

SOCIAL INEQUALITY

SOC 327, SECTION 1

Spring 2021

Online/Asynchronous

Department of Sociology and Social Work
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point



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“The good we secure for ourselves is precarious and uncertain until it is secured for all of us and incorporated into our common life.”

Jane Addams

“[Humans] are equal; it is not birth but virtue that makes the difference.”

Voltaire

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

No society is without inequality. Though the type and degree of inequality varies drastically across different societies, all human societies include some way of categorizing groups of people and treating them differently. The ideas and actions based on such categorizations and treatment can lead to stereotyping, prejudices, and discriminations. However, while the reality that inequality exists appears universal, it is

not static or absolute. Indeed, many attempts to change the status quo have proved successful, altering the way groups of people are categorized and treated. Consider the civil rights movements in the United States (e.g., women's suffrage, racial desegregation, marriage equality, etc.), the worker's movements in Latin America, or, on a global scale, the decolonization of European territories throughout South America, Africa, and the Middle East. In each of these cases, some segment of a population was ostracized based on a socially constructed determinant, which was used to stereotype, discriminate, and in some cases, eradicate a group of people. But, through various means of social change and action, these inequalities were lessened, if not undone altogether.

The purpose of this course is to survey the variety of social inequalities that persist in human societies through a sociological perspective. While this course is offered to a student population that is largely American, we will explore a wide range of case studies and examples of inequalities across different time periods and social/cultural geographies. To accomplish this goal, we will break down the study of social inequalities into three units. Unit 1 provides the framework to sociologically understand 1) what social inequalities (versus social differences) are, 2) how they are constructed, and 3) introduces six common examples of social inequalities. Unit 2 will include the bulk of this semester's inquiry by organizing the study of social inequality based on four levels of analysis: individual (micro), institutional (meta), societal (macro), and global (mega). Finally, Unit 3 will direct our focus toward key responses and reactions toward social inequalities.

By completing these three thematic units, you will acquire the skills to sociologically examine any social inequality, how they are constructed and the ways that they are maintained and legitimated, and how this can change. As you approach this course, the following questions may serve as a useful guide to (re)orient yourself to this topic.

1. *What examples of social inequalities have you personally experienced in your life (we've all experienced some form of unfairness, stereotype, etc. based on a socially constructed trait!)?*
2. *Where do the beliefs and actions surrounding that social inequality come from (e.g., personal opinions, group norms, institutional policy and/or law, cultural values and standards, etc.)?*
3. *Should something be done to change this? Why or why not? And, if so, how?*

REQUIRED TEXT

(1) Ore, Tracey E. *The Social Construction of Difference & Inequality: Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality* (6th Edition), McGraw Hill.

(2) Supplementary material will be provided throughout the semester

COURSE FORMAT AND EXPECTATIONS

Format

The format of each class will vary throughout the semester. Since we all learn differently, I will utilize a variety of teaching methods to present the material. These methods will include lectures, in-class activities, video presentations, and class

discussions. It is vital that you come to class prepared (i.e., read what you are asked to have read!) and ask questions and make comments when you have them. Not only will the material make more sense, but you will get a lot more out of the class as well.

Note on Online/Asynchronous learning: Due to the unique nature of this instructional modality, this course will have a semi-structured feel. New content will be posted each week, leaving the consumption of that material up to the student. It is vital that you do not get behind from week to week for obvious reasons. Assignments will continue to have hard deadlines, just like a ‘normal’ semester.

Academic Integrity

To ensure that the highest level of academic and personal integrity is upheld, it is important that you understand your rights and responsibilities as a student at UWSP (see [Academic Integrity: A Guide for Students](#)). For a complete overview of UWSP academic standards and disciplinary procedures, please visit: the following website: <http://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Pages/Academic-Misconduct.aspx>

Disability Services

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal law requiring educational institutions to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information about UWSP’s policies. Any student who feels that an accommodation may be needed based on the impact of a disability should contact [Disability Services and Assistive Technology](#) at 715-346-3365 in Room 609 Learning Resource Center at 900 Reserve Street. Staff will work to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

Attendance Policy

Your attendance and participation will be recorded and calculated as part of your final evaluation. However, I understand ‘participation’ inclusively. This can include the conventional (i.e., talking in class) as well as other forms of interaction in and outside of class (e.g., office hour visits, email discussions, in-class activities). In short, I am looking for students to be engaged in the material, however or wherever that might be.

Technology Policy

My expectations regarding technology are simple and, hopefully, not unrealistic. I do not expect students to be without their phones, tablets, and/or computers. I completely understand that the schedule for most students may even necessitate this. In fact, our class will even utilize this as a resource at times during the semester; for instance, in-class activities that prompt students to do a quick search online. I also understand that some students prefer to take notes electronically, on a tablet or laptop. (Be warned: [research shows that students retain more information when notes are hand-written.](#)) But, *unless specified otherwise or a circumstantial agreement with me is made, phones should be silent (e.g., airplane mode), and out of sight.* As soon as a device becomes a distraction to the class, I will revoke technology privileges all together.

Assignment Submission and Late Policy

All assignments (unless specified otherwise) should be submitted by the respective deadline electronically via Dropbox on Canvas. Turnitin (originality checking software) is activated with results viewable to you and me. Please use this as a tool for writing. Late work is accepted up to one week after the specified deadline (5-point reduction), also via the appropriate Canvas dropbox. I will not accept assignments after this.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATIONS

Weekly Discussion Board

Weekly Discussion Posts are *critical* dialogues covering some aspect from the previous week and organized in a popular online format. This will allow your fellow students to comment/discuss in a productive and respectful manner. This interactive approach is vital for working through new material. The specific requirements and directions will be discussed in class.

10/12 Weekly Discussion Posts (10 points each) = 100 points

Unit Papers

Unit papers are more organized assignments that approach a specific topic or problem. The requirements and expectations for these papers will be discussed in class. These are assignments that allow you to apply the ideas/concepts we have discussed in class to a setting/problem of your choosing. You must choose three (out of six) topics to write.

3/6 Unit Papers (50 points each) = 150 points

Research Paper

This is a more extensive research assignment that is due at the end of the semester. Requirements for this assignment will be discussed in greater detail in class. Overall, this is an opportunity for you to research some aspect of social inequality that we may (or may not) have covered in class and expand on that discussion by conducting your own analysis.

Presentation = 20

Research Paper = 80

Total = 100

Attendance/Participation

Attendance is crucial to succeed in this class. Keeping up on your reading in order to actively participate in class will ensure that you are adequately prepared for the assignments. My teaching philosophy is based on a cultivation of *active learning*. This means that I aim to provide an environment whereby students are able to ‘experience’ the material. However, this is a dual relationship. Students must also be willing to learn in order to make this happen. By *being* in class regularly (not just present), an active and invigorating culture of learning can be developed. *Attendance and Participation will be recorded via in-class activities and quizzes*. This being said, life is always full of unexpected events and emergencies. If you think you will miss a class, please let me know as soon as possible so we can make other arrangements.

Attendance/Participation = 50

Evaluation

Evaluation of this course is based on the standard UWSP grading scale.

Course Evaluation:

Discussion Board =	100
Unit Paper =	150
Research Paper =	100
<u>Attendance =</u>	<u>50</u>
Total =	400

Grading Scale		
Letter Grade	Percent	Points
A	92-100	366<
A-	90-91	358-365
B+	87-89	346-357
B	83-86	330-345
B-	80-82	318-329
C+	77-79	306-317
C	73-76	290-305
C-	70-72	278-289
D+	67-69	266-277
D	60-66	238-265
F	<60	<238

COURSE SCHEDULE

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignment
25-Jan	Introductions and review of syllabus		
Unit 1. Conceptualizations and Categories			
1-Feb	Review of inequality and sociology		
	Social construction of inequality	Intro (1-18)	
8-Feb	A. Class and status	6 & Supp.	DP1
	B. Race, ethnicity, and nationality	1 & 2	
15-Feb	C. Sex, gender, and sexuality	9, 10, 13	DP2
	D. Disability	Rossenblum and Travis (Supp.)	
Unit 2. Levels of Inquiry			
22-Feb	<i>Experiencing social inequality (micro)</i>	Intro (586-589), 43, 47	DP3, UP1
	A. Race, ethnicity, and nationality	44, 45, 48, 49	
1-Mar	B. Sex, gender, and sexuality	46, 52, 53	DP4
	C. Class and status	42, 50, 51	
8-Mar	<i>Institutions and ideology (meta/mega)</i>	Intro (211-237)	DP5, UP2
	A. Family	17, 19	
15-Mar	B. Education	20, 22	DP6
	C. Work and economy	25, 26	
22-Mar	<i>Spring Break</i>		
29-Mar	D. State and public policy	29, 30	DP7, UP3
	E. Media, language, and culture	31, 33, 36	
5-Apr	F. Violence and social control	38, 39	DP8
	<i>Global inequality, globalization (mega)</i>	Sernau (Supp.)	UP4
12-Apr	A. Cultural syncretism and imperialism	Hebron and Stack (Supp.)	DP9
	B. Technology and social change	55	
Unit 3. Resistance and Response			
19-Apr	A. Social change	Intro (699-711) & 54	DP10, UP5
	B. Development and progress	56 & 58	
26-Apr	C. The problem of pluralism	57	DP11
	D. Agency and Structure		
3-May	<i>TBA</i>		DP12, UP6
10-May	<i>TBA</i>		
21-May 11:59pm	Final Exam Period <i>Submit Final Paper via Canvas</i>		Final Paper