Economic inequality has increased significantly in recent decades. In this course we explore the impact of public policies and programs on the distribution of income, wealth and opportunity in the United States with a particular focus on inequalities across racial and ethnic groups. The course begins with an introduction to key concepts in the measurement of inequality and poverty and an overview of recent trends within and between groups. We then turn to systematically analyze how public policy shapes inequality across a range of topical areas including labor markets, education, taxation, health, housing and criminal justice. The course will also include a critical examination of the role of race in shaping public opinion and public policymaking from key historical moments to the present.

Throughout the course students will analyze the impact of existing policies as well as critically evaluate the potential impact of proposed policies on inequality. Readings will be drawn from across the social sciences and from a range of governmental and non-governmental organizations with the goal of equipping students with the background and knowledge necessary to actively engage in these ongoing policy debates.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

- Students will be able to assess and interpret empirical analyses of poverty, inequality and economic mobility.
- Students will be able to identify and evaluate the role of public policies and programs in mitigating or exacerbating social and economic inequality both within and between groups.
- Students will be able to write an original policy memo analyzing the impact of a proposed policy change
- Students will be able to persuasively advocate for a proposed policy change.

**READINGS**

There are two required texts:

Additional course readings will be made available online.

**WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS**

As part of the course, students will be required to write two original policy memos. In Policy Memo #1, students will critically evaluate an existing public policy or program and its impact on inequality within and between groups. In Policy Memo #2, students will design and advocate for an original public policy intervention aimed at reducing inequality; this memo will form the basis of a short (5-7 min) in-class presentation. **Note: One of the memos must specifically address how the focal policy or program serves to reproduce, exacerbate or mitigate inequalities between racial and ethnic groups.** Memos should be 4-5 double spaced pages and directly engage with readings from the course as well as studies published in academic journals as well as reports produced by government agencies and reputable think tanks. In consultation with the instructor, enrolled graduate students are required to submit a more detailed policy analysis paper (10-15 pp.) that engages extensively with relevant research in peer-reviewed academic journals.

Students will also be asked to post occasional responses to readings on the course website.

**ASSESSMENT**

Grades will be assigned based on the following:

- Policy Memo #1 25%
- Policy Memo #2 25%
- Policy Presentation 15%
- Short In-Class Exam 25%
- Attendance and Participation 10%

With final grades assigned out of 100 total percentage points:

93-100=A; 88-92=AB; 83-87=B; 78-82=BC; 70-77=C; 70-60=D <60=F

Note: Students are expected to be familiar with and adhere to University of Wisconsin policies regarding academic honesty and integrity. See: [students.wisc.edu/doso/academic-integrity/](students.wisc.edu/doso/academic-integrity/)
WEEK 1

Day 1. Introduction: Thinking and Talking About Inequality
• Butler, Stuart. 2015. “Taking Culture Seriously” Brookings

Day 2. Poverty: Measurement and Concepts
• Tim Smeeding “Poverty Measurement” in D. Brady and L. Burton, eds., The Oxford Handbook of Poverty and Society, Oxford University Press
• Who is Poor? (IRP Fact Sheet)
• How is poverty measured? (IRP Fact Sheet)

Day 3. Income Inequality: Measurement and Concepts
• “Inequality Matters” Jared Bernstein and Ben Spielberg. The Atlantic Magazine.
• “On Views of Race and Inequality, Blacks and Whites are Worlds Apart” Pew Research Center.
• Income Inequality. Jeffrey Thompson and Timothy Smeeding. Pathways Magazine.
• Striking it Richer: The Evolution of the Incomes of the Top 1%. Emmanuel Saez.

• Exploding Wealth Inequality in the United States. Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman.
• Why Assets Matter. CFED.

WEEK 2

• Katznelson-When Affirmative Action Was White
  o Preface: Du Bois’s Paradox
  o Chapter 1: Doctor of Laws
  o Chapter 2: Welfare in Black and White
  o Chapter 3: Rules for Work
Day 6. Labor Markets
- Little Labor: How Union Decline is Changing the American Landscape. Jake Rosenfeld.

Day 7. Income Support Programs

Day 8. Taxation
- Excerpts from Taxing the Poor: Doing Damage to the Truly Disadvantaged. Katherine Newman and Rourke O’Brien.

WEEK 3

Day 9. How Race Shaped the American Welfare State (Part 2)
- Katznelson-When Affirmative Action Was White
  - Chapter 5: White Veterans Only
  - Chapter 6: Johnson’s Ambitions, Powell’s Principles: Thoughts on Renewing Affirmative Action.

Day 10. Education I: Early Childhood through High School

Day 11. Education II: Higher education
- Race and Stratification in College Enrollment Over Time. Rachel Baker, Daniel Klasik, Sean F. Reardon.
Day 12. Health & Health Care
- Beyond Health Care: The Role of Social Determinants in Promoting Health and Health Equity. Harry J. Heiman and Samantha Artiga. Kaiser Family Foundation.
- Excerpts From: Unequal Health Outcomes in the United States.
- Poverty May Hinder Kids’ Brain Development.

WEEK 4

Day 13. Race and Attitudes Towards Redistribution
- Gilens-Why Americans Hate Welfare
  - Chapter 3: Racial Attitudes, the Undeserving Poor, and Opposition to Welfare
  - Chapter 5: The News Media and the Racialization of Poverty
  - Chapter 6: Media Distortions: Causes and Consequences

Day 14. Housing & Neighborhoods
- “Do housing vouchers work?” Robert Haveman.
- Excerpt from “Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City” Matthew Desmond.

Day 15. Criminal Justice and Incarceration
- Mass Incarceration, Visualized (Bruce Western, Harvard University)
- Racial Disparities in Youth Commitments and Arrests. The Sentencing Project.

Day 16. Student presentations