

Sociology 0130: The American Heritage: Democracy, Inequality, and Public Policy

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Office Hours: Maxcy 210 Wed 2-4

Fall 2009 MWF 11-11:50 J. Walter Wilson 402

Preview version

Description

How does one build a just society? Since the origin of the Republic, equality has been professed as a fundamental American value. Nevertheless, inequality is manifest in American society in many ways, for instance in schooling, race relations, and labor markets. This course examines these two contrasting elements of American social structure and public life. Our initial discussions focus on the debate over government intervention in social life and responsiveness of human behavior to policy changes. These issues and concepts will then be examined through several contemporary public policy issues, such as family formation, welfare, immigration, affirmative action, and education. Throughout, we examine how the social science research community contributes to the development of public policy. The 2008 elections and the public policy efforts of the new administration provide key sources of examples and problems relevant to the course.

Soc 130 is designed to help students develop skills leading to more critical assessment of public issues. At the end of the semester, students should be better able to gather information about social policy issues, write more clearly about these issues, and understand better the role of social science in public decisions. Soc 130 is also designed to prepare students to advance more deeply into specific sociological and social policy topics.

Format

Lectures MWF with discussion each week. Soc 130 maintains a website. Visit:

mycourses.brown.edu. When possible we will post announcements, news items of interest to the class, updates on assignment and readings, etc. Assignments and lecture outlines will be posted on the website after appearing in class. Required course readings are available via **OCRA** and are noted as such on the syllabus.

Requirements

Requirements for the class include four policy memos, one hour examination (in reading period), and a final policy research paper. Policy memos are short and succinct. They necessitate research and synthesis of a particular public policy topic. These memos help develop concise writing skills in the context of a real-world policy application. In recognition of the genuinely short turnaround time in which many policy decisions are made, some course assignments will have deliberately short deadlines. The final research paper offers analysis and in-depth investigation on inequality through the lens of a particular public policy issue of the student's choice. The paper will be approximately 12-15 (double-spaced) pages; details will be announced later in the semester. All students are expected to keep up with the reading. The course participation grade is through the iClicker technology. We do not record your actual response; only that you were present to respond. *Obtain an iClicker from the Sciences library and register it right away.*

Grade Distribution

Policy Memos	40%
Final Paper	30%
Hour examination	20%
Clicker Participation	10%

Readings

The reading list includes material from contemporary books and articles in the fields of social science and public policy. These books are available at the Brown Bookstore, and they are on reserve at the Rockefeller Library. Additional readings are in OCRA via *MyCourses* and are noted in the week that they occur with links. Several weeks identify readings *FOR MORE*. These delve into the topic in further detail, provide recent journalistic commentary, or bring in recent writings from social science journals.

Books

Iceland, J	<i>Where We Live Now</i> (Berkeley: U California, 2009)
NYT Correspondents	<i>Class Matters</i> (NY: NY Times Co., 2005) & <i>MyCourses</i> link
Wilson, WJ and R Taub	<i>There Goes the Neighborhood</i> (NY: Vintage, 2006)

Other Course Notes:

Soc 130 is Green. Soc 130 uses the web and other e-resources extensively. Lectures are posted to the website in Power Point. You may submit your assignments double-sided and single-spaced to conserve paper.

Soc 130 has Dynamic Content. We incorporate into the course current events that take place during the semester. These include major activities of the branches of government, newly released policy briefs, guest speakers on campus, and the like. Students should be aware of updates from class and from the course website.

Week	Topic	Dates
1	Intro: Social Science, Public Knowledge <i>Goals of the course</i> <i>Policy IQ & The big picture</i>	(Sep 9, 11)
<i>READ:</i>	<i>NYT Class Matters</i> Chs. 3,4,7,8,9	
2	New Visions, Old Visions, Different Visions? <i>Why gov't? Equity vs. Efficiency</i> <i>Welfare state vs. Rugged Individual</i>	(Sep 14, 16, 18) <i>E- Resource Session 16 Sep</i>
<i>READ:</i>	Murray, <i>In Our Hands</i> (Washington, AEI, 2006) Chs. 1,5,6,A Skocpol <i>Social Policy in the United States</i> (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995) Ch 1 Cherlin, A. <i>Marriage Go Round</i> Ch 1	
<i>FOR MORE:</i>	Besharov, "Social Welfare Conservatism" AEI Jan 2008 DeMuth, C. "Why the Era of Big Government Isn't Over" <i>Commentary</i> April 2000 Esping-Anderson G "Towards the Good Society, Once Again" Mansfield, "Democracy and Greatness" <i>Weekly Standard</i> 11 Dec 2006	
3	Nature vs. Nurture <i>Environment vs. Heredity</i> <i>Arenas of debate</i> <i>Community and Social Capital</i>	(Sep 21, 23, 25)
<i>READ:</i>	Pinker, "Why nature & nurture won't go away" <i>Daedalus</i> (Fall 2004) Putnam, <i>Bowling Alone</i> (NY: Simon & Schuster, 2000) Chs 1, 18	
<i>FOR MORE:</i>	Massey, D.P. and R Sampson "Moynihan Redux" <i>Annals</i> Weiner, J <i>Beak of the Finch</i> (Knopf, 1994) (selected passages for reference)	
4	Facing Inequality <i>Inequality: Race, Class, Gender</i> <i>The Wage Gap</i>	(Sep 30; Oct 2) <i>NO CLASS Sept 28</i>
<i>READ:</i>	<i>NYT Class Matters</i> Chs. 1, 12 Jencks, "Does Inequality Matter?" <i>Daedalus</i> 131 (2002): 49–65 Lareau, A and D Conley <i>Social Class: How Does it Work</i> Chs 2 & 13-14 (reflections)	
<i>FOR MORE:</i>	Burtless, G & Jencks, C. "American Inequality and Its Consequences." Neckerman, K. M. and F. Torche. 2007. "Inequality: causes and consequences." <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i> 33:335-357	
5	Poverty and the Stratification of Society <i>The Distribution of Income</i> <i>The rich get richer??</i> <i>Poverty in comparative perspective</i>	(Oct 5, 7, 9)
<i>READ:</i>	O'Conner <i>Poverty Knowledge</i> (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001) Chs 4,11 <i>Iceland Poverty in America</i> Ch 2	
<i>FOR MORE:</i>	Hoynes, H.W. et al "Poverty in America: Trends and explanations." <i>Journal of Economic Perspectives</i> 2006 [link] <i>Iceland Poverty in America</i> Chs 3-6 [reserve]	

