

# SOC 451/551: Social Stratification

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Winter, 2009  
M/W, 12:00-1:20pm  
116 Education

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:15 -3:15pm, or by appointment

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Stratification is a core concept in sociology and reflects the fact that the human condition has long been a fundamentally unequal one. Indeed *all* known societies have been characterized by inequalities of one sort or another, with the most privileged individuals and groups enjoying a disproportionate share of the total wealth, power, and prestige in their societies. The central objective of this seminar is to move beyond what we think we already know about these familiar issues to develop a deeper, analytically sound understanding of different forms of inequality and why they persist despite our society's professed commitment to egalitarian principles. In pursuing this objective, we will look beyond individual and cultural explanations for inequality to consider how social relations, contexts, and institutions create unequal opportunities and outcomes.

## COURSE READINGS

Course readings will be excerpted from the following books and will be available electronically; however, if you wish to purchase the full books, most can be obtained in paperback, reducing their cost. You're expected to bring printed excerpts or the book with you to class for use in group discussion.

- \* *Outliers: The Story of Success*, Malcom Gladwell (2008)
- \* *The Pecking Order: Which Siblings Succeed and Why*, Dalton Conley (2004)
- \* *Power & Powerlessness: Quiescence & Rebellion in an App. Valley*, John Gaventa (1980)
- \* *Organizing America: Wealth, Power & ... Corporate Capitalism*, Charles Perrow (2002)
- \* *Being Black, Living in the Red*, Dalton Conley (1999)
- \* *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*, Eric Klinenberg (2002)
- \* *Nickel & Dimed: On Not Getting By in America*, Barbara Ehrenreich (2001)
- \* *The Second Shift*, Arlie Hoschschild (2003; 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition),

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### I. The Many Layers of Social Inequality

#### Week 1: Introduction: The Social Context of Individual Success

Jan 5: Objectives and Introductions

Jan 7: Excerpt from *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell (2008)

Key Question:

- What can exceptionally successful people tell us about social arrangements and inequality?

#### Week 2: Individuals & Families: *The Pecking Order*, Dalton Conley (2004)

Jan 12: Chapters 1-3

Jan 14: Chapter 8

**\* Weekly Reading Memos begin and are due to Blackboard by 11am each Wednesday.**

Key Questions:

- How can children from the same family diverge so widely in social outcomes?
- How does a family's own "pecking order" shape such disparities?

#### Week 3: Social Networks: Annual Review Article

Jan 19: \*\* Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday - No Class \*\*

Jan 21: "Social Networks and Status Attainment," *Annual Rev. of Sociology*, Nan Lin (1999)

**\* Group Presentation Assignments/Selections Due Wednesday.**

Key Questions:

- How specifically do social networks influence individual success?
- How do sociologists study these dynamics and what are key questions for future research?

#### Week 4: Large Organizations: *Organizing America*, Charles Perrow (2002)

Jan 26: Chapters 1-2

Jan 28: Chapters 6-7

Key Questions:

- How did a nation committed to individual effort and decentralized power come to be dominated by big firms that concentrate wealth and power?
- What are the consequences of today's large firms for understanding social inequality?

**Week 5: Small Towns & Communities: *Power & Powerlessness*, John Gaventa (1980)**

Feb 2: Chapters 1-3

Feb 4: Chapter 10

Key Questions:

- Why don't powerless people act on their interests and rebel?
- What are the "three faces" of power?

**Week 6: Midterm**

**Feb 9: Mid-term Exam – In class**

Feb 11: \*\* No Class: Work on Group Research Presentations \*\*

\*\* No Weekly Reading Memo Due \*\*

**II. Persisting Inequalities of Race and Gender**

**Week 7: Race & Class: *Being Black, Living in the Red*, Dalton Conley (1999)**

Feb 16: Chapters 1-2

Feb 18: Chapters 4 & 6

**\* Group Presentations Begin**

Key Questions:

- Why does the "wealth gap" persist over and above income differences?
- What are the implications the "wealth gap" for understanding racial inequality in the future?

**Week 8: Race & Place: *Heat Wave*, Eric Klinenberg (2002)**

Feb 23: Prologue, Chapter 2

Feb 25: Chapter 4, Conclusion

Key Questions:

- How do race and place intersect to shape the life chances of urban residents?
- How do government officials tend to respond when extreme inequalities are exposed?

**Week 9: Gender & Low-Wage Employment: *Nickel & Dimed*, Barbara Ehrenreich (2001)**

Mar 2: Introduction, Chapter 2

Mar 4: Final Chapter: "Evaluation"

Key Questions:

- What is meant by the term "mother's hours," and how might this job trait affect wages?
- How do you think Ehrenreich's experience would have differed if she were a man?

**Week 10: Gender & Dual-Career Families: *The Second Shift*, Arlie Hochschild (2003)**

Mar 9: Introduction, Chapters 1-4

Mar 11: Chapters 15-17

Key Questions:

- How does women's employment influence gender roles and the household division of labor?
- What types of strategies do couples negotiate when both parents work?

**Week 11,**

**Wed, Mar 18, 10:15am: Final Exam – In class**

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Weekly Reading Memos:	30% (6 @ 5pts/each)
Midterm Exam (in-class):	35%
Final Exam (in-class):	25%
Group Presentation:	10%

**Attendance Policy:** Students are expected to attend all class meetings and to participate actively. Please arrive on time. Attendance will be taken. If you need to leave early, please speak with Prof. Elliott to determine whether you will receive credit for that day. Missing more than three classes during the term will decrease your final grade by 5 percentage points for each additional absence (e.g., if you miss four classes, your final grade will decline 5 points; if you miss five classes, your final grade will decline 10 points).

**Weekly Reading Memos** (6 @ 5 points/each; 30%): Writing is an essential part of critical reading and reflection. In weekly reading memos, you'll engage key ideas from the assigned reading in a formally written memo. Proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling are expected. Each memo should be at least 800 words, or roughly 3 pages, double-spaced in length and are due to our course Blackboard site by 11am on assigned Wednesdays. (See p.6 for details on how to post to blackboard.)

Below are some basic questions to help guide your reading and develop your memos. You may also include questions in your memos that you would like to consider for group discussion and/or clarification.

- What's the author's main question (and why is it important)?
- What's the author's answer (and why is it important)?
- How is this answer supported?
- What are the implications?

Excluding Weeks 1 and 6, there are 8 memo opportunities. You only have to do 6; you may choose your own "off" weeks. There is no extra credit for extra memos, nor is there opportunity to turn them in late for credit. If you submit more than 6 memos, your highest 6 scores will be used for computation in your final grade.

**Exams** (Midterm: 35%; Final: 25%): We'll have two exams during the term on assigned readings and material covered in class. Possible essay questions will be distributed in advance, and the exam will be administered in class on the scheduled date. It will be closed-book and hand written. The only time to make up a missed midterm exam is during the final exam period. There are no opportunities to make up the final exam.

**Group Presentation** (10%, due on assigned date): The U.S. system of higher education is among the best in the world, but it tends to fail in two key areas: It devalues collective effort; and, it produces ineffective communicators. One reason for the latter might be anxiety and lack of practice. In a recent college survey, undergraduates ranked public speaking as their #1 fear, even above dying! The objective of in-class presentations is to address these weaknesses, tap your creativity, and allow you to take a more active role in your own learning.

Each presentation should relate to one or more central themes for the assigned week, must include at least one scholarly book or article, and should focus on sociological dimensions of the selected topic. The best presentations will move beyond simple reporting. They will (a) motivate the topic by situating it within key course themes for that week; (b) present relevant material in an engaging and coherent manner; and (c) identify one or more key areas for further sociological research.

Your tasks:

- 1) Form a group by Week 3. If you have no preferences regarding co-workers, presentation topic, and/or date, no problem. You'll be assigned to a group (and get to meet new people).
- 2) As a group, identify a research topic and approve with Prof. Elliott at least 1 week prior to your presentation. This topic should relate to one or more course themes for the assigned week.
- 3) Prepare your in-class presentation.
- 4) On your assigned presentation date:
  - a) distribute a 1-page outline of your presentation, with a list of 1 or more references.
  - b) deliver a 15-minute oral presentation on your topic (must include visual aid);
  - c) prepare to answer questions from your colleagues;
  - d) complete and submit your Confidential Evaluation Form. (See last page of syllabus.)

Note: In all group work, there is a potential "slacker" problem. To minimize this problem you must evaluate (confidentially) the performance of yourself and fellow group members. Based on these peer evaluations I reserve the right to raise or lower individual grades for this assignment. Information provided in these presentations is fair game for exams.

## GRADING

Grading is based on individual performance, not a curve. Late assignments will only be accepted if you meet prior to the deadline with Prof. Elliott and provide a legitimate, verifiable reason. Computer problems do not qualify. Please plan ahead and do not wait until the last minute to complete assignments.

A+ = 98-100	B+ = 88-89	C+ = 78-79	D+ = 68-69
A = 93-97	B = 83-87	C = 73-77	D = 63-67
A- = 90-92	B- = 80-82	C- = 70-72	D- = 60-62

## GENERAL PROTOCOL

**Blackboard Website:** You are automatically enrolled in the course blackboard site. Readings, announcements, links, and grades will be posted here. You are expected to check this site regularly for course updates and information. This is also where you'll post your weekly reading memos.

**Classroom Etiquette:** Practice the Golden Rule, especially during class discussions and student presentations. This means turning off your cell phone, paying attention, and generally showing the kind of respect you'd like to receive yourself. Violations may result in dismissal from class.

**Academic Honesty:** Sadly, academic dishonesty has become a common practice on U.S. campuses. Please be aware that academic dishonesty is unacceptable in this class. If you have any doubt about what constitutes academic dishonesty, please discuss these issues with your instructor. Academic dishonesty will be referred to the appropriate university authority and could result in failure in this class, or worse. (On plagiarism see <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/> ).

## HOW TO POST READING MEMOS TO BLACKBOARD

1. Go to **“Communication”** within our course blackboard site.
2. Go to **“Discussion Board”**.
3. Go to the appropriate week, or **“Forum,”** for your memo submission.
4. **Click on the first message in the folder, which will be from Prof. Elliott and will not have a “Re:” in the subject line.** (Technically when you submit your memo each week, you will be replying to the first message posted by me. By doing things this way, we're able to keep each week's postings within a common “thread,” which facilitates review.)
5. Next, in the box that appears, you will see a short message from me. **To write and/or post your memo, click the “Reply” button.**
6. Next, **you may post your memo in one of two ways:**
  - (a) Type your memo directly into the message box and submit; or
  - (b) Cut and paste your memo from a wordprocessing program into the message box, then submit.

Note: Do NOT submit your memo as an attachment. It requires others to have the same software as you and increases chances of computer viruses, which is no fun for anyone.

Note: The time and date are stamped on your memo when it is submitted. This stamp will be used to assess adherence to the memo deadline.

**To read others' memos,** simply work your way through the messages for the respective week.

## CONFIDENTIAL REPORT FOR GROUP PRESENTATION

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Research Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

	<u>You</u>	<u>Person #2</u>	<u>Person #3</u>
NAME	N/A		
Attended group meetings in & out of class (Rate: all, most, half, some, none)			
Contributed to general planning & suggested ideas (rate: 1-5, with 5=high contribution)			
Was enthusiastic about the collaborative project (rate: 1-5, with 5=productive attitude)			
Did appropriate library and/or other research (rate: 1-5, with 5=much research)			
Helped organize/coordinate information for outline & presentation (rate: 1-5, with 5=much help)			
Played a valuable role (rate: 1-5, with 5=very valuable)			

**Comments about your project and/or the collaborative process:**