not merely as evaluation techniques, but as learning tools.
- A central figure in American sociology, C. Wright Mills, coined the term "sociological imagination" to describe the understanding of how our personal biographies intersect with our societies' history. In order to help you develop this imagination, we will be taking a *historical perspective*, in which we look at how

certain forms of inequality have both changed and remained stable over time, and at what factors have shaped them. At the same time, it is my hope that you will integrate this sociological imagination, or at least aspects of it, into your own *personal philosophy*. Of particular interest to me is your ability to locate yourself within these social systems, and an analysis of the role your activity plays in reproducing or transforming those systems.

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**Some (not so random) thoughts on the structure of the class and classroom conduct:**

A primary goal of mine is preparing students for active citizenship in a multicultural society. This concept of citizenship is intimately tied to democracy, particularly participatory democracy. In such a framework, it is important to look at how and where democratic principles are put into practice, and where they are absent. My work as a sociologist has attuned me to areas where non-democratic practices are reproduced, and to looking at how this reproduction may be interrupted. Thus, my goal is to inject democratic practices into the classroom setting. Of course, the structure of the University places much of the power for structuring classes in the instructor's hands. In trying to create a democratic classroom, I intentionally give up some of this power (not all of it; I still have to grade papers and exams, determine the syllabus, etc.).

So, what is this democratic classroom under discussion? In short, it is based on the ideas of Jurgen Habermas, ideas that place democratic decision making in the context of discourse. We will discuss the concepts brought up in readings, but the content of the conversation will be determined by the class, not by the instructor. I will often bring in questions from the reading to start the class, but where the conversation goes from that point will be determined by all of you. This, of course, places responsibilities on you, the class participants. The primary responsibility is that each of you *read the assigned reading for each class period and come to class ready to discuss it*. Active democratic citizenship requires participation! Your participation in the class will be considered as a part of your overall grade for the class (see below for grading criteria).

Since the class will be based in conversation, a few notes are in order. The first should go without saying, but experience has taught me it needs to be said: *Respect other members of the class*. It is perfectly acceptable to disagree with each other. Indeed, I hope we do disagree with each other; this leads to more interesting and fruitful discussion. However, disagreement is no reason to attack each other. We should be willing to debate ideas without insulting the holder of the idea. Therefore, *comments intended to insult or demean other class members will not be tolerated*. Likewise, *statements that are racist, sexist, homophobic and the like will also not be tolerated*. Please find ways that are not insulting or attacking to express yourself. Basic courtesy and good manners are expected.

As a part of courtesy and good manners, allowing others to speak, and listening to them are central. Please do not engage in private conversations while others are speaking. Also, make sure your cell phones and pagers are turned off when you come to class.

**Attendance:**

Finally, since the class is based in conversation and participation, *attendance is required*. If you must miss class, please let me know. *Students who miss more than 5 class periods will fail the class*. Exceptions to this (for major illness or similar problems) *may* be dealt with on an individual basis, but this is not guaranteed. In such cases, a doctor's note or similar documentation will be required. I have been taken advantage of in the past; therefore I will *not* be flexible on the two-absence rule. More than five absences *will* result in failure.

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**Academic Dishonesty:** I truly wish that this part of the syllabus were not necessary. However, the actions of some students make its inclusion a requirement. You can find the Boston College's Academic Integrity statement at this web site:

<http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/resources/policy/#integrity>

There are two basic rules you should follow to help you stay out of trouble. First, *cite all of the sources of information you use*. A guide to citations will be made available in class. Even simply forgetting to cite something is considered plagiarism. Second, *turn in your own work*. Do not turn in someone else's work as your own. It's that simple.

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**Rights of Students With Disabilities:**

If you are a student who has a disability (physical, learning, etc.), BC does have services available to assist you. Information on these services may be found at the Office for Disability Services:

<http://www.bc.edu/offices/odsd/services/disabilityservices/>

Please let me know if you have any special needs so that we can work together to help you succeed in the class.

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**Course Readings:**

There are four required texts for the class:

Anne Fadiman. *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Girl, Her American Doctors, and the Clash of Cultures*. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.

Jonathan Kozol. *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*. Crown Publishers.

Steven Seidman. *Beyond the Closet: The Transformation of Gay and Lesbian Life*. Routledge.

Thomas Shapiro, ed. *Great Divides: Readings in Social Inequality in the United States*. Third Edition. McGraw-Hill.

There are also a number of articles and other readings. These will be placed on WebCT or on reserve at the library.

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### Course Outline

Note: The class schedule is subject to change. If it does, I will notify the class via email and place the revision on WebCT.

Date	Topic	Reading
Jan 17	<i>Course Introduction</i>	
Jan 19	<i>Why Inequality Matters</i>	Shapiro: Chapters 1-5
Jan 24	<i>(Re)producing Social Inequality</i>	Shapiro: Chapters 6-9 <b>Hand out Semester Project Assignment</b>
Jan 26		Shapiro: Chapters 10-12
Jan 31	<i>Class</i>	Shapiro: Chapters 13-14 <b>Hand out Essay 1 Assignment</b>
Feb 2		Shapiro: Chapters 17-19 Burriss: "Interlocking Directorates and Political Cohesion among Corporate Elites" (WebCT)
Feb 7		Shapiro: Chapters 20-21
Feb 9		Video: People Like Us Reading: TBA
Feb 14	<i>Race and Ethnicity</i>	Shapiro: Chapters 22-23 Garrouette: "The Racial Formation of American Indians" (WebCT)
Feb 16		Shapiro: Chapters 24-26 Lee and Bean: "America's Changing Color Lines: Immigration, Race/Ethnicity and Multiracial Identification" (WebCT) <b>Essay 1 Due</b>
Feb 21		Shapiro: Chapters 27-29 <b>Hand out Essay 2 Assignment</b>
Feb 23		Shapiro: Chapters 30-32
Feb 28	<i>Gender</i>	Shapiro: Chapter 33 Scott: "Gender as a Useful Category of Historical Analysis" (WebCT)
Mar 2		Shapiro: Chapters 34-37
Mar 4-12	<i>Spring Break-No Classes</i>	
Mar 14		Shapiro: Chapters 38-40

Mar 16		Bittman, et. al.: “When Does Gender Trump Money? Bargaining and Time in Household Work” (WebCT) <b>Essay 2 Due</b>
Mar 21	<i>Sexuality</i>	Seidman: Intro, Chapters 1-2 <b>Hand out Essay 3 Assignment</b>
Mar 23		Seidman: Chapter 3
Mar 28		Seidman: Chapter 4 Video: The Celluloid Closet
Mar 30		Seidman: Chapter 5
Apr 4	<i>Immigration and Inequality</i>	Shapiro: Chapters 15-16
Apr 6		Cranford: “Networks of Exploitation: Immigrant Labor and the Restructuring of the Los Angeles Janitorial Industry” (WebCT) <b>Essay 3 due</b>
Apr 11		Fadiman: Chapters 1-9 <b>Hand out Essay 4 Assignment</b>
Apr 13	<i>Easter Break-No Class</i>	
Apr 18		Fadiman: Chapters 10-19
Apr 20	<i>Education and Inequality</i>	Shapiro: Chapters 41-43 Kao and Thompson: “Racial and Ethnic Stratification in Educational Achievement and Attainment.” (WebCT)
Apr 25		Kozol: TBA
Apr 27		Kozol: TBA <b>Essay 4 Due</b>
May 2	<i>The Environment and Inequality</i>	Shapiro: Chapters 44-46 Video
May 4	<i>Course conclusion and evaluation</i>	<b>Research Paper Due</b> <b>Hand out final exam questions</b>
May 5-8	<i>Study Days-No Class</i>	
May 9-16	<i>Final Exams</i>	<b>Final Exam Due in my office (McGuinn 410A) by 2:30 pm, Saturday, May 13</b>

### Course Assignments and Grading

Below is a list of the assignments and how much they’re worth in determining your final grade:

Four essays @ 14% each	56%
Final exam (take home)	14%
Semester-Research Paper	20%
Attendance/Participation	<u>10%</u>
	100%

The handout and due dates for each of the assignments is listed in the class schedule above.

Papers are due in class on the dates listed. If you turn in a paper late (including after class on the due date), one letter grade will be deducted for the first day, and one-third of a letter grade for every subsequent date.

All of the papers should be typed, double-spaced using a standard font and margins (don't go messing with the margins and font size to alter the number of pages...). All of your sources **must** be cited. A failure to cite your sources *is* academic dishonesty. Consider this your warning. Instances of academic dishonesty will result, *at a minimum*, in failure for the assignment. See the Boston College academic dishonesty policy above.

Papers will be graded on a letter basis. Those letters will be worth the following points when calculating grades:

A+	100	C+	78
A	97	C	75
A-	94	C-	72
B+	88	D+	68
B	85	D	65
B-	82	D-	62
		F	0

The final grading scale will be:

A	95-100%	C	73-76%
A-	90-94%	C-	70-72%
B+	87-89%	D+	67-69%
B	83-86%	D	63-66%
B-	80-82%	D-	60-62%
C+	77-79%	F	59% or ↓