Sociological Perspectives on Social Stratification and Inequality in the United States: A Century of Continuity and Change
SOCY 07
(MWF, 1:45-2:50pm; x-period, Th 1:00-1:50pm)
Location: 370 Berry Library

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Email: Jason.Houle@Dartmouth.edu
Office: 104 Silsby Hall
Phone: 646-3524
Office Hours: Monday, 3:15pm-5pm, or by appointment

Course Description:

When we think about social inequality, it’s tempting to view it as the inevitable byproduct of effort, where those at the top are rewarded for their perseverance, and those at the bottom should work harder to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps.” In this class, we will interrogate these naïve assumptions, and explore sociological understandings of social stratification and inequality in the context of 20th and 21st century United States. We will specifically focus on how sociologists write, craft arguments, and develop and test theories about social inequality. As part of this process, you will learn how to write (and read) formal sociological research papers, such as those that appear in academic journals, and also how to package these ideas to public audiences (such as op-eds). Substantively, we will focus on a range of topics, including (but not limited to): social mobility, poverty and social welfare policies, race and gender stratification, the causes and consequences of rising wealth and income inequality, and the changing face of inequality before and after the Great Recession.

Course Structure & Objectives

This course will skew heavily towards seminar so students are expected to come prepared to discuss and critically engage with the readings. A key goal of this class is that you learn how to write like a sociologist. Thus, in addition to practicing our own writing, we will spend a great deal of time discussing how sociologists think about, write about, and argue about social stratification. For these reasons, we will mainly examine research that appears in academic journals, books, and journalistic outlets—rather than textbooks—so that you can get a feel for the types of questions researchers are asking, how they craft their arguments, as well as potential gaps in the literature. By the end of this course, you should be able to engage in a critical, evidence and theory-based dialogue of social stratification in the U.S, articulate these ideas in your writing, and have a solid grasp of how to write and articulate sociological ideas and research to both academic and public audiences. Students should also refer to the learning outcomes expected in all First Year Seminars: http://dartmouth.edu/writing-speech/curriculum/writing-courses/first-year-seminars/first-year-seminar-course-outcomes

Unless otherwise noted, the course will take the following format:
Mondays/First day of Unit: Student-led seminars
Wednesdays/Middle day(s) of Unit: Standard seminar
Thursday (X Hour): One-on-one student meetings (by appointment)
Friday/Last day of unit: Writing Workshops

**Evaluation and Grading (including due dates)**

*Reading Questions (5%):* You will need to submit at least ONE question for each reading every class on the appropriate discussion forum on Canvas (so 2 readings x 1 question each = 2 questions). This can be a critical question about the article (or set of articles), or a more basic question about how the study was conducted or the theories driving the study. The questions must be submitted on the discussion forum on Canvas **no later than 9:00am on the day of the class.** I have set up the discussion forum so it will not accept posts after that time. These questions are extremely important, as they will help me guide discussion and let me know if anything from the readings needs to be clarified. Given that students have competing interests during the term which may make it difficult to complete all of the reading questions, I will drop the two lowest grades.

The purpose of the reading questions are fourfold: (1) to encourage the practice of note-taking and critically engaging with the readings; (2) to help spark class discussion; (3) to alert me if anything needs to be clarified from the readings; and (4) to let me know that you have, in fact, done the reading.

*Student Led Seminars (5%):* On the first day of each unit (typically Monday) two students will be responsible for leading seminar on that day. I will provide more concrete instructions on student-led seminars during the first week of class. Student led-seminars can take whatever form you would like. This could include use of powerpoint, student activities, and the use of outside materials. My goal here is to 1) get you comfortable with speaking and presenting material in front of groups of people—as this is an important skill 2) give you a deeper understanding of the material by teaching it and talking through it, which will ultimately make you a better writer.

*In-Class Writing Prompts (10%):* We will start off some classes with a brief (5-10 minute) writing prompt on the readings for the day. I will provide you with a prompt (perhaps a quote from a reading, or a topic) and you will need to reflect on that prompt based on the readings. As part of the prompt, you should begin with a brief summary of the authors’ argument, findings, and conclusions, as well as your reflections on the topic. For example—did you find the study useful? Did something bother you about the question/theory/methods? This is the place to get some of these ideas down. You will receive feedback on these reading prompts and may use them during group peer-review sessions and may be asked to revise the prompts during our writing workshops. You can **only** turn in the reading prompts in-person on the day of class. If you are absent, you are not allowed to turn in the prompts via email. If you come into class,
complete the prompt, and duck out the back door, you will not get credit. For this reason, I will drop the two lowest reading prompt grades.

**Writing Workshops (5%)** On the last day of every unit (typically Fridays) we will have writing workshops. Some of these writing workshops will have distinct themes (such as “Reading Academic Articles” “Writing Social Scientific Research Articles” and “Writing Social Science for a Public Audience” “How to search for and cite academic research”), while in others we will free write, or take this time to workshop and peer review your writing with classmates. Because writing is central to this course, your attendance on writing workshop days will be graded. If you show up and actively contribute, you will receive an A for the day. If you do not come to class, you will receive a 0 for the day. I will drop the lowest writing workshop grade at the end of the term. I also reserve the right to hold impromptu writing workshops on additional class days.

**Paper 1 (20%)** For your first major writing assignment, you are tasked with using your budding sociological imagination to analyze your own life experiences from the perspective of the sociological concepts and theories learned up to that point. You will have multiple opportunities to revise this paper, including a draft of your introduction (first paragraph and thesis statement). You will also have another opportunity for feedback when you turn in a draft of your full paper before the final draft is due. The final (revised) draft of this paper is due on **Friday Jan 29th**, and should be 5-7 pages, double-spaced. You will receive more details on this assignment in class.

**Final Research Paper (50%)** For the final writing assignment, you will write a standard sociological research paper on the topic or question of your choice (provided that it is related to stratification and inequality). You will draw on secondary literature (at least seven academic sociological research articles) to address your research questions. This paper will be completed in a series of steps, and you will receive feedback and review from myself and your classmates at each stage:

1) **1/2-page research proposal (5%)**: Your research proposal must include your research question, a testable hypothesis, and a description of how you plan to address/answer your research question. **Due January 18th**

2) **Thesis statement and outline of the paper (5%)**: **Due February 5th**

3) **Literature Review (5%)**: Your literature review should include a discussion of the relevant scholarly literature on your topic as it pertains to your research question. Please note that the literature review is not supposed to be a simple summary of the research on a topic. Rather, you need to use existing research, theory, and evidence to build your argument and motivate your research question. **Due February 12th**

4) **Rough Draft (5%)** **Due February 22** You will need to schedule a meeting with me no later than **Thursday March 1st** to discuss your plans for revision.

5) **Revised Draft (5%)** We will workshop (peer review) these in class on **Friday March 4**

6) **Presentation of Research Project (5%)** (To be scheduled during final week of class)

7) **Final Draft (20%)** **Due Friday March 11**
I will provide more details on the specifics (ex. using ASA style, font requirements) in class.

**Class Participation (5%):** Given that this class will be a seminar rather than lecture, class participation is imperative to the success of this class. What does class participation entail? It means you must be an active participant in the class. This includes actively contributing to the class discussion, above and beyond your participation in small group discussions and workshops. If you come into class, sit quietly every day, and do not contribute to class discussion you will receive a 0 for class participation.

*I will use the following scale in assigning grades:*

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<td>95%-100%</td>
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<td>83%-88.9%</td>
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<td>92%-94.9%</td>
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**Attendance Policy**

As a general rule, I do not believe in attendance policies for college-aged students. If you must miss class, you do not need to provide me with an explanation. More importantly, do not ask whether you missed anything important (if the material you missed wasn’t important, it wouldn’t have been covered in class). Do not ask me for notes—ask your classmates. I will assume that you are serious about your commitment to this class. As such, I presume that if you miss class you have a good reason (e.g., you are very sick, you are caring for someone who is very sick, or you are trapped under something very heavy). One exception: If your absences become chronic, or if you anticipate chronic absences, then it’s time to consult with me.

All that said, if you blow off class and do so on a regular basis, your class participation, reading prompt, and writing workshop grades will suffer.

**Late Policy**

On any assignment, your grade will be reduced by one unit for each day late (e.g., 1 day, from A to A-; 2 days, B+; 3 days, B; and so on). One exception: reading prompts and questions will not be accepted if they are late.

*Make-up exams/assignments:* There will be no make-up assignments except in extremely rare cases in which some unforeseen crisis/emergency arises. If you know ahead of time that you have a conflict with an assignment due date, you should turn in the assignment early to avoid late penalties. If you hand in an assignment late because you are sick, and you have had several weeks to complete the assignment, the late penalty will still apply.
**Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner and all members of the Dartmouth community are expected to act in accordance with this principle. Academic integrity includes a commitment not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation or deception. Such acts of dishonesty violate the fundamental ethical principles of the Dartmouth community and compromise the worth of work completed by others. As such, dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated and students found in violation of the Dartmouth honor code will be notified and reported to the appropriate authorities. Cheating and other forms of dishonesty (such as plagiarizing) often result when students feel too much pressure to perform and that they do not have the tools to achieve their goals. If you are falling behind or feeling overwhelmed, please come sit down and chat with me BEFORE you decide to cheat.

**Disability Needs**

Any student with a disability-related need for modifications or reasonable accommodations in this course must let me know as early in the term as possible and contact the Student Disabilities Coordinator. I will keep this information strictly confidential, but please note that the Student Disabilities Coordinator may be consulted to verify the disability. See [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~accessibility/](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~accessibility/) for more information.

**Course Readings**

All readings for this course will be available on Canvas. You are expected to complete the readings by the date listed on the syllabus and come to class prepared to discuss these readings—if you were at all confused or lost by the readings, then you must come to class with questions for discussion.

**A general note on reading academic journal articles in this course:** Much of the reading in this course will be from the major sociological journals (e.g. *American Journal of Sociology, American Sociological Review Behavior*). For this reason, the reading may be a bit more arduous for those of you who are unfamiliar with the technical style of academic journal articles. For this reason, we will spend time learning how to read scholarly articles, and in many cases I will only be assigning portions of articles. That said, please do not get too caught up or tripped up by the details of the analytical methods and results. I’m more concerned that you come away with the general arguments and conclusions of an article than I am with whether you understand the intricacies of multiple regression (or whatever method is used). Thus, you should pay closest attention to the “front end” of the paper (that is, the literature review and hypotheses) and the conclusion section. You should do your best with the methods and results sections of the paper, as they can provide important clues about the strengths and weaknesses of the study (e.g. how well do their variables actually measure the concepts they’re interested in? Do their data actually...
allow a good test of their hypothesis? Do we believe their findings?), but don’t let yourself get lost in the weeds.

**TENTATIVE READING SCHEDULE**

*Note: please refer to evaluation and grading section for due dates*

**Unit 1: How Do Sociologists Think About Social Stratification? An Introduction (1/4-1/8)**

*Songs of the Week: Working Class Hero, John Lennon
  Darkness on the Edge of Town, Bruce Springsteen
  Factory, Bruce Springsteen*

**Monday: An Introduction to the Course**

Marx, Karl. “Alienation and Social Classes” (pp. 127-131) and “Ideology and Class” (pp. 141-142), Grusky

Weber, Max “Class, Status and Party” pp 165-174, Grusky


**Wednesday:**


**Friday:**


**Unit 2: American Exceptionalism? Status Attainment and Social Mobility (1/11/-1/15)**

*Songs of the Week: Career Opportunities, The Clash
  Like a Rolling Stone, Bob Dylan*

**Monday:**

Pinsker, Joe. 2015. “America is even less socially mobile than economists thought” The Atlantic

Wednesday:

Friday:

Unit 3: Poverty and Social Welfare Policy (1/18-1/22)

Songs of the Week: Fast Car, Tracy Chapman
                    Crime to be Broke in America, Michael Franti & Spearhead

Monday- No Class (MLK Day)
Wednesday

Thursday (X Hour)


Friday


Songs of the Week:  Stand Up (Let’s Get Murdered), P.O.S.
                   The Blacker the Berry, Kendrick Lamar
                   Only A Pawn in Their Game, Bob Dylan

Monday

http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/05/the-case-for-reparations/361631/

Chicago Public Radio. 2015. “The Problem we all live with” This American Life
http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/562/the-problem-we-all-live-with

Wednesday


Friday - Tomaskovic-Devey Visit-TENTATIVE


-OR-

If Prof Tomaskovic-Devey visits this week (currently tentative) please read the following instead of Pager:


Unit 5: Sex and Gender Stratification (2/1-2/5)

Songs of the Week: Transgender Dysphoria Blues, Against Me!
Dixon’s Girl, Dessa

Monday


Wednesday

Friday

Unit 6: College: The Great Leveler? (2/8-2/12)

Songs of the Week: (Don’t Go Back) To Rockville, R.E.M
Money, Pink Floyd

Monday


Wednesday

Friday

Houle, Jason N. 2013. “Disparities in Debt: Parents’ Socioeconomic Resources and Young Adult Student Loan Debt.” *Sociology of Education* 87:53-69


**Unit 7: Income Inequality: Causes and Consequences (2/15-2/19)**

*Song of the Week: Price Tag, Sleater Kinney*

Monday

Leicht, Kevin and Scott Fitzgerald. 2014. “The Struggling Middle Class.” Pp. 15-28 of *Middle Class Meltdown: Causes, Consequences and Remedies*


**Wednesday**


Friday


**Unit 8: Wealth Inequality, Elites and the 1 Percent (2/22-2/24)**

*Song of the Unit: Super Rich Kids, Frank Ocean*

Monday


**Wednesday**


**Unit 9: Inequality in the Wake of The Great Recession (2/26-3/2)**

*Songs of the Week: Bored in the U.S.A, Father John Misty Life During Peacetime, Worriers*

**Friday**


**Monday**


*If you’re interested in following up on this, check out the This American Life episode “Status Update” http://www.thisamericanslife.org/radio-archives/episode/573/status-update?act=3#play*

**Wednesday**

Houle, Jason. 2014. “Mental Health in the Foreclosure Crisis.” *Social Science and Medicine* 118:1-8

**Friday 3/4: Rough Draft Writing Workshop/Peer Review**

**3/7-3/11: In-Class Presentations**
Optional Readings by Unit

**Unit 1**

Massey, Doug. “How Stratification Works” pp. 1-27 in *Categorically Unequal*


**Unit 2**


Western, Bruce. 2002. “The Impact of Incarceration on Wage Mobility and Inequality.” *ASR*

Van Leeuwen and Maas “Historical Studies of Social Mobility and Stratification” *Annual Review of Sociology*


**Unit 3**


Seefeldt, Kristin S. and John D. Graham “America’s Partial Social Safety Net”, p. 58-83 of *America’s Poor and the Great Recession*


Cozzarelli, Catherine et al. 2001. “Attitudes Towards the Poor and Attributions for Poverty.” *Journal of Social Issues* 57:207-227

Seefeldt, Kristin S. and John D. Graham “The Impact of the Great Recession on Poverty in the U.S.”, p. 17-41 of *America’s Poor and the Great Recession*


**Unit 4**


**Unit 5**


Unit 6


Grodsky, Eric and Erika Jackson. 2009. “Social Stratification in Higher Education.” Teachers College Record


Unit 7


Unit 8


Unit 9


Sullivan, Teresa, Elizabeth Warren, and Jay Lawrence Westbrook. 2000. “Middle Class and Broke” pp. 27-73 in The Fragile Middle Class: Americans in Debt (Skim)