

Inequality & Social Justice (SOCY 45) Dartmouth College, Fall Term 2023

Abbreviated Syllabus (more detailed information on Canvas)

Professor: Marc Dixon
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Classroom: 028 Haldeman Center
Class Time: 2:10-3:15, MWF; X-Hour: 1:20-2:10, Thursday

Office Hours:
Tuesday, 3:30-4:30 in Blunt 306D; Thursday, 3:30-4:30 on
Zoom: <https://dartmouth.zoom.us/j/98713753833?pwd=dHQ4SGtUWHkxaTN3KzhUkVSK0MyQT09>

Course Description: How are valued societal resources such as wealth, power, and prestige distributed? Does rising economic inequality matter? What would a just society even look like? This course examines these and other questions by engaging social science research on inequality and by investigating inequality-generating processes and their consequences in our local area. In the second half of the class, we will consider how key inequality-related problems play out in our region, the Upper Valley of NH & VT, and some of the community-based efforts underway to address them. Along the way we will consider how social scientists conduct research on inequality, important debates in the field, and a range of intersecting topics and issues including housing, health, and work.

Course Format: The course is organized by [weekly modules](#). For each week, I will post required readings, additional notes and key points to consider for that week's topic, and other relevant learning materials. I will typically provide an introduction to the topic or theme on Monday, while Wednesday and Friday classes will be more discussion-based. Currently we have Thursday X-Hours scheduled for 10/19 and 11/9. All learning materials are provided on canvas or through the library. There is no required text.

Learning Goals: Throughout the course, students should:

- Gain familiarity with major trends in economic inequality over the last half-century
- Gain basic knowledge of how social scientists measure and explain changes in economic inequality
- Develop an awareness of how inequality dynamics play out in the Upper Valley of NH & VT
- Develop data literacy and the ability to interpret and evaluate research findings

Assessment: Students are assessed on their participation, weekly writing, a group discussion and presentation, and a mid-term exam and a research-based op-ed. More details [here](#).

Generative AI: You may use AI programs, e.g., ChatGPT, to help generate ideas and brainstorm, or to refine your writing/spell and grammar check. **However**, you should note that the material generated by these programs may be inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise problematic. AI models have built-in biases (i.e., they are trained on limited underlying sources; they reproduce, rather than challenge, errors in the sources). Finally, the use of AI models may also stifle your own independent thinking and creativity.

For these reasons, no assignment should ever be generated in whole from an AI program. In addition, AI programs may not be used at all for the in-class midterm exam.

Some basic guidelines: Cross-check any material gleaned from ChatGPT and similar programs. Do not assume it is correct. You may not submit any work generated by an AI program as your own. If you include material generated by an AI program, it should be cited like any other reference material (with due consideration for the quality of the reference, which may be poor). Failure to do so will be treated as academic dishonesty.

Course Outline (check Canvas weekly for the most up to date information)

Week 1, 9/11-9/13: Foundational Debates: How are valued resources like housing, jobs, and income distributed? How has this changed over time? How does this vary across groups? And, importantly, how does it impact the life-chances of individuals? We take these questions up in Part I of the class. We begin with the big picture questions: What is justice? What would a just society look like? How much inequality is too much? How would we even know? Part moral philosophy, part social science, this is a good place to start.

[Due this week: Introductions by 11:59PM EST on Friday, September 15](#)

Week 2, 9/18-9/22: The Shape of Inequality in the United States: Economic inequality has skyrocketed over the last four to five decades. The pattern has not been "the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer" as much as the "rich getting extraordinarily rich" and stagnation in the middle of the income distribution. Over the next few weeks, we will consider the major patterns, their causes and consequences. Along the way we will learn how social scientists measure inequality and we will identify useful data sources for examining inequality in the U.S. and beyond.

Due this Week: [Weekly Writing by 8:00 AM EST on Wednesday, 9/20](#)
[Crowd-Sourced Inequality Topics by 11:59 PM on Friday, September 23](#)

Week 3, 9/25-9/29: Does Rising Income Inequality Matter?: In Week 1 we covered some of the moral objections to steep inequalities. This week we turn to empirical literature on the consequences of rising inequality. As we will see, the answers to whether or how inequality matters are complex. As is public opinion on inequality. We will take some time to consider what Americans think about inequality and how that has changed over time.

Due this week: [Weekly Writing by 8:00 AM EST on Wednesday 9/27](#)

Week 4, 10/2-10/6: Group Differences: Race and Racism: Race, racism, and racial justice are the forefront of American politics and public life, perhaps more so than any time since the Civil Rights era of the 1960s. This week we consider how social scientists understand and study race. We will examine how conceptions of race change over time and what it all means for inequality and the life-chances of individuals.

Due this Week: [Weekly Writing due by 8:00 AM EST on Wednesday, 10/4](#)

Week 5, 10/9-10/13: Group Differences: Gender: We continue our broad section on inequality by considering gender as a social category, how it is enacted in practice, how gender norms have changed in recent decades, as well as gender relations that have changed very little.

We will spend some of Friday's class reviewing for the midterm, so bring your questions!

Due this Week: [Weekly Writing by 8:00AM EST on Wednesday, 10/11](#)

Week 6, 10-16-10/20: Midterm Exam and a Primer on Rural Inequality Issues and Our Region

Due this Week: [Midterm Exam Due by 3:15 PM on Monday, October 16](#)

Week 7, 10/23-10/27: Local Focus 1: Poverty and Working Poverty in the Upper Valley: Over the next two weeks we will have the same basic format. Monday is an introduction to the general topic and patterns at the national level. Wednesday student groups will present on inequality dynamics (here poverty and working poverty) in our region. And Friday we meet with a local practitioner on the issue.

Due this Week: [Weekly Writing due by 8:00 AM EST on Wednesday, 10/25](#)

Week 8, 10/30-11/3: Local Focus II: Housing Access and Affordability: We look at housing as the most basic of needs before turning to the recent housing crunch and local dynamics. As we will see, this has become a crisis for the middle class as well.

[Due this Week: Weekly Writing by 8AM on Wednesday, November 1.](#)
[Op-ed pitch by 11:59 PM on Friday, November 3.](#)

Week 9, 11/6-11/10: Group Findings and Crowd-Sourced Inequality Topics: This week we recap our brief survey of inequality-related issues in the Upper Valley. Groups will share their findings in class on Monday. Then on Wednesday and Thursday (X-hour) we will take up your crowd-sourced topics from week 2. We will not meet on Friday.

Due this Week: [Weekly Writing due by 8:00 AM EST on Wednesday, 11/8](#)

Week 10, 11/13: Course Wrap-up

Due This Week: [Weekly Writing by 8:00AM EST on Monday, November 13.](#)