

Inequality in the U.S. Syllabus

CORE-105-015

Fall 2019

Mon / Thurs 2:30 – 3:45

Watkins Art Bldg, 102

3 credits

Instructor

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Office Hours

Mon / Thurs 4-5

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Inequality is a complex problem

Economic and associated social and political inequalities have always been a part of human societies, although their extremity, character, and relationship vary over time and from place to place. Unfortunately, Americans today are living through a period of acute socioeconomic and political inequality, despite the U.S. ideal of equality of opportunity.

What causes inequality? How is it manifested? What are its effects? How do we think about it? And, how might we remedy it? These are some of the questions we will seek to answer in this interdisciplinary course. We will read and discuss some of the best scholarship on our topic from Economics, Philosophy, Political Science, and Sociology as well as top notch explanatory and investigative journalism.

Complex Problems Learning Outcomes

Your Complex Problems seminar uses scholarly methods of inquiry—like diverse perspectives, critical reading, communication, reflection, and integrative learning—to study multi-faceted real-world problems or enduring questions. The content of your seminar is designed as a vehicle for learning and practicing those methods of inquiry, which are the course's learning outcomes. These outcomes will help you to enact your curiosity and cultivate intellectual flexibility in preparation for future work at the university and beyond.



Diverse Perspectives

- A. Complexity
- B. Multiple Perspectives
- C. Awareness
- D. Civility



Communication

- A. Audience
- B. Sources
- C. Organization



Critical Reading

- A. Summary
- B. Response
- C. Conversation



Reflection

- A. Feedback
- B. Metacognition



Integrative Learning

- A. Connect

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

1. Complete all reading assignments before coming to class.
2. Record notes in your notebook. What is the author's main argument (or arguments)? What evidence supports that argument? What are the reading's positives and negatives?
3. Participate actively, respectfully, and thoughtfully in class. Note that I generally do not allow the use of computers or cell phones in class. (I will make exceptions with good reason, but you must speak with me.)
4. You will complete three in-class essay exams. For each, you may rely on notes from your notebook.
5. You will complete one substantial group project. This assignment is scaffolded, proceeding incrementally.
6. You will lead a portion of class one day with another student. Please work with one another, and with Fahim, to plan your session.
7. Finally, you will attend three enriching co-curricular activities.

GRADING AND ASSIGNMENTS

- EXAMS ... 40%
 - Exam 1 ... 5%
 - Exam 2 ... 20%
 - Exam 3 ... 15%
- Final project ... 20%
 - Summary/critique ... 10%
 - Presentation ... 10%
- Class leader ... 5%
- Co-curricular attendance ... 5%
- Reading journal ... 15%
- Class participation / attendance ... 15%

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism or cheating, is a violation of University policy and may result in a failing grade in the course and/or other disciplinary measures. It is important that you familiarize yourself with AU's Academic Integrity Code, located here: <https://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/code.cfm>.

READINGS

Please purchase the following texts (via Amazon, Barnes & Noble, or another book seller) or obtain them via the University library reserves:

1. Steven K. Vogel. 2018. *Marketcraft: How Governments Make Markets Work*. Oxford University Press.
2. Justin Gest. 2016. *The New Minority: White Working Class Politics in an Age of Immigration and Inequality*. Oxford University Press.
3. Elizabeth Anderson. 2017. *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don't Talk about It)*. Princeton University Press.
4. Kay Lehman Schlozman, Henry E. Brady, and Sidney Verba. 2018. *Unequal and Unrepresented: Political Inequality and the People's Voice in the New Gilded Age*. Princeton University Press.
5. Spencer Piston. 2018. *Class Attitudes in America: Sympathy for the Poor, Resentment of the Rich, and Political Implications*. Cambridge University Press.

All other required readings will be made available via Blackboard or web links embedded in the syllabus.

CLASS ATTENDANCE POLICY

The learning outcomes of the Complex Problems curriculum are not possible without regular attendance in class; in view of this, you should plan to attend every class meeting. Please keep the following in mind:

- According to American University's Undergraduate Regulations, "Excused absences include major religious holidays (posted annually by the Office of the Provost and Kay Spiritual Life Center or verified by the Kay Spiritual Life Center as an excused absence for religious observance), medical or mental health events, approved disability-accommodation-related absences, and approved varsity athletic team events." For an absence to be excused, students must supply proper documentation (or notice in the case of a religious obligation) in a timely manner. To preserve student privacy, **only the Dean of Students Office** can provide documentation for absences due to mental-health or medical issues.
- All other absences will be considered unexcused. Students may have one unexcused absence without penalty. More than three unexcused absences may be grounds for course failure.
- Excessive absences, excused or unexcused, can change the nature of the course so that it is impossible for you to achieve the learning outcomes. In these cases, faculty and students should consult about options, including withdrawal, medical leave, or course failure.
- Co-curricular activities are integral to the Complex Problems curriculum. Faculty and Program Leaders plan co-curricular activities as a meaningful component of the students' academic experience; however, to the degree that a Complex Problems co-curricular activity conflicts with students' academic or employment obligations, or would fall under the category of an excused absence, it is not mandatory. If such reasons prevent attendance at a co-curricular activity, students should determine, with their professor, a meaningful alternative. Options might include a different date for the activity, an alternative but similar activity, or some other supplemental assignment that enacts the intellectual work of the co-curricular event.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS & ACTIVITIES

Week 1: Overview of Economic Inequality

Monday, August 26

- Course introduction
 - Course syllabus
 - Reading to understand and evaluate
- Discussion: What does inequality look like?

Thursday, August 29

- Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez. 2014. "Inequality in the long run." *Science* 344(6186): 838-843.
- Mini-lecture
 - <https://inequality.org/facts/global-inequality/>

Week 2: Economy Mobility and Place

Monday, September 2

- LABOR DAY – no class

Thursday, September 5

- Raj Chetty, David Grusky, Maximilian Hell, Nathaniel Hendren, Robert Manduca, and Jimmy Narang. 2017. "The fading American dream: Trends in absolute income mobility since 1940." *Science* 356(6336): 398-406.
- Raj Chetty, Nathaniel Hendren, Patrick Kline, and Emmanuel Saez. 2014. "Where is the Land of Opportunity? The Geography of Intergenerational Mobility in the US." (Executive Summary of QJE paper).
- In-class video lecture: Raj Chetty, Professor of Economics, Harvard University. "Causal Effects of Neighborhoods" from his course *Using Big Data to Solve Economic and Social Problems*.
 - <https://opportunityinsights.org/course/>

Week 3: Rich and Poor

Monday, September 9

- Chrystia Freeland. 2011. "The Rise of the New Global Elite." *The Atlantic*.
- Matthew Steward. 2018. "The 9.9 Percent is the New American Aristocracy." *The Atlantic*.

Thursday, September 12

- Alana Semuels. 2016. "The End of Welfare as We Know It." *The Atlantic*.
- *San Francisco Chronicle*. 2019. "24 Hours Inside San Francisco's Homelessness Crisis."

Week 4: The Deepest Inequality

Monday, September 16

- Rachel Kushner. 2019. "Is Prison Necessary?" *The New York Times Magazine*.

Thursday, September 19

- In-class essay exam 1

CAUSES & CORRELATES OF ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

Week 5: The Role of the Government in the Economy

Monday, September 23

- Steven K. Vogel. 2018. *Marketcraft: How Governments Make Markets Work*. Oxford University Press. Chapter 1

Thursday, September 26

- Steven K. Vogel. 2018. *Marketcraft: How Governments Make Markets Work*. Oxford University Press. Chapters 2, 3

Week 6: Inequality and the Decline of Unions

Monday, September 30

- Jake Rosenfeld. 2014. *What Unions No Longer Do*. Harvard University Press. Introduction, Chapter 1

Thursday, October 3

- Jake Rosenfeld. 2014. *What Unions No Longer Do*. Harvard University Press. Chapter 2

Week 7: Inequality and Education

Monday, October 7

- Jonathan Kozol. 2012. *Jonathan Kozol On Kids Who Survive Inner Cities*. NPR interview.
- U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. 2018. Public Education Funding Inequity in an Era of Increasing Concentration of Poverty and Resegregation.

Thursday, October 10

- Shamus Rahman Khan. 2011. *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School*. Princeton University Press. Introduction, Chapter 5
- *Optional*: The Upshot. 2017. "Some Colleges Have More Students From the Top 1 Percent Than the Bottom 60. Find Yours." *The New York Times*. January.

Weeks 8-10: The Intersection of Economic Inequality and Race

Monday, October 14

- No class

Thursday, October 17

- Ta-Nehisi Coates. 2014. "[The Case for Reparations.](#)" *The Atlantic*.

Monday, October 21

- Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. 2014. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*. Rowman & Littlefield. Chapter 3
- In-class video: [Dalton Conley interview of Devah Pager.](#)

Thursday, October 24

- Justin Gest. 2016. *The New Minority: White Working Class Politics in an Age of Immigration and Inequality*. Oxford University Press. Chapter 4

Monday, October 28

- Justin Gest. 2016. *The New Minority: White Working Class Politics in an Age of Immigration and Inequality*. Oxford University Press. Chapter 6
- Author to visit class!

Thursday, October 31

- In-class essay exam 2

ECONOMIC INEQUALITY, POLITICS, & POLICY

This month, read one of the books below:

- Bernie Sanders. 2016. *Our Revolution: A Future to Believe In*. St. Martin's Press.
- Elizabeth Warren. 2017. *This Fight Is Our Fight: The Battle to Save America's Middle Class*. Henry Holt and Company.
- Andrew Yang. 2019. *The War on Normal People: The Truth About America's Disappearing Jobs and Why Universal Basic Income Is Our Future*. Hachette Books.

Week 11: Inequality and Policy in the "Private" Sector

Monday, November 4

- Elizabeth Anderson. 2017. *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don't Talk about It)*. Princeton University Press. Chapter 1

Thursday, November 7

- Elizabeth Anderson. 2017. *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don't Talk about It)*. Chapter 2
- *Optional*: Alexander Hertel-Fernandez. 2016. "[Employer Political Coercion: A Growing Trend.](#)" *The American Prospect*.

Week 12: Unequal Political Participation

Monday, November 11

- Kay Lehman Schlozman, Henry E. Brady, and Sidney Verba. 2018. *Unequal and Unrepresented: Political Inequality and the People's Voice in the New Gilded Age*. Princeton University Press. Chapters 4, 5

Thursday, November 14

- Kay Lehman Schlozman, Henry E. Brady, and Sidney Verba. 2018. *Unequal and Unrepresented: Political Inequality and the People's Voice in the New Gilded Age*. Princeton University Press. Chapters 8, 9

Week 13: Unequal Political Influence

Monday, November 18

- Read one of the following:
 - Benjamin I. Page, Larry M. Bartels, and Jason Seawright. 2013. "Democracy and the Policy Preferences of Wealthy Americans." *Perspectives on Politics* 11(1): 51–73.
 - Nicholas Carnes. 2012. "Does the Numerical Underrepresentation of the Working Class in Congress Matter?" *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 37(1): 5–34.

Thursday, November 21

- Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page. 2014. "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens." *Perspectives on Politics* 12(3): 564-581.

Week 14: Public Opinion about Inequality

Monday, November 25

- Spencer Piston. 2018. *Class Attitudes in America: Sympathy for the Poor, Resentment of the Rich, and Political Implications*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1, 2

Thursday, November 28

- THANKSGIVING – no class

Week 15: More Public Opinion and Course Wrap-Up

Monday, December 2

- Spencer Piston. 2018. *Class Attitudes in America: Sympathy for the Poor, Resentment of the Rich, and Political Implications*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 3, 4

Thursday, December 5

- In-class essay exam

AU STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Academic Support Services

All students may take advantage of the [Academic Support and Access Center \(ASAC\)](#) for individual academic skills counseling, workshops, Tutoring and Writing Lab appointments, peer tutor referrals, and Supplemental Instruction. The ASAC is located in Mary Graydon Center 243.

Additional academic support resources available at AU include the Bender Library, the Department of Literature's Writing Center (located in the Library), the Math Lab in the Department of Mathematics & Statistics, and the Center for Language Exploration, Acquisition, & Research (CLEAR) in Asbury Hall. A more complete list of campus-wide resources is available in the ASAC.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

AU is committed to making reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. The ASAC assists students with disabilities and promotes full participation in academic programs and other campus activities.

Students are not required to notify the university or any of its offices or personnel of a disability either prior to or subsequent to admission; however, if a student plans to request accommodations, documentation of the disability must be provided. As accommodations are not retroactive, timely notification at the beginning of the semester, if possible, is strongly recommended.

To register with a disability or for questions about disability accommodations, contact the Academic Support and Access Center at 202-885-3360 or asac@american.edu, or drop by MGC 243.

For more information, visit AU's [Services for Students with Disabilities web page](#).

Center for Diversity & Inclusion

[CDI](#) is dedicated to enhancing LGBTQ, multicultural, first-generation, and women's experiences on campus and to advancing AU's commitment to respecting and valuing diversity by serving as a resource and liaison to students, staff, and faculty on issues of equity through education, outreach, and advocacy. It is located on the 2nd floor of Mary Graydon Center. (202-885-3651, MGC 201 & 202)

Counseling Center

The [Counseling Center](#) offers counseling and consultations regarding personal concerns, self-help information, and connections to off-campus mental health resources. (202-885-3500, MGC 214)

Dean of Students Office

The Dean of Students Office offers one-on-one meetings to discuss academic, adjustment, and personal issues that may be interfering with a student's ability to succeed academically. The office also verifies documentation for students who have medical or mental health issues that cause them to be absent from class. (202-885-3300, Butler Pavilion 408)

International Student & Scholar Services

International Student & Scholar Services has resources to support academic success and participation in campus life including academic counseling, support for second language learners, response to questions about visas, immigration status and employment and intercultural programs, clubs and other campus resources. (202-885-3350, Butler Pavilion 410)

Office of Advocacy Services for Interpersonal and Sexual Violence

OASIS provides free and confidential advocacy services for anyone in the campus community who experiences sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, or stalking. Advocacy is survivor-driven and intended to empower survivors to make informed decisions about their health, emotional well-being, and the adjudication process. (202-885-7070, Wellness Center – McCabe Hall 123)

Writing Center

Writing Center offers free, individual coaching sessions to all AU students. In your 45-minute session, a student writing consultant can help you address your assignments, understand the conventions of academic writing, and learn how to revise and edit your own work. (202-885-2991, Bender Library – 1st Floor Commons).

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Discrimination and Harassment (Title IX)

American University expressly prohibits any form of discriminatory harassment including sexual harassment, dating and domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The university is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution that operates in compliance with applicable laws and regulations. AU does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including pregnancy), age, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, personal appearance, gender identity and expression, family responsibilities, political affiliation, source of income, veteran status, an individual's genetic information, or any other bases under federal or local laws in its programs and activities.

If you experience any of the above, you have the option of filing a report with the [AU Department of Public Safety](#) (202-885-2527) or the [Office of the Dean of Students](#)(dos@american.edu or 202-885-3300). Please keep in mind that all faculty and staff – with the exception of counselors in the Counseling Center, staff in the Office of Advocacy Services for Interpersonal and Sexual Violence (OASIS), medical providers in the Student Health Center, and ordained clergy in the Kay Spiritual Life Center – who are aware of or witness this conduct are required to report this information to the university, regardless of the location of the incident. For more information, including a list of supportive resources on and off-campus, contact [OASIS: The Office of Advocacy Services for Interpersonal and Sexual Violence](#) (oasis@american.edu or 202-885-7070) or the Office of the Dean of Students.

For information about your rights, see the [Title IX Information](#) page on the AU website.

Emergency Preparedness

In the event of an emergency, American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or the use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU email and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any emergency-related absence. Students are responsible for checking their AU email regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of an emergency, students should refer to the AU Student Portal, the [AU website](#), and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/college specific information.

Religious Observances

Students will be provided the opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance, provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. Please send this notification through email to the professor. For additional information, see American University's [religious observances policy](#).

Sharing of Course Content

Students are not permitted to make visual or audio recordings, including live streaming, of classroom lectures or any class-related content, using any type of recording devices (e.g., smart phone, computer, digital recorder, etc.) unless prior permission from the instructor is obtained, and there are no objections from any of the students in the class. If permission is granted, personal use and sharing of recordings and any electronic copies of course materials (e.g., PowerPoints, formulas, lecture notes, and any classroom discussions—online or otherwise) is limited to the personal use of students registered in the course and for educational purposes only, even after the end of the course.

Exceptions will be made for students who present a signed Letter of Accommodation from the Academic Support & Access Center. Further details are available from the [ASAC website](#).

To supplement the classroom experience, lectures may be audio or video recorded by faculty and made available to students registered for this class. Faculty may record classroom lectures or discussions for pedagogical use, future student reference, or to meet the accommodation needs of students with a documented disability. These recordings are limited to personal use and may not be distributed (fileshare), sold, or posted on social media outlets without the written permission of faculty.

Unauthorized downloading, file sharing, distribution of any part of a recorded lecture or course materials, or using information for purposes other than the student's own learning may be deemed a violation of American University's Student Conduct Code and subject to disciplinary action (see Student Conduct Code VI. Prohibited Conduct).

Use of Student Work

The professor will use academic work that you complete for educational purposes in this course during this semester. Your registration and continued enrollment constitute your consent.