

# University of Waterloo

## Graduate Level Social Inequality: Soc 720

Fall 2021  
Online Friday 10-12:50

**Instructor's name, office location, office hours, contact:**

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**Link to Class:** [https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting\\_ZDM4MzU4N2YtYTBIMS00ZThkLTg1OWItNTQ3MTY5MDU2Zjhl%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22id%22%3a%22723a5a87-f39a-4a22-9247-3fc240c01396%22%2c%22oid%22%3a%2274ed45db-1bc7-4e96-aad6-5d9def345c25%22%7d](https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting_ZDM4MzU4N2YtYTBIMS00ZThkLTg1OWItNTQ3MTY5MDU2Zjhl%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22id%22%3a%22723a5a87-f39a-4a22-9247-3fc240c01396%22%2c%22oid%22%3a%2274ed45db-1bc7-4e96-aad6-5d9def345c25%22%7d)

### Course description:

This course is designed to expand your analytical toolkit and help you think like a sociologist when examining the dimensions, patterns, causes, and consequences of social inequality. To achieve these aims, the course is not arranged by specific topics or instances of inequality, but rather on learning classical and contemporary sociological theories, concepts, frameworks, and ways of approaching the study of social inequality.

### Course objectives:

Throughout the course you will:

- 1) Grapple with foundational questions such as:
  - a. What are the forms, sources, and consequences of inequality?
  - b. How durable or rigid is social inequality?
  - c. What maintains or reproduces social inequality?
  - d. What are (some of) the main frameworks or approaches for studying social inequality?
  - e. What theories, concepts, or frameworks/approaches illuminate our understandings and help us answer important questions about social inequality?

## Readings:

Books, book chapters and journal articles can be found on our Library reserve page.

- Learn: Soc 720
- Bottom left corner '**Library Resource**'.
- Select "**Get Course Reserve**" and **login**.

\*There are two Grusky readers posted – **please refer to the 2014<sup>th</sup> version (4<sup>th</sup> edition) co-edited by Grusky and Weisshaar**

\*if you have trouble getting access to these resources, please consult with Sarah Brown  
[sarah.brown@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:sarah.brown@uwaterloo.ca)

Date	Topic	Readings
Week 1: Sept 10	Introduction	No Reading
Week 2: Sept 17	Foundational Questions and Approaches	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Chapter 1:</b> Tilly, C. 1998. <i>Durable Inequality</i>. University of California Press.</li> <li><b>Chapter 1:</b> Sowell, T. 2018. <i>Discrimination and Disparities</i>. Basic Books.</li> <li><b>Grusky and Weisshaar 2014 Reader:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grusky &amp; Weisshaar - Introduction</li> <li>Grusky &amp; Szelenyi – The Stories we Tell...</li> <li>Davis and Moore – Some Principles....</li> <li>Tumin – Some Principles...</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
<b>Week 2: (Some) Discussion Questions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This week we will consider foundational approaches for examining social inequality. What are the prevailing approaches and concepts? What are the central assumptions?</li> <li>What are (some of ) the forms and sources of inequality?</li> <li>How much inequality is permissible? What are its functions and dysfunctions?</li> </ul> <p><b>Some Core Concepts:</b> durable inequality, life chances, social closure, exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, adaptation, [particularism, interaction, transmission and mentalism], relational analysis, counter-factual</p>		
Week 3: Sept 24	Categories, Relationships, and Boundaries	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Introduction and Chapter 3:</b> Kingston, P. <i>The Classless Society</i>. Stanford University Press.</li> <li><b>Chapter 3:</b> Tomaskovic-Devey, D. and D. Avent-Holt. 2019. <i>Relational Inequalities: An Organizational Approach</i>. Oxford University Press.</li> <li>Lamont, M. and V. Molnar. 2002. "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences." <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i> 28: 167-195.</li> <li><b>Grusky and Weisshaar 2014 Reader:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weber – Class, Status, Party</li> <li>Weber – Status Groups and Classes</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
<b>Week 3: (Some) Discussion Questions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there identifiable 'groups'? On what basis should we categorize people?</li> <li>What are symbolic and social boundaries? How do they maintain and reproduce inequalities?</li> <li>What are the central assumptions? What empirical patterns and observations support these assumptions? What are the limits and possibilities of concepts, theories or approaches?</li> </ul> <p><b>Some Core Concepts:</b> symbolic boundaries; social boundaries; RIT; social class; status group, classless society, class structure, class formation, inequality regime, categorization, social closure</p> <p><b>*REVIEW ANNUAL REVIEW PAPER ASSIGNMENT</b></p>		

<b>Week 4: Oct 1</b>	No Meeting this Week  <b>Submit Paper Outline by 11:59pm, Oct 1</b>	
<b>Week 5: Oct 8</b>	Mobility and Status Attainment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hertel, F.R. and O. Groh-Samberg. 2019. "The Relationship Between Inequality and Intergenerational Class Mobility in 39 Countries." <i>American Sociological Review</i>. Vol 84(6): 1099-1133.</li> <li>Haller, A.O. and A. Portes. 1973. "Status Attainment Processes." <i>Sociology of Education</i> Vol 46(1): 51-91.</li> <li><b>Grusky and Weisshaar 2014 Reader:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Turner – Sponsored and Contest Mobility</li> <li>Sorikin – Social and Cultural Mobility</li> <li>Parkin – Marxism and Class Theory</li> <li>Liu and Grusky – The Winners....</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
<b>Week 5: (Some) Discussion Questions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is status attainment?</li> <li>What are the mechanisms by which people rise and fall?</li> <li>How is mobility facilitated? How is it blocked?</li> <li>How much mobility should be present in a 'fair' society?</li> <li>How can we conceptualize movement (e.g., vertical and horizontal)?</li> <li>What are the central assumptions? What empirical patterns and observations support these assumptions? What are the limits and possibilities of concepts, theories or approaches?</li> </ul> <p><b>Some Core Concepts:</b> Relative Mobility; Absolute Mobility; Mobility chances; Inter-Class; Inter-Class inequality; Social Mobility; Blocked Mobility; Great Gatsby Curve; Contest Mobility; Sponsored Mobility; Social Closure; Status attainment; Blau-Duncan model; Wisconsin model; Horizontal and Vertical Processes (MMI and EMI)</p>		
<b>Reading week: Oct 9-17</b>		
<b>Week 6: Oct 22</b>	Elites, Privilege and 'Merit'	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Introduction and Chapter 1:</b> Markovits, D. 2019. <i>The Meritocracy Trap</i>. Penguin Books.</li> <li><b>Introduction:</b> Van Zanten, A. 2015. "Educating Elites: The Changing Dynamics and Meaning of Power and Privilege." In <i>Elites, Privilege and Excellence</i>. Routledge.</li> <li>Reeves, R.V. and K.Howard. 2013. "The Glass Floor...Opportunity Hoarding." Center on Children and Families at Brookings. <a href="https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/glass-floor-downward-mobility-equality-opportunity-hoarding-reeves-howard.pdf">https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/glass-floor-downward-mobility-equality-opportunity-hoarding-reeves-howard.pdf</a></li> <li>Khan, S. 2012. "The Sociology of Elites." <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i>. 38: 361-377.</li> </ol>

		<p>5. <b>Grusky and Weisshaar 2014 Reader:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brooks – Bobos in Paradise</li> </ul> <p><b>Before Class</b> - Watch Video: Anand Giridharadas on 'Winners Take All' and the charade of elite philanthropy  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcHINKLQBIM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcHINKLQBIM</a></p>
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#### Week 6: (Some) Discussion Questions

- In the context of elites, what are older and newer forms?
- Who are the 'new' elites? What defines them? How is it altering inequality?
- Does 'merit' exist? Is meritocracy a 'trap'?
- What are the central assumptions? What empirical patterns and observations support these assumptions? What are the limits and possibilities of concepts, theories or approaches?

**Some Core Concepts:** merit, opportunity hoarding, glass ceiling, elites, 'winner take all'

<b>Week 7: Oct 29</b>	Capital, Consumption, and Identity	<p>1. <b>Introduction and Chapter 5:</b> Khan, S. 2012. Privilege. Princeton University Press.</p> <p>2. Davies, D. and J. Rizk. 2018. "The Three Generations of Cultural Capital Research." <i>Review of Educational Research</i>. Vol 88(3).</p> <p>3. Friedman et al. 2021. "Deflecting Privilege: Class Identity and the Inter-generational Self." <i>Sociology</i>. Vol 55(4).</p> <p>4. <b>Grusky and Weisshaar 2014 Reader:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bourdieu – Distinction</li> </ul> <p>Optional: Watch Video – Khan - <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=symFERJZGx0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=symFERJZGx0</a></p>
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#### Week 7: (Some) Discussion Questions

- What is cultural 'capital'? What are the main traditions? What role does it play in social inequality?
- How do people from privileged backgrounds see themselves? How has it changed?
- What is the 'ease' of privilege? What is 'saying merit, doing privilege'?
- Are there cultural practices and tastes that define people?
- What is a cultural omnivore?
- What are the central assumptions? What empirical patterns and observations support these assumptions? What are the limits and possibilities of concepts, theories, or approaches?

**Some Core Concepts:** capital; cultural capital (three 'traditions'); cultural omnivore, merit, saying merit doing privilege, interaction ritual theory (IRT), class identity, multigenerational social mobility

Week 8: Nov 5	Book Application: Lareau – Unequal Childhoods (including Appendix A)	
Week 9: Nov 12	Social Capital, Networks and Status	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Coleman, J. 1988. Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital. <i>American Journal of Sociology</i>. Vol 94: S95-120.</li> <li>2. McPherson, M., L. Smith-Lovin, and J. M. Cook. 2001. “Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks.” <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i>. Vol 27: 215-244.</li> <li>3. iDiMaggio, P and F. Garip. 2012. “Network Effects and Social Inequality.” <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i>. Vol 38: 93-118.</li> <li>4. <b>Grusky and Weisshaar 2014 Reader:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Granovetter - Strength of Weak Ties</li> <li>• Lin - Networks and Status Attainment</li> <li>• Burt – Structural Holes</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
<b>Week 9: (Some) Discussion Questions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is status attainment? How does it work?</li> <li>• What are obligations, information channels, social norms, and social closure (as it relates to social capital)?</li> <li>• How is social capital a type of resource?</li> <li>• What roles does social capital, human capital, and social networks play?</li> <li>• What are structural holes?</li> <li>• How do network characteristics (e.g., relative strength of a tie) influence social inequality?</li> <li>• In what way can networks shape individual behaviour/choices and social inequality? What are the potential consequences?</li> <li>• What are the central assumptions? What empirical patterns and observations support these assumptions? What are the limits and possibilities of concepts, theories or approaches?</li> </ul> <p><b>Some Core Concepts:</b> social capital; social networks, human capital, strong ties; weak ties; networks; status, structural holes, embeddedness</p>		
Week 10: Nov 19	Book Application: Small – Unanticipated Gains (including Appendix A and C)	

<b>Week 11: Nov 26</b>	The Role of Families and Education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Aurini, J.</b> and <u>C. Hillier</u>. 2018. "Re-Opening the Black Box of Educational Disadvantage: Why We Need New Answers to Old Questions." In Mehta, J. and S. Davies (editors). <i>Education in a New Society: Renewing the Sociology of Education</i>. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.</li> <li><b>Downey, D.</b> and D. Condon. 2016. "Fifty Years since the Coleman Report: Rethinking the Relationship Between Schools and Inequality." <i>Sociology of Education</i>, Vol 89(3): 207-220.</li> <li><b>Bell, M.</b> et al. 2016. "Beyond the Culture of Poverty." The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity and Nationalism, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition. John Wiley &amp; Sons Limited.</li> <li><b>Grusky and Weisshaar 2014 Reader</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Heckman – Skill Formation</li> <li>Duncan and Magnuson – Long Reach of Early Childhood</li> </ul> </li> </ol> <p>Optional (posted on Learn): Mehta's OECD report (Canada/Ontario only)</p>
<b>Week 11: (Some) Discussion Questions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the consequences of growing up poor? What is the 'long reach' of childhood?</li> <li>In what ways do families (vs) schools influence outcomes?</li> <li>How has the nature of educational inequality changed over time?</li> <li>How do schools compensate for inequality?</li> <li>What are the potential costs of policy mistakes?</li> <li>What are the central assumptions? What empirical patterns and observations support these assumptions? What are the limits and possibilities of concepts, theories or approaches?</li> </ul> <p><b>Some Core Concepts:</b> culture of poverty; school effects; family effects, reproduction, seasonal comparisons (seasonal learning designs), refraction framework, schools as compensatory</p>		
<b>Week 12: Dec 3</b>	<b>Paper presentations (10 minutes each)</b>	

## Evaluation:

1. Four Mapping Exercises	20%
2. Class Participation	20%
3. Co-Leading two discussions	30%
4. Annual Review Paper	30% (5% paper outline, 25% final)

## Details on Evaluation:

### 1. Four Mapping Exercises (20%)

Four times throughout the term you will contribute to a group exercise (**Decide how first class**). Each time, plan to contribute to 1 to 3 main concepts, noting that the number may vary since some will require more work than others. The goal is to co-produce a comprehensive theoretical guide that will be useful for your class papers, thesis, journal articles, or teaching opportunities long after the course is done.

These exercises also provide an asynchronous activity that will reduce the amount of 'screen time' on Friday.

Plan to spend about 1 hour each time, including finding data and/or relevant readings.

- Draw on the '**Core Concepts**' listed in the course outline. However, please add others from the readings that are useful (even as a place holder for others to tackle).
- Feel free to work on any four weeks that work best for your schedule, including returning to earlier weeks to fill in any holes or add to other posts (add a new line in with your name).
- Feel free to add columns with new categories not previously included
- You may not find data that speaks to your concept. Make a note of this and share where you tried to find relevant information (e.g., Statistics Canada, OECD, UNESCO, policy think tanks, HEQUO etc.). Make a note of the challenges that you encountered (e.g., data on the U.S, but not Canada). Your colleagues may end up finding information – and that's ok



– it's all part of the search and discovery phase and the goal of co-creating knowledge and resources together.

- Let's try to keep it in alphabetical order.

## 2. Class Participation (20%)

Each week we will meet for approximately 1.5-2 hours, noting the asynchronous activity detailed above will serve to reduce the amount of live meeting time each week.

Each week you are expected to attend class, do all the readings, and participate in class discussions. Participation includes both responding to discussion leader questions and comments, as well as posing your own, and demonstrating that you have done the readings. See "Good Discussion Guidelines" below. The same basic rules apply.

## 3. Co-Leading Two Discussions (30%)

Two times (or two class weeks) throughout the term, you will co-lead the class discussion of the readings. This includes attending to the main questions and concepts posed in the course outline, along with additional questions that leaders develop. I am open to how discussion leaders organize the discussion (e.g., each person take responsibility for a reading; co-presenting all the readings; summarizing the readings, but organizing the main discussion by major themes rather than by readings), however it is expected that that all co-leaders will support one another's discussions and develop key take-aways that run through all the readings.

See Group Discussion Signup (**Discuss how first class**).

### Good Discussion Guidelines:

- Highlight the main thesis or key ideas, but do not give a 'line by line' run down of the reading. Discussion leaders should assume that everyone has done the reading.
- Pose stimulating analytical questions. Questions that rest on personal opinions or feelings are not interesting or useful (e.g., 'Did you like the reading? Does 'X' bother you?'). Good discussion questions should push your colleagues to think deeply about, apply, explain, evaluate, compare etc. a theory, concept or empirical pattern, draw connections, create or apply these ideas to a new situation/context and so forth (e.g., how an approach or critique about class could be used to rethink how we approach gender).

- Work toward building your/your colleagues intellectual toolkit for examining social inequality. By now we should all recognize that there is no such thing as a perfect theory or concept or one that gets that job done in every single instance (hence, our critiques shouldn't be about throwing a theory or concept out the window because it looks at 'x' but not 'y'). Theories/concepts are just explanations that help us understand and summarize a *slice* of social life, a particular context, process, outcome and so forth. But they are just that – a possible explanation. And we should be open to thinking about many different explanations that may explain 'what is going on.' We shouldn't worship or vilify them. They may provide a good summary of 'what is happening' in one instance, but not another, and our job is to think about why/how and when it's useful or not. A fair critique recognizes the scope and limitations of any theoretical approach or concept.

So with this understanding in mind, your discussion questions should be attuned to thinking about:

- What are the central claims or assumptions?
  - What questions or types of questions does a theory/concept ask or help us think about (e.g., directs us to questions about the economy)?
  - Could we switch it up to ask something new and interesting (e.g., rather than asking why there is so much inequality, ask why there is not more)?
  - What is the level of analysis (e.g., micro-level)? Could we move it up/down?
  - What are the look fors? What kinds of data or empirical patterns are needed to support the central claims (e.g., some point to qualitative or quantitative, or particular kinds of data within those methodologies such as interview or observational data)?
  - What are the policy implications?
- If appropriate, draw on Mapping exercise posts. You can ask your colleagues to share or elaborate for example.
- While this is not a formal presentation or group activity, you will be more successful if all co-leaders connect and have a game plan in place. Plan to have a brief chat beforehand to share (some of) your discussion questions and the approximate amount of time each reading should take to present and discuss so no one gets rushed or 'squeezed out' near the end.

#### 4. “Annual Review” Paper

Your final paper should be written like an “Annual Review of Sociology” paper. You may select any topic, theory or concept related to social inequality, including one that was covered in the course.

What is an Annual Review article? There are a few different approaches, but in general:

- Annual Review articles tackle one topic, theory or concept, area of study, or intellectual problem in the field.
- They provide a ‘state of the field’ review of that topic, theory or concept etc.
- They provide a synthesis and presentation of the main ideas thematically (e.g., usually *not* by article or person). My advice is to search for Annual Review of Sociology articles in your general area of interest to get a handle on different ways of approaching your paper. For example:
  - Stevens, Armstrong and Arum (2008) argue that sociologists have conceived higher education as a ‘sieve’ (to capture research that examines how they sort and select), an ‘incubator’ (to capture another strand that examines how they nurture talent), a ‘temple’ (to capture another strand that examines how they legitimate certain kinds of knowledge) and so forth.
  - Khan (2012) divides the discussion into classics, resources, and institutions.
  - Dweyer (2018) organizes the literature into credit, debt and inequality.
  - Van Leeuwen and Maas (2010) provide a review of historical studies and approaches to social mobility and stratification including sources of data, approaches, and patterns.
  - Lamont and Molnar (2002) group their discussion by social and collective identity, class/race/gender, professions and knowledge and so forth
- Based on the synthesis and review, concludes by identifying outstanding or promising questions and/or theoretical or methodological directions (e.g., ‘new directions’ or ‘new developments’).

### **5% Paper Outline – Due Oct 1**

You will hand in a brief paper outline that includes:

- a) Working title
- b) Introduction: Draft an introduction that describes the focus of your paper and why it is important and needed (for good examples see Lamont and Molnar and Khan's introduction)
- c) Main sections: Draft a preliminary outline of main sections or ways you plan on organizing the literature on your topic. Briefly elaborate under each section heading (point form here is fine).

\*Note that this may change as your understanding about the topic evolves; however, I want you to start thinking about your paper and ways of organizing the literature.

- d) Preliminary reference list that includes original readings in addition to any relevant course readings.

Length: 2-3 page (single-spaced) or 4-6 page (db-spaced) + reference list.

Format: ¾-1" margins, 12-point font

### **25% Final Paper – Due Date TBD**

The paper should include the same information as a published Annual Review of Sociology article.

This includes:

- Title
- Your name and department and school
- Abstract (150-200 words)
- Key words (about 3-6 words)
- Brief definitions of key terms. Use plain language (see DiMaggio and Garip, 2012 for an example)
- Main paper
- References: You should draw from at least 10-15 new readings, in addition to relevant course readings.

Length: approximately 20-25 pages (double spaced)

Format: ¾-1" margins, 12-point font

**Note about deadline – we can talk about it as a group. I will give you as much time before the holiday as possible, noting that I need 3 days to read and grade.**

**Academic integrity, grievance, discipline, appeals and note for students with disabilities:**

**Academic integrity:** In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. [Check [the Office of Academic Integrity](#) for more information.]

**Grievance:** A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read [Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4](#). When in doubt, please be certain to contact the department's administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

**Discipline:** A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. [Check [the Office of Academic Integrity](#) for more information.] A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course instructor, academic advisor, or the undergraduate associate dean. For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to [Policy 71, Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties, check [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#).

**Appeals:** A decision made or penalty imposed under [Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances](#) (other than a petition) or [Policy 71, Student Discipline](#) may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to [Policy 72, Student Appeals](#).

**Note for students with disabilities:** [AccessAbility Services](#), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with [AccessAbility Services](#) at the beginning of each academic term.

**Turnitin.com:** Text matching software (Turnitin®) may be used to screen assignments in this course. Turnitin® is used to verify that all materials and sources in assignments are documented.

Students' submissions are stored on a U.S. server, therefore students must be given an alternative (e.g., scaffolded assignment or annotated bibliography), if they are concerned about their privacy and/or security. Students will be given due notice, in the first week of the term and/or at the time assignment details are provided, about arrangements and alternatives for the use of Turnitin® in this course.

It is the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor if they, in the first week of term or at the time assignment details are provided, wish to submit the alternate assignment.