

History of Inequality in America (HIST 3232)

CLASS INFORMATION

Class Sessions: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:30-1:45
Location: 1140 Main Library

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor: Colin Gordon
Office: 270 Schaeffer Hall
Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 2:00 to 3:00 or by appointment.
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ABOUT THE COURSE

“The History of American Inequality” is animated by our current concern with the problem of inequality (broadly defined) in the United States. But it is more about the *history* of that problem; about how we got where we are today. In this sense, the class will cover both the basic concepts and dimensions of inequality, and the development of inequalities over time. The historical coverage ranges across the 20th century. Our focus in this class is on the United States, but we will use international comparisons to set the American experience into a broader context.

This class draws on perspectives from not only history, but also economics, sociology, political science, philosophy, and law. At the core of the class is this question: Why has inequality widened in the United States in the last generation? This, in turn, raises a wide range of other questions:

- In a market economy, how much inequality is acceptable?
- What are the policy implications; what can or should we do to lessen inequality?
- What are the political implications; who are the winners and the losers?
- Should we aim for equality of opportunity, equality of outcomes, or both?

Classroom time will be devoted to a mix of lecture and class activities and discussions. In this respect, student participation and preparation are key. I expect you to come to class having completed the relevant readings for that day (or unit). By engaging in activities and discussions, you will be able to learn from one another, develop your ability to clearly articulate your ideas, and build your confidence in discussing issues related to these issues. I will direct and explain classroom activities, work with students on those activities, and offer short lectures to provide important background or clarify key concepts.

Readings

The readings for this course consist of selections from a wide range of material. All course readings are available on the ICON/Canvas course webpage. The readings can be found (usually hyperlinked) in the description of each unit or “module.”

Course Evaluation and Assignments

Class assignments are detailed under the “Assignments” tab on ICON/Canvas. Course evaluation rests on a series of short writing assignments. There are no examinations.

- **Reading reaction papers:** Preparation for class, and staying current in your course reading, is important. For this reason, almost half of the course grade rests on a series of “reading reaction” papers. With a few exceptions (before and after the due dates for the other assignments), these are to be submitted each Friday. These are not onerous exercises (each will just be a couple of paragraphs), but do require you to complete, and reflect on, that week’s readings. For each of these assignments, I will clearly indicate which of the course readings you should focus on. The first paragraph of each reading reaction paper should summarize the argument(s). The second paragraph should offer your reaction: Do you agree or disagree? What are the strengths or weaknesses of the argument? What unanswered questions does the reading raise? There are NINE assigned reading reactions; students are graded on EIGHT—meaning you can drop your lowest grade or “pass” on one of these.
- **Short essays:** You will write two short (750-1000 word) essays. The first (due early in the semester) is on the subject “Does Inequality Matter,” and will draw on some of our early readings. The second (due later in the semester) is on the subject “Inequality and Policy,” and will focus on one of the policy areas we discuss. Further details and expectations for these short papers can be found under each, in the “Assignments” tab on ICON/Canvas.
- **Participation:** At the end of the semester, I will add a grade for attendance and participation. This is not just a reward for showing up regularly, but is an assessment of your engagement in the course.

Attendance and Participation	20
Reading Reaction Papers (9@5pts)	40
Short Essay Assignment 1	20
Short Essay Assignment 2	20

Grading System and the Use of +/-

Final grades will be assigned on the basis of the following distribution.

97-100% = A+	80-82% = B-	63-66% = D
93-96% = A	77-79% = C+	60-62% = D-
90-92% = A-	73-76% = C	Below 60% = F
87-89% = B+	70-72% = C-	
83-86% = B	67-69% = D+	

Late Work Policy, and other Accommodations

Life is complicated and all of us have many obligations and challenges, and we would rather you do the work late than not at all. HOWEVER, I only accept work up to one week late. Work that is more than one week late will not be accepted. Late work receives only $\frac{1}{2}$ credit. In other words, failure to submit work on time will result in an automatic 50% grade before the work is graded (for example, if the assignment is worth 5 points, a late assignment will be worth a maximum of 2.5 points). Your success in this class is important, to you and to me. If there are circumstances that may affect your performance in this class, please let me know as soon as possible so that we may work together to develop strategies for adapting assignments to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course.

Classroom Dialogue and Dynamics

The issues we deal with in this course are often controversial, and you may be exposed to arguments you do not agree with in the readings, discussions, class activities, or lectures. A great deal of learning occurs in the classroom, and as part of this process you are encouraged to voice your opinion about these issues. This is not a class where we all need to agree at the end of the day. In fact, disagreement is a good way to learn because it requires critical thinking and reflection on one's own position.

Together, we need to create a comfortable environment by sharing ideas, observations, and questions respectfully; such an environment is only possible when instructors and students treat each other with mutual respect and listen without interruption. Therefore, we will not tolerate words or actions that result in hostility in the classroom. The following ideas help us create a positive atmosphere:

- We are all knowledgeable in different ways. We all have something to teach and something to learn. A well-rounded understanding of the social world cannot be achieved without the participation of many different perspectives.
- No one is to be blamed for the circumstances of their existence that have been beyond their control. We cannot be blamed for repeating misinformation we have learned in our social locations, but we can hold each other accountable to not repeat misinformation after we have learned otherwise.
- Learn to appreciate different personalities. Try to draw out those who are quieter than others, but respect people's comfort levels and learn to recognize active listening. Those who are more assertive should try to recognize and refrain from dominating the conversation.
- Everyone should be encouraged to rethink the assumptions and knowledge we bring into the classroom; approach learning with an open mind.
- Respect each person's experience, never demean or trivialize another's life experience. It is possible to voice your point of view without offending and alienating your peers.

Each class is a learning community with a unique dynamic. We welcome and will thoughtfully consider critical feedback and constructive suggestions for changes that may enhance the classroom dynamic.

COURSE SCHEDULE

The following is a basic outline of the course schedule, listing the course units or modules and their topical coverage. The dates and date ranges are approximate (reserving the possibility that it might take more or less class time to get through some topics). For a detailed course schedule, including daily topics, activities, and readings, consult the ICON/Canvas course site.

UNIT 1: Introduction (January 16-February 9)

- *Inequality Measures and Metrics*
- *Inequality: Why Does it Matter?*
- *The Demographics of Inequality*
- *The Geography of Inequality*
- *Thinking about Causes*

Important dates: Reading Reaction Papers due January 26, February 2, February 9

UNIT 2: Causes and Consequences I: Inequality and Public Policy (February 12-March 9)

- *Patterns of American Public Policy Since 1920*
- *What Unions Do (or Did)*
- *Job-Based Benefits*
- *The Minimum Wage*
- *Social Programs*

Important dates: Reading Reaction Papers due March 2 and March 9; first short paper due February 23.

UNIT 3: Causes and Consequences II: Making the One Percent (March 19-April 13)

- *Big Finance and American Inequality*
- *Corporate Governance and CEO Pay*
- *Taxes*
- *Macroeconomic Policy*
- *The Politics of the One Percent*

Important dates: Reading Reaction Papers due March 23, March 30, and April 6.

UNIT 4: What to Do? (April 16-May 4)

- *Goals, Lessons, and Possibilities*
- *Where to Begin?*
- *Blueprints for Shared Prosperity*

Important dates: Second short paper due April 20; Reading Reaction Paper due April 27.

Addendum – Spring 2018

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Department Director (DEO): Elizabeth Heineman
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Administrative Home: The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the administrative home of this course and governs matters such as the add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and other related issues. Different colleges may have different policies. Questions may be addressed to 120 Schaeffer Hall, or see the CLAS Academic Policies Handbook at <http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook>.

Electronic Communication: University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). Faculty and students should use this account for correspondences (Operations Manual, III.15.2, k.11).

Accommodations for Disabilities: A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet with the course instructor privately in the instructor's office to make particular arrangements. See <http://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/> for more information.

Academic Honesty: All CLAS students or students taking classes offered by CLAS have, in essence, agreed to the College's Code of Academic Honesty: "I pledge to do my own academic work and to excel to the best of my abilities, upholding the IOWA Challenge. I promise not to lie about my academic work, to cheat, or to steal the words or ideas of others; nor will I help fellow students to violate the Code of Academic Honesty." Any student committing academic misconduct is reported to the College and placed on disciplinary probation or may be suspended or expelled (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

CLAS Final Examination Policies: The final examination schedule for each class is announced by the Registrar generally by the fifth week of classes. Final exams are offered only during the official final examination period. No exams of any kind are allowed during the last week of classes. All students should plan on being at the UI through the final examination period. Once the Registrar has announced the date, time, and location of each final exam, the complete schedule will be published on the Registrar's web site and will be shared with instructors and students. It is the student's responsibility to know the date, time, and place of a final exam.

Making a Suggestion or a Complaint: Students with a suggestion or complaint should first visit with the instructor (and the course supervisor), and then with the departmental DEO. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

Understanding Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community have a responsibility to uphold this mission and to contribute to a safe environment that enhances

learning. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported immediately. See the UI Comprehensive Guide on Sexual Harassment for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.

Reacting Safely to Severe Weather: In severe weather, class members should seek appropriate shelter immediately, leaving the classroom if necessary. The class will continue if possible when the event is over. For more information on Hawk Alert and the siren warning system, visit the Department of Public Safety website.

Resources for Students: Students will find the University or History Writing Centers very useful for this course; the Tutor Iowa site is also very valuable for students seeking extra help:

History Writing Center: <https://clas.uiowa.edu/history/teaching-and-writing-center>

University Writing Center: <http://writingcenter.uiowa.edu/>

Speaking Center: <http://clas.uiowa.edu/rhetoric/for-students/speaking-center>

Tutor Iowa: <http://tutor.uiowa.edu/>