Class, Power, and Social Inequality

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Office Hours: Tues, 2:00-3:00; Thur, 11:00-12:00
12:05-1:35pm

Course Overview:
In the United States, the richest 10% of the population owns about 65% of the wealth (net financial assets), while the poorest 20% owns less than 1%. On average, women’s annual earnings fall more than 25% below men’s earnings; the same is true of ethnic minorities compared to whites. And, female-headed families constitute a high proportion of the poor. How can we explain and understand such social inequality? Is inequality the consequence of individual abilities? Are poor people simply less motivated, less able, or less “good”? Or, are there larger social forces at work, and if so, what are they?

To answer these fundamental questions, this course examines social inequality and stratification in the United States. We will concentrate on how social class and the market economy affect inequality, but issues of race and gender are interwoven throughout the course. Students will gain an understanding of the current extent of inequality in various social institutions and organizations. By looking at the bases of inequality, students will also acquire an understanding of “popular” and sociological perspectives on economic, racial, and gender inequality, as well as on the role of the state in ameliorating and/or maintaining inequality. Perhaps most importantly, we will examine the possibilities for changing social inequality in the United States.

Throughout the semester, we will consider the treatment of animals by humans as a reflection of how humans exploit one another. We will see how the social construction of inequality, the market economy, and issues of class, race, and gender shape people’s treatment of animals.

Requirements:
Grades will be based on several criteria: class participation, reading responses, a group project, and two exams. In fulfilling these requirements, students are expected to adhere to the Georgia Tech Honor Code (see www.deanofstudents.gatech.edu/Honor/). Honor code violations will be addressed appropriately and could result in an “F” on the assignment or in the course. I am happy to accommodate you if you need any special considerations due to a disability, but please let me know as soon as possible (do not wait until exam day!). You should contact the ADAPTS Office (see www.adapts.gatech.edu/index2.htm).

Participation (10%)
Student participation is essential because much of each class session will include discussion. Make sure you do the reading before class and come prepared to discuss. Do not assume that these are automatic points. You must earn them by contributing in class. Furthermore, disruptive behavior (e.g., socializing in class, passing notes, coming to class late) will negatively affect your grade. If you have a question or comment or need something clarified, raise the issue in class.
**Reading Responses (15%)**
Each week, students will write a 1-2 page (typed, doubled spaced, 1" margins, 12 point font) response to a reading for that week. (In total, each students will write about 10 reading responses during the course of the semester.) These papers will allow students to *demonstrate that they understand the readings and how the readings fit with the course*. These responses are due on T-Square by the beginning of the class in which we cover those readings (see the attached page).

**Group Projects (15%)**
Students will participate in group projects, exploring different aspect of inequality at Georgia Tech (e.g., gender differences in student majors, ethnic diversity in student socializing, etc.). After gathering and organizing information to answer particular research questions, students will present and explain their findings to the class in a 15-20 minute presentation. These projects have two purposes: (1) to help students see how issues of inequality directly affect their everyday lives; and, (2) to expose students to the process of social research, thereby giving them a better understanding of how sociological knowledge is attained.

**Exams (60% total)**
This course will have two exams, each of which will be in-class and closed-book/note. The first exam is scheduled for Thursday, **February 28**. The second exam will be on the date designated by the college, which is Thursday, **May 1**, from 8:00-10:50am. All exams will consist primarily of short essay questions. These questions will require students to draw on readings, lectures, and discussions from the course. We will discuss the exams as they approach.

**Summary of grade breakdown:**
- Participation.............. 10%
- Reading Responses.. 15%
- Group Project........ 15%
- Exams (2)............... 60%
- Total.................... 100%

**Readings:**
Several required books are available at the **Engineer’s Bookstore at 748 Marietta Street**:


In addition to these books, many of the course readings are our course page on T-Square.
Weekly Schedule:
Unmarked readings come from the required books. An asterisk (*) indicates that a reading is on our course page on T-Square.

Introduction: The Social Construction of Inequality
Jan. 8   Introduction: What are social inequality and stratification?

Jan. 10   Principles of Inequality: What’s the “nature” of inequality?

Jan. 15   Different Explanations: Why does inequality exist?

Jan. 17   Ideology: Why do we accept inequality?
Video: “Social Class in America”

Jan. 22   “Rooted in the System”: How does the economy shape inequality?

Education: The “Great Equalizer”?
Jan. 24   Class and Education: What are the social bases of educational achievement?

Jan. 29   Stratification in Education: Do schools reproduce inequality?
Jan. 31  *Inequality Within Schools: How do race, gender, and class affect student achievement?*

**Group Presentation:** Gender and Academic Major

Feb. 5  *Inequalities at the Highest Levels: Is academia a meritocracy?*

**Group Presentation:** Race and Gender Disparities in Faculty Positions

**The U.S. Economy: Equal Opportunity?**
Feb. 7  *Inequality in the “Land of Opportunity”: How unequal is the U.S.?*
Rose. Social Stratification in the United States.

**Group Presentation:** Income distribution at Georgia Tech versus in U.S.

Feb. 12  *“The Other America”: Who are the poor?*

**Group Presentation:** Social Groupings at Georgia Tech

Feb. 14  *Shifts in the Economy: How do they shape inequality?*

**Group Presentation:** Job Opportunities and Expectations

Feb. 19  *Women at Work: How does gender affect working women’s paychecks?*

**Group Presentation:** Gender and Sports at Georgia Tech

Feb. 21  *Race at Work: What role does race play in occupational segregation?*

**Group Presentation:** Race, Gender, and Occupations at Georgia Tech

Video: “Discrimination Testers”
Feb. 26  
*Out of Poverty: What obstacles and opportunities face the poor?*

Feb. 28  
**FIRST EXAM**

**The Invisible Inequality of Wealth: How Pervasive Is It?**
Mar. 4  
*Wealth in America: Are we a land of equality?*

Mar. 6  
*Racial (Dis)Advantages: How large is the racial wealth gap?*
Shapiro.  *Hidden Cost*. Ch 2 (“Cost of Being Black”), p42-59; Ch 4 (“Middle Class”), 87-104.

Mar. 11  
*Reproducing Inequality: How does inheritance shape wealth inequality?*

Mar. 13  
*Community Color: How does homeownership affect the racial wealth gap?*

Mar. 18-20  
**No Class: Spring Break**

**Labor, Capital, and the State: What (or Who) Shapes the Economy?**
Mar. 25  
*The rules of the game: Does capitalism simply reproduce inequality?*

Mar. 27  
*The rules of the game: Does capitalism simply reproduce inequality?*

**Game: Stratification Monopoly**

Apr. 1  
*Class Conflict: Where do labor’s and capital’s power come from?*


Apr. 3  
*The Case of Autoworkers: How did things get started?*
Video: “1937 Sit-Down Strike at Flint”
Apr. 8  
*The “Golden Years”: What was good and bad about the post-war era?*

Apr. 10  
*Facing Globalization: “What the hell happened?”*
Video: “Roger & Me”

Apr. 15  
*A different approach in Linden: Easing deindustrialization?*

Apr. 17  
*Power in the state: What’s behind our social policy?*

Apr. 22  
*Globalization: What’s power got to do with it?*

Apr. 24  
*Organizing for Change: What works?*

May 1  
**FINAL EXAM** (8:00-10:50a.m.)