

**Spring 2017
Freshman Seminar**

INEQUALITY

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The Basics

When to meet: Mondays, 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Where to meet: Social Ecology 2, Room 2372

What to bring: a willingness to actively participate and share your insights

Why come: to learn and earn an academic unit in the process

Where to find the instructor: Social Ecology 2, Room 3305

How to contact the instructor: e-mail jenness@uci.edu

How to learn about the instructor: <http://www.seweb.uci.edu/users/jenness/jenness.html>

The Topic

Policymakers, politicians, and citizens alike debate the causes, manifestations, and consequences of inequality in America. Along the way, the nature and workings of human perception and morality, communities, the American dream, and current economic, political and social systems are implicated. Designed to provide an empirical and theoretical basis for thinking about inequality, this course examines a range of manifestations of inequalities in the U.S., including, for example: a growing share of income and wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few; disparities in health, education, incarceration, and other dimensions of human welfare are organized around race and ethnicity as well as region; and a small number of people exert a huge political influence on American democracy while others remain figuratively and literally disenfranchised. These and other types of concerns are discussed in this integrated freshman seminar series. This is the third of three integrated freshman seminars (one offered each quarter of the 2016-17 academic year).

The Objective

Ultimately, the goal of this course is to accomplish what good education always accomplishes: stimulate curiosity and the desire to learn more; acquire, critique, and apply knowledge; understand and respond to the complexities of life by using information tools, research skills, creative thinking, reasoning and analysis; benefit from the ability to communicate effectively, including in productive dialogue with people whose experiences differ from your own and who may be separated from you by time, space, culture, and station in life.

The Requirements

There are four requirements for this course:

1. Attend every meeting of the seminar;
2. Actively participate in every meeting of the seminar;
3. Read the assigned readings
4. Write three (3) two page, typed, single-spaced response papers in response to the assigned readings for any three weeks of the course. These response papers are due in class on the day we are discussing the assigned readings for that week.

This is a University of California class and, as with all UC classes, students are expected to abide by the student code of conduct as well as the most basic rules of etiquette, including: getting to class on time and coming prepared to engage; turning off all electronic devices other than a laptop computer; not talking about things unrelated to the class during the class; and remaining respectful of diverse views when engaging in classroom debate. All views are allowed and welcome; however, expressing them in a respectful way is required. Reasonable people can disagree, but disagreement needs to be expressed in ways that are conducive to the free exchange of ideas, productive dialogue, and meaningful learning. Finally, all students are required to uphold the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. For details on UCI's policy on academic honesty, please see the UCI Catalogue or <http://www.editor.uci.edu/catalogue/appx/appx.2.htm#gen0>. It is every student's responsibility to read and understand UCI's academic honesty and integrity policies.

The Grading Policy

Course grades will be computed using the following criteria:

1. Attendance (40%)
2. Participation (30%)
3. Writing Assignments (30%)

To elaborate on the 1-2-3 above, regular class attendance and active participation, as well as successful completion of the writing assignment on time, will earn the student an A in the seminar. If you participate and do a good job on the assignments, but miss two classes, your grade will drop one whole letter grade. For example, if you miss two classes, your grade drops from an A to a B; if you miss 4 classes your grade drops to a C, etc. Note: any student who feels he/she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor to discuss his/her specific needs. Also, contact the Disability Services Center at 949-824-7494 as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

The Course Outline

The outline below indicates what we will be discussing and when we will be discussing it. Discussion topics are not chiseled in stone; all topics and dates are tentative and subject to change. If changes are made, they will be announced in class or over e-mail.

Week 1: Introduction to "inequality" and "inequalities"

Reading: "The Dangerous Safety of College," by Frank Bruni. *The New York Times*, March 11, 2017.

Reading: "Promoting Knowledge in the Age of Unreason," by Todd Gitlin. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 17, 2017.

- Week 2: Wealth Inequality in the United States
Reading: “Wealth Inequality in the United States,” by Lisa A. Keister and Stephanie Moller. 2000. *The Annual Review of Sociology* 23:63-81.
- Week 3: Legacies of Inequality, Part I: 13th, a documentary available on Netflix
Reading: “Review: ‘13th’ the Journey From Shackles to Prison Bars,” by Manohla Dargis. *The New York Times*, September 29, 2016.
- Week 4: Legacies of Inequality, Part II: Discussion of 13th
Reading: “The Crooked Ladder: The Criminal’s Guide to Upward Mobility, by Malcolm Gladwell. *The New Yorker*, August 11th and 18th, 2014.
- Week 5: Views of Poverty
Reading: “Poverty in Unexpected Places, by the Editorial Board. *New York Times*, October 29, 2016.
Reading: “How Do Americans View Poverty? Many Blue Collar Whites, Key to Trump, Criticize Poor People as Lazy and Content to Stay on Welfare,” by David Lauter. *The Los Angeles Times*, August 14, 2016.
- Week 6: Views of Wealth
Reading: “How Americans View Wealth and Inequality,” by Dan Ariely. *BBC News*, August 20, 2012.
Reading: “The Faces of American Power: Nearly as White as the Other Oscar Nominees,” Haeyoun Park, Josh Keller, and Josh Williams. *The New York Times*, February 28, 2016.
- Week 7: Imagining Extreme Inequality, Part I: Snowpiercer, a film available on Amazon.com
Reading: “How to Understand Snowpiercer,” by Joe Carter. *Action Institute Powerblog*, July 18, 2004.
- Week 8: Imagining Extreme Inequality, Part II: Snowpiercer, a film available on Amazon.com
Reading: “Middle-Class Families, Pillar of the American Dream, Are No Longer in the Majority, Study Finds,” by Don Lee. *The Los Angeles Times*, December 9, 2015.
- Week 9: The Veil of Ignorance and the Future of Inequality
Reading: “Privilege, Pathology, and Power,” by Paul Krugman. *The New York Times*, January 1, 2016.
- Week 10: Wrap-up: Rethinking Inequalities in the Context of the Future
Reading: “Why 2017 May be the Best Year Ever,” by Nicholas Kristof. *The New York Times*, January 21, 2017.
Reading: “Incomes Up, Poverty Rate Down in New Census Data,” by Don Lee. *The Los Angeles Times*, September 14, 2016.