Course Description
While social scientists have long been interested in the issue of economic inequality, it has only recently resurfaced in popular discussions. Current interest in inequality in the United States has been stimulated by the “Occupy Wall Street” movement and the recognition that most of the income gains of the past three decades have been captured by the very rich (the top 1 percent, especially the top 0.1%). The global recession has also raised concern about international inequality and the plight of the approximately 2 billion people worldwide who are poor and hungry. Concerns about income inequality center on two sets of issues. First, the unequal distribution of income or other essential goods may be judged to be inherently unfair violating norms of distributive justice. Second, inequality may be the cause of other problems such as distortions in the political system, reduced economic growth or unacceptable health disparities. On the other hand, inequality may be the natural consequence of differences in skill or effort so that attempts to reduce it could lower the incentives for hard work and innovation making everyone worse off. The purpose of this seminar is to explore issues related to U.S. and global inequality including the current state of inequality and its causes and consequences.

The seminar is organized around a fairly large set of readings (six books and 22 shorter articles). The specific readings for each session are listed in the Course Outline. Discussion of these readings will be led by students participating in the seminar. Beyond leading discussions of the readings, there are two writing assignments. The first is a comprehensive review of one or more books or articles due in class on November 19. Six of the required articles (those by Singer, Freeman, Solow, Groopman, and the two by Sunstein) are well-written book reviews from the New York Review of Books that can also serve as models for this exercise. The second writing exercise is a short “op-ed” piece that might be posted as a blog or sent to the Lincoln Journal-Star or a home-town newspaper for publication on the editorial page due in class on December 3. Students will present their op-ed pieces at the last class on December 10. Students may choose whatever books, literature or topics related to inequality to address. Further instructions for these assignments will be given as the term progresses.

Discussion of each of the six books required for this seminar (see below) will be led by teams of two or three students. The instructor will lead the discussion of the first book by Rousseau during the second class section. The other books will be discussed over two class sessions except for the last book by Piketty for which three class sessions have been reserved. The way in which the discussion is organized and conducted is up to the responsible team. In addition to participating in one of the teams charged with leading the discussion of a book, each student will also lead discussion of two or three of the shorter articles. Sign-up lists for the book teams and individual articles will be circulated at the first class session.

Although my background is in economics, I have tried to find a wide range of reading material and wish to encourage students to bring in additional information and ideas from different perspectives. Of the six books, three were written by economists (Deaton, Milanovic and
Piketty), two were written by philosophers (Rousseau and Fleishacker) and one was written by a political scientist (Gilens). Although economics will figure prominently in most of the discussions, there are no economics prerequisites and students should be able to follow the admittedly complex arguments advanced in the readings without substantial background in economics or the social sciences. The students participating in this seminar come from a wide range of backgrounds and this diversity will add significantly to the quality of our deliberations. All points of view are welcome.

**Required Readings**

A. Core books:


5. *Affluence and Influence: Economic Inequality and Political Power in America* by Martin Gilens.


B. Shorter readings (All are posted on Blackboard. Full citations can be found in the bibliography following the seminar outline):

- Aug. 27: “Inequality is Not Inevitable” by Joseph Stiglitz
  “For Richer, for Poorer” *The Economist*

- Sept. 3: “Is Violence History?” by Peter Singer
  “The Ancient Roots of the 1%” by Heather Pringle
  “Our Egalitarian Eden” by Elisabeth Pennisi

- Sept. 10: “Property and Ownership” by Jeremy Waldron

- Sept. 17: “How do We Know What’s Moral?” by Cass Sunstein
  “A New Theory of Justice” by Samuel Freeman

  “The Body and Human Progress” by Groopman

- Oct. 1: “Can Disparities be Deadly?” by Emily Underwood
  “Cosmopolitanism after 9/11” by David Held

- Oct. 8: “Economic Growth and Income Inequality” by Simon Kuznets
Oct. 15: “While Emerging Economies Boom, Equality goes bust” by Mara Hvistendahl
   “Summary: Human Development Report 2013” by UN Development Program

Oct. 22: “The Upside of Income Inequality” by Becker and Murphy
   “Thinking Clearly about Economic Inequality” by Will Wilkinson
   “Defending the One Percent” by N. Gregory Mankiw
   “The Many Ways to Measure Economic Inequality” by DeSilver

Oct. 29: “Skills, Education, and the rise of Earnings Inequalities among the ‘Other 99 Percent’”
   by Autor
   “An Original Thinker of Our Time” by Sunstein

Nov. 5: “The Rise and Consequences of Inequality in the United States” by Alan B. Krueger

**Seminar Outline**

Session 1 (Aug 27): Introduction to the Seminar.
Read “Inequality is not Inevitable,” by Joseph Stiglitz and “For Richer, for Poorer,” The Economist.
   – 2:00 to 3:10: Introduction to the course: seminar organization, requirements, discussion leader sign-ups and introductions.
   – 3:10 to 3:20: Break.

Part I: Equality and distributive justice

Session 2 (Sept 3): Why is there inequality in human populations?
   – Read Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Note: be sure to read the introduction as well as the discourse. Try to look at the notes and other documents included in the book).
   – Read “Is Violence History?” Peter Singer’s review of Our Better Angels (S. Pinker); “The Ancient Roots of the 1%” by Heather Pringle and “Our Egalitarian Eden” by Elisabeth Pennisi.
   – 2:00 to 3:10: The origins of inequality. (Rousseau)
   – 3:10 to 3:20: Break
   – 3:20 to 4:20: Has human society always been unequal? (Pringle and Pennisi). What should we assume about human nature? (Singer)

Session 3 (Sept 10): What have philosophers said about the fair or just distribution of the good things in life?
   – Read pages 1 to 68 of A Short History of Distributive Justice (Fleischacker).
   – 2:00 to 3:10: From the Greeks to Adam Smith on distributive justice. (Fleischacker)
   – 3:10 to 3:20: Break
   – 3:20 to 4:20: What is “property?” (Waldron)

Session 4 (Sept 17): What is distributed under distributive justice?
   – Read Fleischacker, pages 69-133.
– 2:00 to 3:10: The modern philosophic view of distributive justice. (Fleischacker)
– 3:10 to 3:20: Break
– 3:20 to 4:20: Equality of what? What exactly is to be distributed? (Sunstein and Freeman)

Session 5 (Sept 24): What does it take to be well off? Health and wealth from prehistory to the modern world
– Read introduction and part I of The Great Escape by Deaton.
– 2:00 to 3:10: History of wellbeing in human societies. (Deaton)
– 3:10 to 3:20: Break
– 3:20 to 4:20: Why Malthus was wrong. (Solow and Groopman)

Session 6 (Oct 1): Will the global poor catch up?
– Read parts II and III of The Great Escape.
– Read “Can Disparities be Deadly?” by Emily Underwood and “Cosmopolitanism after 9/11” by David Held.
– 2:00 to 3:10: What is the relation between economic inequality and health? (Deaton)
– 3:10 to 3:20: Break
– 3:20 to 4:20: What do we owe the less fortunate? (Underwood and Held)

Part II: The state of inequality in the world.

Session 7 (Oct 8): What is the current state of within-country inequality?
– Read the preface and first chapter of The Haves and the Have-Nots by Milanovic.
– Read “Economic Growth and Income Inequality,” by Simon Kuznets.
– 2:00 to 3:10: Inequality within countries: who was the richest person ever? (Milanovic)
– 3:10 to 3:20: Break
– 3:20 to 4:20: The Kuznets curve. (Kuznets)

Session 8 (Oct 15): How important is between-country inequality for global inequality?
– Read chapters 2 and 3 of The Haves and the Have-Nots (Milanovic)
– 2:00 to 3:10: Inequality between countries and global inequality. (Milanovic)
– 3:10 to 3:20: Break
– 3:20 to 4:20: Politics and inequality in poor countries. (Hvistendahl, UNDP)

Session 9 (Oct 22): Is inequality a bad thing? The other side--
– Read “The Upside of Income Inequality,” by Becker and Murphy; “Thinking Clearly about Economic Inequality,” by Wilkinson; “Defending the One Percent,” by Mankiw; and “The Many Ways to Measure Economic Inequality” by DeSilver.
– 2:00 to 3:10: The argument against worrying about inequality. (Becker/Murphy, Wilkinson, Mankiw and DeSilver)
– 3:10 to 3:20: Break
– 3:20 to 4:20: Discussion of hunger, poverty and inequality in Lincoln with Scott Young, Director of the Lincoln Food bank.

Part III: Causes and consequences of inequality

Session 10 (Oct 29): Do public policies in the United States reflect the views of the majority?
– Read Chapters 1 to 4 of Affluence and Inequality by Martin Gilens.

– 2:00 to 3:10: Final comments on the benefits of inequality. Democracy and inequality, (Gilens)
– 3:10 to 3:20: Break
– 3:20 to 4:20: The rhetoric of reaction (Sunstein and Autor).

– Read Chapters 5 to 8 of Affluence and Inequality by Gilens.
– Read “The Rise and Consequences of Inequality in the United States” by A. H. Krueger.

– 2:00 to 3:10: Interest groups, political parties and democratic responsiveness. (Gilens)
– 3:10 to 3:20: Break

Session 12 (Nov 12): Capital and Income.
– Read Introduction and Parts One and Two of Capital in the 21st Century by T. Piketty.

– 2:00 to 3:10: What is capital? (Piketty)
– 3:10 to 3:20: Break
– 3:20 to 4:20: How has capital changed over the long run? (Piketty)

Session 13 (Nov 19): The structure of inequality.
– Read Part Three of Capital in the 21st Century by T. Piketty
Review Papers submitted as electronic files emailed to instructor during the day.

– 2:00 to 3:10: Inequality of labor income over time. (Piketty)
– 3:10 to 3:20: Break
– 3:20 to 4:20: Inequality in the ownership of capital. (Piketty)

Session 14 (Dec 3): Regulating capital in the 21st century.
– Read Part Four and the Conclusion of Capital in the 21st Century by T. Piketty.
Op-ed pieces emailed to instructor during the day.

– 2:00 to 3:10: Income and wealth taxes. (Piketty)
– 3:10 to 3:20: Break
– 3:20 to 4:20: Is income inequality really a problem? Free discussion--

Session 15 (Dec 10): Wrap-up and student presentations of op-ed pieces.
– 2:00 to 3:10: Student presentations of op-ed pieces.
– 3:10 to 3:20: Break
– 3:20 to 4:20: Free discussion of the seminar including student comments on which readings seemed useful and which did not.
Inequality Bibliography


Butler, Jeffrey V. (No date). “Inequality and Relative Ability Beliefs,” unpublished manuscript, Einaudi Institute for Economics and Finance, Rome, Italy.


