Controversies About Inequality
SOCIOLOGY 141 & 241
Spring Quarter, 5 credits
Tuesday & Thursday, 1:15pm-2:30pm
Building 320 (Braun Corner), Room 105
Instructor: David B. Grusky

In recent years, issues of poverty and inequality have become increasingly common topics of public debate, as academics, journalists, and politicians attempt to come to terms with growing income inequality, with the increasing salience and visibility of inter-country differences in wealth and income, and with the persistence of extreme forms of racial, ethnic, and gender stratification. The purpose of this course is to study these various forms of inequality more closely and to introduce students to ongoing debates about their sources and consequences as well as the types of public policy that might be pursued to reduce (or even increase) inequality. These topics will be addressed through the vehicle of public debate and discussion among world renowned scholars.

**Format:** For each of the four topical modules, we will spend several sessions completing relevant background readings and otherwise preparing for the debate and discussion. We will begin by discussing the larger intellectual context within which the debate is located and then turn to the more specific issues at stake. The four debates will occur during regular class sessions and will be open not just to class members but to the wider Stanford community.

**Assignments:** The course grade will be based in part on reports for each of the four debates. For each debate, students should (a) outline the key issues at stake, (b) rehearse the competing positions that might be staked out with respect to those issues, (c) discuss the types of empirical evidence that are relevant in choosing from among competing positions, and (d) conclude by laying out an argument for a particular position. In assembling these papers, students should draw as necessary on the materials provided in the lectures, debates, and required readings. The papers should be no longer than 5 pages (double-spaced) and are due one week after the day on which the debate is held.

**Papers:** In addition to the four debate-based writing assignments, students should complete a 15-page (double-spaced) research paper. This paper should be based on any of the four debate topics covered in class or on some other controversy of the student’s choosing (with the only constraint being that it must pertain to issues of poverty or inequality). This paper should take on the same structure as the usual 5-page debate write-up, but a broader review of the relevant research literature should now be completed.

**Sociology 241 Requirements:** For those taking Sociology 241 (instead of Sociology 141), a 20-page (double-spaced) research paper is expected rather than a 15-page paper, but in all other respects the requirements are the same.

**Grades.** Grades will be based on the four 5-page writing assignments (20% each) and the research paper (20%). The research paper is due on Monday, June 11 and should be submitted to the TA.

**Readings:** All readings can be found on CourseWork.
Assignment due dates: The following due dates should be borne in mind:
Thursday, April 19: Racial and ethnic inequality paper
Tuesday, May 1: Poverty paper
Thursday, May 17: Incarceration paper
Thursday, June 7: Gender inequality paper
Monday, June 11: Final research paper

Schedule

A. Introduction

Tuesday, April 3: Introductory comments

B. Racial and ethnic inequality

Thursday, April 5: Lecture
Tuesday, April 10: Lecture
Thursday, April 12: Debate and discussion
“What is Discrimination?”
Richard T. Ford, George E. Osborne Professor of Law, Stanford University
Devon W. Carbado, Associate Dean and Professor of Law, University of California – Los Angeles
Tuesday, April 17: Debriefing on debate

Overview readings


Debate readings


Due date for racial and ethnic inequality paper: Thursday, April 19
C. Poverty

Thursday, April 19: Lecture
Tuesday, April 24: Debate and discussion
   “Poverty and Microlending”
   Eric Weaver, Executive Director, Lenders for Community Development
   Matthew Flannery, CEO and Co-Founder, Kiva.org
   Jessica Flannery, Co-Founder, Kiva.org
Thursday, April 26: Debriefing on debate

Overview Readings


Debate Readings


   (available at http://www.microfinancegateway.org/content/article/detail/31747?PHPSESSID)

Due date for poverty paper: Tuesday, May 1

D. Incarceration

Tuesday, May 1: Lecture
Thursday, May 3: No class
Tuesday, May 8: Lecture
Thursday, May 10: Debate and discussion
   “Incarceration, Race, and Poverty”
   Lawrence D. Bobo, Martin Luther King Jr. Centennial Professor and Director, Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity, Stanford University
   Christopher Uggen, Distinguished McKnight Professor and Chair of Sociology, University of Minnesota
Tuesday, May 15: Debriefing on debate
Overview Readings


Debate Readings


Due date for incarceration paper: Thursday, May 17

E. Gender inequality

Thursday, May 17: Lecture
Tuesday, May 22: Lecture
Thursday, May 24: No class
Tuesday, May 29: Lecture
Thursday, May 31: Debate and discussion
“All Employment Discrimination and Gender”
Barbara Reskin, S. Frank Miyamoto Professor of Sociology, University of Washington
Trond Petersen, Professor of Sociology, University of California-Berkeley
Tuesday, June 5: Debriefing on debate

Overview Readings


Debate Readings


Due date for gender inequality paper: Thursday, June 7