

**Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy
American Political Science Association**

Sample Outline of Undergraduate Course

Suzanne Mettler (Coordinator)

Lawrence R. Jacobs

Kay L. Schlozman

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Sample Outline of Undergraduate Course

I. Introduction

1. Inequality and American Democracy: Course Overview

Discuss handouts highlighting trends in economic inequality

2. Inequality Today: Its Manifestation and Causes

Gary Burtless, "Growing American Inequality: Sources and Remedies," In *Setting National Priorities: The 2000 Election and Beyond*, ed. Henry J. Aaron, Robert D. Reischauer (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1999), pp. 137-65.

Paul Krugman, "For Richer: How the Permissive Capitalism of the Boom Destroyed American Equality," *New York Times Magazine*, October 20, 2002, p.62+.

3. Wealth and Democracy

Kevin Phillips, *Wealth and Democracy: A Political History of the American Rich* (New York: Broadway, 2002), Chaps. 3, 5.

David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000) Chap. 1.

4. Poverty and Downward Mobility in the United States

Bradley R. Schiller, "Characteristics of the Poor," *The Economics of Poverty and Discrimination* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004) pp. 60-66.

Teresa A. Sullivan, Elizabeth Warren, and Jay Lawrence Westbrook, *The Fragile Middle Class: Americans in Debt* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), Chap. 1.

Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (New York: Owl Books, 2002).

5. Class in America

See film, "People Like Us: Social Class in America" (120 minutes)

Available at: www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus/

6. How Political Theorists Think about Economic Inequality
Amartya Sen, *Inequality Reexamined* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) Chapter 1.
John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1971) Ch 2, 5.
Robert J. Antonio (ed), *Marx and Modernity* (Malden, Oxford, Victoria, Berlin: Blackwell, 2003) pp. 113-119, 135-42, 157-165, 199-203.
Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1983) Chapter 1.

7. Inequality in American Political Thought and Constitutional Law

Thomas Jefferson, "Declaration of Independence."
James Madison, *Federalist #10*.
Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "Declaration of Sentiments," Seneca Falls.
Abraham Lincoln, "Gettysburg Address."
Martin Luther King, "I Have a Dream."

Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896.
Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka, KS, 1954.
San Antonio v. Rodriguez, 1973.

Robert A. Dahl, *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

8 American Public Opinion Regarding Inequality

Nathan Glazer, "On Americans & Inequality," *Daedalus* (summer 2003): 111-16.
Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) Chapter 4.

II. Inequalities in Political Voice

9. Political Participation

Kay Lehman Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady, "Civic Participation and the Equality Problem," in *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, ed. Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1999) pp. 427-59.

10. Political Parties

Jeffrey M. Stonecash, *Class and Party in American Politics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000).

11. Organized Interests

Kay L. Schlozman and John T. Tierney, *Organized Interests and American Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986) Chapter 4.
Ellen S. Miller and Micah L. Sifry, "Labor's Loss," *American Prospect*, August 14, 2000. Available at: www.prospect.org/web/printfriendly-view.wv?id=5365/.

III. Inequalities in Representation and Governance

12. Congressional and Presidential Policymaking

Larry M. Bartels, "Economic Inequality and Political Representation," Paper delivered at Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, August 2002. Available at: www.princeton.edu/~bartels/papers/.

13. Money and Politics

Stephen Ansolabehere, John M. De Figueiredo, and James M. Snyder, "Why Is There So Little Money in U.S. Politics?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17(1) (2003): 105-130.
Darrell West and Burdett Loomis, *The Sound of Money* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998).

14. Federalism and Devolution

John Donahue, *The Devolution Revolution: Hazardous Crosscurrents* (New York: Century Foundation, 1999), selections.
Paul Peterson, "Who Should Do What? Divided Responsibility in the Federal System," *Brookings Review* (Spring 1995).

IV. The Two-Way Street: The Mutual Implications of Public Policy and Inequality

15. Overview of American Public Policy: Successes and Failures, In Comparative and Historical Perspective

Timothy M. Smeeding, Lee Rainwater, and Gary Burtless, "U.S. Poverty in a Cross-National Context," in *Understanding Poverty*, Sheldon Danziger and Robert H. Haveman, eds. (New York: Russell Sage, 2001) pp. 162-89.
Theda Skocpol, "Targeting Within Universalism: Politically Viable Policies to Combat Poverty in the United States," in Christopher Jencks and Paul E. Peterson, *The Urban Underclass* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1991) pp. 411-36.

16. The Rights Revolution Meets Economic Inequality

Douglas S. Massey, Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) Chaps. 1, 3, 4, 6.

Randy Albelda and Chris Tilly, *Glass Ceilings and Bottomless Pits: Women's Work, Women's Poverty* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1997).

17. Case #1: Health

Helen Epstein, "Enough to Make You Sick?" *New York Times*, October 12, 2003.

*"Covering the Uninsured," in *The CQ Researcher, Issues for Debate in American Public Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc, 2004) pp. 41-59.

18. Case #2: Education

Jennifer L. Hochschild and Nathan Scovronick, *The American Dream and the Public Schools* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) Chaps. 1-3.

*"Testing in Schools," in *The CQ Researcher, Issues for Debate in American Public Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc, 2003) pp. 21-40.

19. Case #3: Tax Policy

Christopher Howard, "The Hidden Side of the American Welfare State," *Political Science Quarterly* Vol. 108, No. 3 (Autumn 1993): 403-436.

20. Case #4: Family Support

Janet C. Gornick and Marcia K. Meyers, *Families That Work: Policies for Reconciling Parenthood and Employment* (New York: Russell Sage 2003) selected chapters.

*"Welfare Reform," in *The CQ Researcher, Issues for Debate in American Public Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc, 2003) pp. 101-26.

21. Case #5: Incarceration

*“Prison-Building Boom,” in *The CQ Researcher, Issues in Social Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc, 2000) pp. 135-52.
Marc Mauer, “Mass Imprisonment and the Disappearing Voters,” and
Bruce Western, Becky Petit, and Josh Guetzkow. “Black Economic Progress in the Era of
Mass Imprisonment,” both in *Invisible Punishment* M. Mauer and M. Chesney-
Lind, ed. (New York: The New Press, 2002) pp. 50-58, 165-80.

22. Case #6: Social Security

*“Retirement Security,” in *The CQ Researcher, Issues for Debate in American Public Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc, 2004) pp. 99-118.

V. Looking to the Past and Future

23. Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003).

24. William Julius Wilson, *The Bridge Over the Racial Divide: Rising Inequality and Coalition Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

* Readings marked by an asterisk are chosen as preparation for in-class debates. Instructors not planning to hold debates may wish to replace these with other readings on each subject.

Sample Assignment for Research Paper

Instructor: Suzanne Mettler
Syracuse University

Spring Semester 2004

Research Project, Inequality and Civic Engagement in American Politics

The quality of life in the United States varies considerably from neighborhood to neighborhood. Generally speaking, such disparities have sharpened as economic inequality has grown over the last 30 years. Your task is to acquaint yourself with the socio-economic features of two distinct neighborhoods that exist in the same general vicinity, typically in the same county or congressional district, and then, subsequently, to conduct a political or civic analysis comparing the two places. The purpose of this assignment is to facilitate understanding of the relationship between economic inequality and democracy by illuminating the dynamics operating at the local level, and by considering them in relationship to national developments.

You may choose localities in the Syracuse area, or elsewhere in the United States (such as near where you are from) as long as you will be able to spend some time there between now and late March. The research will proceed in a few steps. First, you will do two brief assignments to help acquaint you with the socio-economic well-being of the two neighborhoods and to compare them. Then, you will conduct civic/political analysis, and write a research paper.

- A) *Initial Socio-economic Comparison, due in class on February 16.*
- a. Decide on the two neighborhoods you will compare. Pick one that you consider a fairly wealthy neighborhood, and one that you think of as relatively impoverished.
 - b. Using the census web site's Fact-Finder (<http://factfinder.census.gov>), gather data. First, print out a "fact sheet" for each neighborhood (typically defined by either name or zip code; the maps section on this page can help you figure out the latter.) Compare the two neighborhoods, and make a list of the 5-7 disparities (or similarities) which you find most striking.
 - c. Then, spend time perusing this web site under the categories "people" and "housing." Explore 5-7 more particular aspects of each locality. Write a couple of paragraphs about your findings, your reflections upon them, and any questions they raise in your mind.
 - d. Staple together and turn in: the 2 fact sheets, and your written responses.

Note: If it turns out that your neighborhoods are fairly similar in median family income and/or in the percentage of adults who have college degrees, I will likely urge you to replace one of them with a neighborhood that differs quite considerably.

- B) *On-Site Visits to Each Neighborhood, can be handed in at any time, March 31 at the latest.* Go to each of the neighborhoods, and explore them, keeping your eyes and ears open in the manner of a social scientist. Observe:

- a) the type, age, and state of repair of the housing stock;
- b) the number, type and variety of businesses;
- c) the primary mode of transportation and availability of public transportation;
- d) visit 2 local grocery stores in each area to assess availability, prices, and quality of products, being careful to note differences. Compare the quality of produce and cost – lettuce, tomatoes, in-season fruit. Get specific price comparisons for one brand of cereal, milk, orange juice, bread, ground beef, chicken, baby food/formula, and diapers.
- e) the number and quality of local parks and public recreational facilities in each area. Assess quality and quantity of facilities. (Phone calls or county literature may assist you here.)

Write up your findings in a 2-3 page report, with list of price comparisons attached, and hand in.

C) *The Research Paper*

Please choose between the following topics. You should decide on your topic, and let me know what it is, by *February 23*. The final paper, which should be 10-12 pages (typed, double-spaced, with a title page, parenthetical citations, and a bibliography) in length, will be due in class on *April 14*. Students will also do presentations on their findings in class, from *April 5-27*.

You will want to draw on the data you collected for the first two assignments in your research paper. As well, you should collect additional data and reports, and may conduct some interviews with public officials, civic leaders, or others if you wish. Be sure to also draw on appropriate readings from class to put your findings in context. Use graphs and tables to summarize quantitative data. Below each question below, see additional tips to guide you in your research.

1. *Political Participation and Representation*

While most Americans are willing to tolerate economic inequality, they generally support the principle of political equality, meaning that all citizens are equal before the law and have equal political rights. Evaluate the degree of political voice and the amount of political influence in each of your two neighborhoods. Do your findings suggest that political equality exists? Why or why not? Does it matter?

Suggestions:

*Compare voter registration rates, partisanship, and turnout rates across localities for local, congressional, and presidential elections. To do this, you will need to visit the county board of elections. (This will require that you find out which wards are included in your neighborhoods. In some localities, this data will be available on the internet, but typically you will need to go in person to request it. Check out county web sites to explore such possibilities.)

*Compare the extent to which each neighborhood seems to be, in effect, represented by the Member of Congress. (*Note: this comparison will be*

especially interesting if your two neighborhoods are both in the same congressional district.) Check out his/her voting record on several issues. To what extent does it seem responsive to needs in each area? Also, has the Member of Congress addressed particular needs in each area? You might call the local office or check out the web site of the MC to explore this.

*Learn what you can about politically active groups in each neighborhood. What are goals? To what extent do public officials seem to pay attention to them, mobilize them, count on them for support, and address their needs?

*In your paper, be sure to discuss your findings as they relate to readings by Schlozman, Rosenstone and Hansen, Bartels, Stonecash, and any others you find relevant.

2. *Educational Opportunity*

Historically, Americans have valued the role of education in providing equal opportunity to citizens, and support for government spending on education has increased with time. The modern economy bestows an income premium on the most highly educated people. How do your two neighborhoods compare in terms of granting equal access to education and equal quality of education? To the extent that educational outcomes are unequal between the two neighborhoods, do you attribute these disparities to educational policies, other policies, or other factors? What difference do disparities make for political equality? Explain.

Suggestions:

*Assess and compare the two along lines of test scores, graduation rates, per pupil spending, percentage of student body with special needs, local tax base, amount of state & federal funding, and average teacher salary. Investigate the politics of each school district in recent years, probing the nature of the most pressing concerns and how they have been handled.

*In the course of your research, try to visit a school in each neighborhood. Call ahead to ask if you may have a tour. (Note that administrators may not be able or willing to grant your request.) Observe general up-keep of physical properties, as well as number and types of resources (i.e. size and “goodness” of library, number of computers, gym facilities, technology labs, etc).

* For data on your selected schools, go to the state web site. In New York, <www.emsc.nysed.gov> this will give you average school test scores and “report card” on how your chosen school is doing compared to national standards. Also see the Census web site (under “people”) for other kinds of data about educational attainment.

*Also explore data available at the National Center for Education Statistics, <www.prospect.org/web/printfriendly-view.wv?id=5365>.

*In your paper, be sure to discuss your findings as they relate to course readings by Massey and Denton, Hochschild and Scovronick, Schlozman, and any others you find relevant.

3. *Assessing the Impact of the Rights Revolution*

Several decades have passed since the United States eradicated formal laws and overt practices which sanctioned discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity. Considering life in the two neighborhoods you have studied, do the promises of the “rights revolution”—greater racial equality and integration—seem to have been realized, or not? Explain. In the course of your essay, explore the extent to which integration, across lines of race and ethnicity, has grown or diminished over the last few decades. To what extent has each neighborhood witnessed economic growth or decline, and educational advancement or set-backs? To the extent that disparities exist, to what factors are they attributable? What does your analysis reveal about contemporary economic inequality, in terms of causes, depth, and possible solutions? How could government help facilitate better outcomes?

*This analysis may be particularly illuminating if you compare an urban and a suburban neighborhood.

*Use Census data to examine shifts in the racial/ethnic composition of each neighborhood over time, as well as shifts in average property values, home ownership rates, median income, employment rates and other SES measures.

*Interview community leaders about causes and consequences of in-migration or out-migration (or the lack thereof) in the neighborhood over time, as well as the sources of economic well-being (or deterioration) over time.

*In your paper, be sure to discuss your findings as they relate to readings by Massey and Denton, Epstein, Mullahy & Wolfe, Hochschild and Scovronick, Wilson, and any others you find relevant.

4. *Civic Engagement*

Scholars suggest that active participation in civic organizations has several important effects for social, economic, and political life at the community level and beyond. Conduct an assessment of the “civic health” of each neighborhood, and compare and contrast them in terms of the degree and types of civic involvement. How might civic engagement in each place have been affected by economic trends, and to what extent does it ameliorate or exacerbate such effects? To explore this question, inventory existing groups in each place, and to assess the extent to which civic involvement seems to be rising or declining. What types of groups are most active and important in each neighborhood today? What are their primary goals, and what public issues do they focus on or what community services do they perform, if any? Are neighborhood improvement projects carried out primarily by groups of local residents, or by advocacy groups either within the community or from elsewhere? To what extent do civic groups in each locality seem to have some political influence or serve as means for mobilization by political leaders and candidates?

* Use data from the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey, as long as you are studying Onondaga County of New York, or any of over 35 localities surveyed for this project <www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/scc_bench.html>.

*Interview some leaders of civic organizations. Ask them about their group’s purpose, activities, membership levels, and the rise or decline in memberships over time.

*Attend a church service in each neighborhood, if possible.

*In your paper, be sure to discuss your findings as they relate to readings by Putnam, Skocpol, Wilson, Schlozman, Rosenstone & Hansen, and any others you find relevant.