Course Description

As long as poverty, injustice and gross inequality persist in our world, none of us can truly rest.
- Nelson Mandela (2005)

No persisting structure of economic and social inequality has existed in the absence of some kind of meaning system(s) which seek both to explain and justify the unequal distribution of societal resources.
- Crompton (1998)

Deepening economic inequality is recognized as one of the greatest challenges of our time, undermining democracy, social cohesion, and individual and community health (APA Task Force on Socioeconomic Status, 2006; World Economic Forum, 2015). Since the 1970s, the economic gap has widened, with the concentration of income at the very top of the distribution rising to levels last seen more than 80 years ago. U.S. poverty rates remain unacceptably high at 13.5 percent; 43.1 million people live below official poverty thresholds (approximately $19,000 per year for a family of three; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016), including 19.2 percent of children under the age of 18. In any given month in 2011, 1.5 million U.S. households lived on incomes of $2.00 per person, per day (Edin & Schaefer, 2015). Economic hardship is also evidenced by the estimate that 22.5 percent of the U.S. population have incomes below 150 percent of the poverty line, or approximately $36,375 for a family of four (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Communities of color, women, and single parent families experience disproportionately high rates of poverty.

Collectively, these trends underscore the urgency of marshalling evidence from psychology and related disciplines (e.g., sociology, public health, political science) to develop comprehensive poverty alleviation and economic justice initiatives. Structural and ideological barriers to poverty and economic justice are formidable and should not be underestimated, but ruptures in tolerance for economic inequality may be reaching a critical turning point. “We are the 99 percent” popularized by the Occupy Movement is now part of mainstream consciousness, support for raising the minimum wage is strong, and there is a growing sense that the economic and political systems are rigged.

Together, we will examine the social psychological dimensions of economic (in)justice, with the dual goals of understanding attitudes and beliefs that justify economic inequality and developing strategies for interrupting class oppression and fostering economic justice. Over the course of the quarter, we will study antecedents, correlates, and consequences of class-based inequities in the United States; how social class, poverty, and classism shape life chances; the impact of classism and its intersections with racism and sexism on lived experience and social policy; and strategies for reducing classist discrimination and improving interclass relations.

Course Goals

At the end of the course, you should have an appreciation of:

- social psychological (and social science) approaches to understanding and studying social class and poverty
- the role of beliefs about poverty and wealth in legitimizing class inequalities
• the impact of sexist, racist, and classist attitudes and beliefs on contemporary welfare policy and support for anti-poverty initiatives
• challenges to and opportunities for reducing classism and improving interclass relations

Course Format
I will provide an overview/presentation of the topic, however, the majority of our time will be dedicated to discussing the readings and sharing your ideas. Please come to class prepared to talk!

Required Readings

I have assigned several chapters of Michael Katz’s (2013), *The undeserving poor: America’s enduring confrontation with poverty* (2nd edition). Although not required, you may find it helpful to read the book in its entirety. It is available electronically through UCSC’s library.

With the exception of Desmond’s book, all readings are available via Canvas.

Supplemental Readings
Supplemental readings are offered for students who want to read more about a particular topic. These optional readings, which are available via Canvas, expand on the week’s themes and deepen coverage.

Requirements
Seminar participation (30%): Each week you should come to class having completed the reading and prepared for discussion. At least 24 hours prior to each seminar meeting (1:00 p.m. on Sunday) please post an entry on the Canvas discussion page for the course containing: (1) one insight stimulated by the set of readings and (2) one question provoked by the week’s readings. You are expected to review these posts prior to our meeting and come prepared to discuss them.

Brief Analysis Papers (30%): Two brief double-spaced analyses of our readings must be completed by the last day of class. These papers should address one or more of the week’s readings and can be critiques (methodological or theoretical), integrations, insights, provocative questions, etc. If you offer a critique, you must offer a concrete approach/alternative. You may wish to discuss connections to other readings, questions the material raised for you, and suggestions for further research in the area.

You can select which weeks to write your brief analysis papers, however, I encourage you to space them out and not turn in both papers at the quarter.

Final paper (40%): Your final paper should explore a topic relevant to the class and of great interest to you. I want to encourage creativity and your projects can take different forms and directions (e.g., literature review, research proposal), however, several core elements are essential to all papers: a clear research question and statement of focus, articulation of the perspective from which you are approaching the question/issue, and a description of how you will examine the question/issue. Your paper must also include a comprehensive literature review in which you illuminate key findings. An excellent paper will not only foster understanding of the issues, but also include your own analysis and interpretation. Your paper should be formatted using American Psychological Association publication guidelines (6th edition).
Course Summary with Key Dates

I. Social Class, Poverty, and Stratification

Welcome! 4/3/17
Conceptualizing Social Class, Poverty, and Stratification 4/10/17
Class Status: Identity, Privilege, and Stigma 4/17/17
Structured Inequality, Life Chances, and the (Re)production of Inequality 4/24/17

II. Justifying Class Inequality: Stereotypes, Beliefs, and Attributions

Classist Stereotypes, Attributions for Poverty and Wealth, and Other Legitimizing Beliefs 5/1/17
System Justification, Class Consciousness, and Rejecting the Status Quo 5/8/17
Framing Inequality 5/15/17

III. Critical Perspectives on Poverty, “Welfare Reform,” and Housing

Welfare Reform, Poor Women, and Poverty Politics 5/22/17
Memorial Day Holiday – No Class 5/29/17
Evicted 6/5/17

IV. Thoughts on Promoting Economic Justice

Toward a More Equitable Society 6/12/17

Detailed Course Schedule

I. Social Class, Poverty, and Stratification

4/3/17 Welcome!
4/10/17 Conceptualizing Social Class, Poverty, and Stratification

Required Readings


Skim/Browse

Supplemental Readings

4/17/17 Class Status: Identity, Privilege, and Stigma

Required Readings
• Supplemental Readings

4/24/17 Structured Inequality, Life Chances, and the (Re)Production of Inequality

Required Readings

Supplemental Readings

II. Justifying Class Inequality: Stereotypes, Beliefs, and Attributions
5/17 Classist Stereotypes, Attributions for Poverty and Wealth, and Other Legitimizing Beliefs

**Required Readings**

**Supplemental Readings**
5/8/17  System Justification, Class Consciousness, and Rejecting the Status Quo

Required Readings


Supplemental Readings


5/15/17  Framing Poverty, Wealth, and Inequality

Required Readings


• Enterprise and Frameworks Institute (2016, October). “You don’t have to live here:” Why housing messages are backfiring and 10 things we can do about it. Retrieved from http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/assets/files/PDF/You_Don't_Have_to_Live_Here.pdf.

Supplemental Readings

III. Critical Perspectives on Poverty, “Welfare Reform,” and Housing

5/22/17 Welfare Reform, Poor Women, and Poverty Politics

Required Readings

Skim/Browse:

Supplemental Readings

5/29/17 Memorial Day Holiday

6/5/17 Evicted (read text)

IV. Thoughts on Promoting Economic Justice

6/12/17 Toward A More Equitable Society

Required Readings


Skim/Browse Overview and Full Report


Supplemental Readings


