

Instructor: Professor Brielle Bryan (briellebryan@rice.edu), 265 Kraft Hall

Class Meets: 1:00-2:15pm, Tuesdays & Thursdays
129 Herring Hall

Open Door Hours 9:30-11:30am Tuesdays & by appointment
265 Kraft Hall

Course Description

Who gets what and why? Social inequality refers to the ways in which socially determined categories of people (e.g., race, class, and gender) are hierarchically positioned in terms of access to social goods (e.g., income, wealth, education, and healthcare). This course investigates the causes and consequences of social inequality in the US, including differential access to opportunities as well as differential rewards when those opportunities are accessible. We will consider American inequality in global and historical context, and we will pay particular attention to contextualizing the fault lines and inequalities laid bare by the medical, social, and economic upheavals that emerged over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Course Objectives

This course aims to: (1) help you understand that macro-level social structures influence individual-level outcomes, (2) enable you to see social inequality at work in the world around you, and (3) encourage you to consider ways to alter social inequality. A further aim of this course is to improve students' critical thinking and communication skills. By the end of the semester, students who complete this course should be able to thoughtfully and critically engage with contemporary debates around inequality in American society.

Accessing Required Readings & Media

All required readings will be downloadable as PDFs or linked to from the Canvas course site (<http://www.rice.edu/canvas/>). Additionally, students will occasionally be asked to listen to podcast episodes or view episodes or clips from television shows in preparation for class meetings. Links to podcasts and videos will be provided on the course website.

Course Policies

Classroom Climate: Discussing race, class, and gender are not only unavoidable but necessary in a class about social inequality. I realize that students in the course will have varying levels of comfort in discussing these issues and varying background experiences informing their discussion of these topics. My goal for the semester is that everyone gets comfortable with having the challenging, potentially uncomfortable discussions that are crucial to understanding social inequality. The best way to ensure that we can be comfortable in having these uncomfortable conversations is by being respectful of one another. Being respectful does not mean you should sit in resentful silence, however, when you disagree with something someone has said. When you

disagree, please take a moment to collect your thoughts (I suggest writing down what you disagree with in the comment and why), then raise your hand and share your thoughts. We best accord each other respect – and make the most progress toward a civil, informed, and engaged society – when we take the time to try to both understand and inform each other. A final key to engaging in difficult conversations in a respectful way (particularly when some students may be working through these issues for the first time while others may feel they've wrestled with these topics and conversations for years) is keeping in-class discussions confidential. Anything said by another student in class should automatically be considered confidential unless a student has obtained permission from their classmate to share what was said (e.g., "I liked what you said and was wondering if I could share it with my roommate").

Attendance: Small-group discussions will be a key component of this course; therefore, attendance is expected at all class sessions. If you are feeling unwell, however, please stay home for your sake and that of your peers! Our classroom is not well equipped for dual delivery, therefore I cannot share recordings of class sessions with students who are unable to attend in person. I will always post lectures slides, however, and I will always be happy to share the discussion questions/prompts with students who miss class.

For student athletes who must miss class sessions, please contact me in the first two weeks of the semester to discuss it. If any circumstances arise that are adversely affecting your performance in the course (e.g., if you are ill and must miss a number of classes), please reach out to me so we can discuss it.

Questions about Assignments: If you have a question about any of the assignments or exams, you're probably not the only one. Thus, for the sake of fairness and full information for all, I will only answer general questions about upcoming assignments and exams either (1) in class or (2) in the Canvas discussion board devoted to this topic. If you wish to talk about the particulars of *your* project or about feedback/grades you received on already submitted assignments or completed exams, I am of course happy to discuss with you privately.

Assignment Deadlines: Assignment deadlines are scheduled to ensure that I will be able to give you timely feedback, and I will always prioritize grading for assignments that were turned in on time. If you turn an assignment in late, I will still grade it, but I cannot promise you that I will be able to do so quickly. This will be particularly pertinent for your (1) policy memo proposal – a late submission of your proposal will mean you have less time to incorporate my feedback in your final policy memo, and (2) your final policy memo. If you turn in your final policy memo after the deadline and I do not have time to grade it before I begin grading final exams, I will only grade it after I submit grades for students who completed all assignments on time. Thus, you may risk receiving an 'incomplete' in the class if I am not able to grade your submission before final grades are due to the registrar.

PPE & Physical Distancing: Always come to class with a mask. The professor reserves the right to require students to wear masks during class and to change this policy over the course of the semester. Moreover, please respect the wishes of any classmate sitting at your table who requests that you wear a mask. If this irks you, the great thing about class is that it's only 75 minutes long. If

students do not comply, the professor may cancel the class meeting and refer the student to Student Judicial Programs and the Dean of Undergraduates or the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

Statement on Disabilities: If you have a documented disability that may affect academic performance, you should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with Disability Support Services (Allen Center, Room 111). You may contact the Director of Disability Support Services Alan Russell at adarice@rice.edu or 713-348-5841 to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) meet with me to discuss your accommodation needs. All conversations will remain confidential.

Honor Code at Rice University: In this course, all students will be held to the standards of the Rice Honor Code, a code that you pledged to honor when you matriculated at this institution. If you are unfamiliar with the details of this code and how it is administered, you should consult the Honor System Handbook at <http://honor.rice.edu/honor-system-handbook/>. This handbook outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of your academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. When in doubt about what constitutes academic dishonesty, please ask! Ignorance of this policy is not an acceptable excuse for noncompliance.

Syllabus Change Policy: This syllabus is only a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice. Always attending class will ensure that you're never in the dark about syllabus changes!

Course Requirements

1. Attendance, Participation, & Punctuality: 10%

The format of this class is designed to encourage all students to engage in conversations with peers and, hopefully, the whole class on the topics that we cover. But I also understand that differing personalities mean that active participation will look different across students. Class participation comes in a variety of forms beyond "talking in class," and these skills can be developed over time, just like any other skill you work on as a student. Your attendance/participation grade will, therefore, be self-assessed based on individual attendance and participation goals you set at the start of the semester.

We'll discuss how participation and attendance will be assessed in class (and there's more information on the course Canvas page), but please note: I encourage regular, on-time attendance in class. There are components of our class that cannot be made up if you miss class regularly, and your performance in class (and your final grade) will suffer if you are absent more than a few times over the course of the semester. It's also distracting to me and to your classmates if you arrive late or leave early on a regular basis. If you know something will cause you to miss class (e.g., a religious observance or an academic/team conflict), please let me know as soon as possible at the start of the semester so we can make alternative arrangements. If a situation arises where you will miss a significant portion of

class (say, more than a week at a time), let me know as soon as you can and we'll figure it out together.

2. Discussion Leadership: 10%

You will be responsible for leading class discussion once during the semester (usually in tandem with a classmate). You are encouraged to research recent events or statistics relevant to the topic of the week and incorporate these into the discussion. You may ask your peers to do one additional short reading (e.g., a news article) or viewing (e.g., <10 minute long video) either in advance of class or during class to add context or an alternative viewpoint to the assigned readings/materials.

3. Texas Gubernatorial Primary Debate Response Paper (due 8am October 17th): 10%

After watching the Texas gubernatorial primary debate (tentatively scheduled for Sept. 30), submit a write up (1000-1400 words) of at least one form of inequality that came up during the debate, the context in which it was raised, and the types of interventions (if any) that were proposed in response.

4. Policy Memo Topics(s) Proposal (due 8am November 4th): 5%

Briefly describe 1-2 potential topics you are considering for the policy memo assignment and the general type of policy solution(s) you are thinking of proposing/investigating as responses to social inequality topic you're proposing. Your proposed topics may be national or local in focus, and you may propose multiple social inequality issues and/or potential policy responses if you wish to receive feedback to help you decide. The proposal should be approximately 400-600 words in length and include citations as appropriate (i.e., when you are making a claim).

5. Policy Memo (due 8am December 2nd): 25%

For this project, you will extensively research a current social inequality topic of your choosing and submit a 1200-1700 word memo outlining the current and historical contours of the issue, current policies in place that contribute to or attempt to address the issue, and your proposed policy intervention(s) to alleviate or eliminate the social inequality that you've identified. Your topic may be national or local (i.e., city- or even campus-level) in scope. We will discuss the assignment at greater length as the semester goes on.

6. Exams: We will have two take-home exams in the course. The exams will be primarily essay-based and will require you to synthesize and analyze the course readings and lecture material. You will be graded on how well you incorporate all elements of course material into your answers (lectures, readings, class discussions, films, etc.). Exams will be timed and submitted via Canvas.

a. Midterm (due by 8am 10/21): 20%

b. Final (TBD): 20%

Grade Policy

The grading scale is as follows:

A+ 97.5+	C+ 77.5-79.49
A 93.5-97.49	C 73.5-77.49
A- 89.5-93.49	C- 69.5-73.49
B+ 87.5-89.49	D+ 67.5-69.49
B 83.5-87.49	D 63.5-67.49
B- 79.5-83.49	D- 59.5-63.49
	F 59.49 and below

A range	Excellent work. Demonstrates superior ability to creatively and appropriately organize and express ideas, and provides comprehensive and thoughtful responses.
B range	Good work. Demonstrates good organization and expression of ideas, and provides solid responses.
C range	Fair work. Demonstrates moderate skill in organization and expression of ideas, and provides acceptable responses.
D-F range	Marginal to Unacceptable work. Demonstrates little to no clear ability to organize and express ideas in an understandable manner, and provides incomplete responses.

Course Schedule – see Canvas Modules for assigned readings/materials for each session

August 23 (Tues.)	Overview, syllabus, what do we mean by social inequality?
August 25 (Thurs.)	Why do we have inequality?
Poverty & Precarity	
August 30 (Tues.)	Poverty
September 1 (Thurs.)	Poverty & exploitation
September 6 (Tues.)	Housing insecurity
September 8 (Thurs.)	Precarious work
Income & Labor Market Inequality	
September 13 (Tues.)	US income inequality (& growth) in global context
September 15 (Thurs.)	Intergenerational income mobility/inequality
September 20 (Tues.)	Gender inequality in income & the workplace
September 22 (Thurs.)	Gender inequality in income & the workplace (part 2)
September 27 (Tues.)	Income and workplace racial inequality
Wealth Inequality, Segregation & Neighborhoods	
September 29 (Thurs.)	Wealth inequality
October 4 (Tues.)	Wealth inequality continued -- reparations

October 6 (Thurs.)	CLASS CANCELLED
October 11 (Tues.)	NO CLASS -- FALL BREAK
October 13 (Thurs.)	Residential segregation & neighborhoods
October 18 (Tues.)	Housing discrimination & racial steering by real estate agents
October 20 (Thurs.)	MIDTERM (Take home)
Educational Inequality	
October 25 (Tues.)	K-12 schools: inequality in school spending & quality
October 27 (Thurs.)	K-12 schools & segregation
November 1 (Tues.)	Class inequality on college campuses
Policing & Criminal Justice	
November 3 (Thurs.)	Policing & inequality
November 8 (Tues.)	Criminal justice system: historical growth and modern disparities
November 10 (Thurs.)	Criminal justice system: conditions and consequences of contact
Health & Environmental Inequality	
November 15 (Tues.)	Health inequalities
November 17 (Thurs.)	NO CLASS -- catch up on reading and/or work on your policy memo!
November 22 (Tues.)	Health inequalities (part 2)
November 24 (Thurs.)	NO CLASS -- THANKSGIVING BREAK
November 29 (Tues.)	Environmental inequality/injustice
December 1 (Thurs.)	Why do we have inequality (revisited) and where do we go from here?