



Module Title: Social Stratification and Inequalities 1

Module Code: SOU33041

Module Name: Social Stratification and Inequalities 1: Theories, Realities, and Representations of Social Inequality

- **ECTS Weighting: 5**
- **Semester/Term Taught: Michaelmas Term**
- **Contact Hours: 22**
- **Module Personnel: Dr Nicole Kapelle**

Module Learning Aims

- To provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical and empirical foundations of social stratification and inequality.
- To explore key dimensions of inequality, such as power, class, race, gender, and education, and their interconnections.
- To develop students' ability to critically analyze social inequality through both academic literature and visual media.
- To encourage students to reflect on the future challenges of inequality and potential sociological contributions to addressing them.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of key concepts, theories, and dimensions of social stratification and inequality.
- Critically analyze empirical evidence on the causes and consequences of inequality.
- Apply sociological theories to interpret visual and cultural representations of inequality.
- Evaluate global and local strategies for reducing inequality and promoting social justice.
- Communicate complex ideas effectively through writing, discussion, and group presentations.

Module Content:

Social stratification and inequality are central to understanding how societies function and evolve. Throughout history, human societies have developed systems that categorize individuals and groups into hierarchical structures, influencing their access to resources, opportunities, and power. These hierarchies are shaped by a



combination of economic, political, and cultural factors, and they persist through complex interactions between individuals, institutions, and broader social forces.

Understanding social stratification requires a critical examination of the mechanisms that create and sustain inequalities, as well as their consequences for individuals and societies. Inequality is not only an economic phenomenon but also intersects with issues of identity, social mobility, and power. Exploring these intersections helps to illuminate how structural advantages and disadvantages are perpetuated over time and across generations.

This course delves into the ways in which individuals and groups are hierarchically organized, examining the social, economic, and political processes that maintain these structures. By exploring topics such as class, power, race, and gender, the course highlights how inequality shapes opportunities, behaviors, and outcomes. We will investigate both historical and contemporary mechanisms that create and perpetuate stratification, drawing on empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks from sociology and related disciplines.

In addition to academic inquiry, the course fosters critical thinking through visual analyses, encouraging students to interpret and critique depictions of inequality in media and culture. By connecting abstract concepts to real-world phenomena, students will gain a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of inequality and the tools to engage with contemporary debates. The course equips students to reflect on possible solutions to reduce disparities and promote equity in various social contexts.

Through theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, students will gain a critical understanding of the structural and cultural processes underpinning inequality. The course also integrates sociological analyses of visual media, encouraging students to connect abstract concepts to real-world representations. By the end of the module, students will be equipped to engage with contemporary debates on inequality and to think critically about solutions to address social disparities.

The following topics are covered across the weeks:

- Classical and Contemporary Theories of Social Stratification
- Economic Inequality, Employment and Precarity
- Power and Privilege
- Racial and Gender Inequality
- Education and Mobility
- Global and Future Challenges

Recommended Reading List:

Each module week will contain 'required resources'. Students are expected to carefully study these central resources, which will represent the essential material for the lectures and tutorials. In addition to this, each lecture topic will contain various 'optional resources' that are recommended for students in order to prepare the module, the tutorials, and assignments.



Some general books, while only recommended, can provide useful knowledge for students to prepare the content of the module around some of the key topics covered in class. The following books could provide a useful guide for students:

- Grusky, D. (2011). *The Inequality Reader: Contemporary and Foundational Readings in Race, Class, and Gender* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429494468>
- Grusky, D.B. (2014). *Social Stratification: Class, Race, and Gender in Sociological Perspective* (4th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429494642>
- Tilly, C. (1998). *Durable Inequality* (1st ed.). University of California Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1ppftj>
- Breen, R. (Ed.) (2004). *Social Mobility in Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Harvard University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt6wpqbc>
- Savage, M. (2000) *Class Analysis and Social Transformation*. Open University

And if you prefer to watch a movie:

- *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2020): Based on Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Harvard University Press.

Module Pre-Requisite:

This is an advanced undergraduate module. Students enrolling should have:

- A basic familiarity with sociological theory and empirical research;
- The ability to critically read and interpret academic texts, synthesize theoretical arguments, and express complex ideas in writing and discussion.

While no statistical or quantitative skills are formally required, students should be prepared to engage with empirical data and theoretical debates on inequality using both written texts and visual media.

Assessment Details:

1. Photo Assignment (50%): Each student will submit five original photographs, taken by themselves, illustrating examples of social inequality observed in their daily lives. A brief reflective commentary must accompany the images, linking them to course concepts and sociological theories.

2. Group Film Analysis (50%): Students will be randomly assigned to groups to complete a written analysis of a contemporary movie, focusing on sociological themes of inequality discussed in class.



- Attendance at designated in-class group work sessions is required. Failure to attend without a valid reason will result in a 10% deduction from the individual's mark.
- A single grade will be awarded to the group, based on the quality of analysis, integration of theory, and collaboration.