

## **POLS 4000: Politics, Policy, and Economic Inequality**

Oklahoma State University

Fall 2018

Tuesdays & Thursdays 3:30-4:45

Stout Hall 040

### **I. Instructor Information**

Instructor: Dr. Joshua Jansa  
Email: [joshua.jansa@okstate.edu](mailto:joshua.jansa@okstate.edu)  
Office Location: Murray Hall 233  
Office Hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays 10-12 & 2-3  
Office Phone: 405-744-0420

### **II. Course Overview**

Economic inequality is on the rise worldwide, and is growing especially rapidly in the United States. Many have remarked that the United States and other western democracies have entered a Second Gilded Age. With resources increasingly unequally divided, it is unclear how often elected officials listen to their poor and working class constituents. Can democracy survive when there is such disparity between citizens?

This course explores this question and related topics, such the root causes of increasing economic inequality, and the effectiveness of economic policies in reducing inequality, and consequences of growing inequality, such as resentment, backlash, and authoritarianism.

Students will learn about the course topic through data and narrative. Students will explore descriptive data and statistical estimates related to inequality. The goal is for students to leave the course with a basic ability to comprehend applied data and statistics. Students will also read about people's experiences with poverty and inequality. Class time is dedicated to discussing experiences, connecting those experiences to the empirical data, and, ultimately, putting a human face on class and inequality.

There are several practical benefits of this course. Students have the opportunity to develop skills that are transferable to the workplace, including interpreting data, understanding trends, coming prepared for meetings, critical thinking, clear and concise writing, and respectfully discussing issues with peers.

### **III. Course D2L Website**

To access the course site, go to [online.okstate.edu/d2l/home](https://online.okstate.edu/d2l/home) and sign-in. Start by reading this syllabus. It is posted under the Syllabus tab in the Content section. More often than not, your question will be answered by the syllabus. If you have any problems accessing the course site, please let me know as soon as possible!

#### IV. Student and Instructor Responsibilities

I will work hard to be prepared, enthusiastic, fair, and respectful of every student. I will provide interesting and important readings, lectures, and assignments that will help you better understand the subject and help you practice important skills for success in your careers. I will also be accessible and do my best to return graded materials in a timely fashion.

You are expected to actively engage with course material, to read all assigned material, and complete assignments on time. You are expected to keep up with lectures, grades, and assignments as they are posted to the course D2L site. You are also expected to ask questions about the material when necessary, and provide thoughtful responses on written assignments. A wise colleague once said: **“Do not let your education be the one thing where you expect less for your money.”**

#### V. Assignments and Grading

Your grade for the course will be determined through a weighted grade. The assignments are weighted in the following way:

|                         |     |
|-------------------------|-----|
| Exam #1:                | 15% |
| Exam #2:                | 15% |
| Exam #3:                | 20% |
| Response Papers:        | 10% |
| In-Class Participation: | 15% |
| Research Design:        | 25% |

##### Grade scale

The following grading scale will be used for assigning final letter grades.:

|     |                 |
|-----|-----------------|
| A = | 90.00 – 100.00% |
| B = | 80.00 – 89.99%  |
| C = | 70.00 – 79.99%  |
| D = | 60.00 – 69.99%  |
| F = | 0 – 59.99%      |

**Note on grade scale:** There will be no rounding up of final course grades, nor a grade curve.

##### Exam #1

Exam #1 will be given in class on September 27th. The exam may be a mix of fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, and identification questions. Exam #1 will test your knowledge of the material from August 21st to September 25th. This span covers information on growing inequality and its causes. This exam is worth 15% of your course grade.

##### Exam #2

Exam #2 will be given in class on November 8th. The exam may be a mix of fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, identification, and essay questions. Exam #2 will test your knowledge of the material from October 2nd to November 6th. This span covers information on individual experiences with inequality and government responses to inequality. This exam is worth 15% of your course grade.

### Exam #3

Exam #3 will be given during finals week. The exam will take place during the University-scheduled final exam day and time, which is Tuesday, December 11th at 2:00 PM. The exam may be a mix of fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, and identification questions. Exam #3 will test your knowledge of the material from the entire course, with emphasis on material from November 13th-December 6th. Because of its comprehensive nature, this exam is worth more than your previous exams. This exam is worth 20% of your course grade.

### Participation

Class time will be devoted to discussions of the readings. Lectures by the instructor will be kept to a minimum. Instead, the instructor will help facilitate discussion and place the readings in a broader context. As such, 15% of your final course grade will be determined by your participation in class. Each student should be prepared to discuss each of the assigned readings every week. Excellent participation includes regularly showing up for class, regularly making comments that demonstrate that you've completed the readings, and making an effort to have a productive conversation. You can also earn points by engaging constructively with one another during small-group work or activities. If you are called upon and are unprepared, your participation points will be negatively affected. For the shy, emailing me a few discussion questions or an appropriate current events article before class that I can bring up during discussion will also help you earn participation points. You should not expect to earn an A on participation just by showing up.

### Response Papers

For two of the class sessions, you will be expected to write a short reaction paper. Each is worth 5% for a total of 10% of your final course grade. Papers should be 2-3 pages long and answer the following questions:

1. How do these readings help us better understand inequality?
2. Which main point(s) especially resonated with you and why?
3. What could the author(s) have done better?

I will provide grading criteria at the beginning of the semester. You may sign-up for a third response paper for extra credit.

### Research Design

Students will complete a research design paper related to the course topic. This assignment exposes students to the process of thinking critically about the relationship between two concepts. In the paper, you will hypothesize a relationship between income inequality and some other variable of your choosing. The paper should also specify whether income inequality is the dependent or independent variable, identify the unit of analysis, explore what the literature says about this (or similar) relationships, discuss why understanding this relationship is important, and propose how you would test the relationship.

I will make every effort to guide you through the process. To do this, I will ask you to check-in with me regarding your research design throughout the semester. These check-ins will count toward your final paper grade. I will provide numerous comments on the written work you turn in to me for these check-ins. I will also provide a full grading rubric for the term paper early in the semester so that you have a clear understanding of what is expected. The paper is worth 25% of your final grade. You should take it very seriously and work your hardest to produce a solid final product.

## **VI. Late Work**

If any assignment is not turned by the time specified in the syllabus, it will be considered late. Late assignments will be discounted a full letter grade each day it is late. For example, if you scored a 90 on an assignment but turned it in a day late, you will earn an 80 on that assignment. I cannot accept any work after the final exam.

You must have a documented emergency preventing you from coming to class or completing an assignment in order to avoid a penalty to your grade for late work. In order to avoid late work penalties, I must be notified as soon as possible of the emergency and must have documentation within one week.

## **VII. Communication**

If you do not understand the readings, or what we discussed in class, or if you have further questions about readings or class, please do not hesitate to ask questions! You are encouraged to attend office hours. If you would like to meet one-on-one, but cannot attend office hours, please email me to set up a time to meet. I am easy to reach if you need to communicate with me. It is important for you to stay in touch, particularly if any problems arise.

## **VIII. Academic Honesty**

You must always adhere to OSU's academic integrity standards. Violations of academic integrity, including unauthorized collaboration, plagiarism, cheating on examinations, helping another person cheat, and unauthorized advance access to examinations, will result in severe penalty. Penalties include: receiving a failing grade on an assignment, examination or course, receiving a notation of a violation of academic integrity on your transcript, and being suspended from the University. You can learn more at <http://academicintegrity.okstate.edu>.

## **IX. Additional Course Policies**

Please see the Oklahoma State University Syllabus Attachment for all other policies in effect and resources available to you for this course.

## **X. Required Readings**

The following books are required for the course:

1. Hacker, Jacob S. and Paul Pierson. 2010. *Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer—And Turned Its Back on the Middle Class*. ISBN: 978-1416588702
2. Vance, J.D. 2016. *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*. ISBN: 978-0062300553
3. Franko, William W. and Christopher Witko. 2018. *The New Economic Populism: How States Respond to Economic Inequality*. ISBN: 978-0190671013

You are required to complete additional readings, but these will be provided to you on D2L.

## **XI. Course Schedule**

The course schedule is presented below. I reserve the right to change the course schedule at any time, but I will let you know with ample time before hand.

### Week 1—Why Inequality Matters

Aug 21: Class Introduction

- Read the syllabus!

Aug 23: Why Inequality Matters

- Jencks “Does Inequality Matter?”
- Stiglitz “Why It Matters”

### Week 2—Growing Inequality and Immobility

Aug 28: Growing Inequality in the U.S. & Worldwide

- Saez “Striking It Richer: The Evolution of Top Incomes in the United States”
- Weissmann “It is Worse Today than It was in 1774”
- Piketty & Saez “Inequality in the Long-Run”
- OECD “Income Inequality High in the Face of Weak Recovery”

Aug 30: Is Economic Immobility More Important?

- Cowen “It’s Not the Inequality; It’s the Immobility”
- Inskeep “Top 20 Percent of Americans ‘Hoard The American Dream’”
- Pew Center “Economic Mobility in the United States”

### Week 3—Economic Explanations

Sept 4: Globalization, Technological Change, and Productivity

- Dymond “The Decline of US Manufacturing Jobs and Living Standards”
- Fowler “Silicon Valley Engineers Fear the Monster They’ve Created”
- Van Arnum & Naples “Financialization and Income Inequality in the United States”

Sept 6: Why Economic Explanations Fail

- Hacker & Pierson pgs. 1-40

### Week 4—Political Explanations

Sept 11: Political Change and Inequality

- Hacker & Pierson pgs. 41-72

Sept. 13: Decline of Labor and Rise of Business

- Hacker & Pierson pgs. 92-136 and 223-252

### Week 5—Unequal Voice and Increased Income Inequality

Sept 18: Unequal Representation

- Bartels “Economic Inequality and Political Representation”
- Carnes “White Collar Government Before the Votes Are Cast”
- Rigby & Wright “Political Parties and Representation of the Poor”
- Gilens “Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness”

Sept 20: Retrenchment of the Welfare State

- Hacker “Privatizing Risk without Privatizing the Welfare State”

Week 6—Wrap-Up Causes of Inequality and Exam

Sept 25: Paper Workshop and Exam Review

- **Paper Topics Due**

Sept 27: Exam Day

- **Exam #1 in class**

Week 7— Individual Experiences with Poverty and Inequality

Oct 2: Poverty and Inequality Post-Recession

- No assigned readings – documentary viewing and discussion

Oct 4: Poverty in Appalachia

- Vance pgs. 1-80

Week 8— Individual Experiences with Poverty and Inequality

Oct 9: (Not) Getting by in America

- Irwin “To Understand Rising Inequality, Consider Janitors, Then and Now”

Oct 11: Family and Culture in Crisis

- Vance pages 81-128

Week 9—Individual Experiences with Poverty and Inequality

Oct 16: The Working Poor Experience

- Vance pages 129-177

Oct 18: Hillbilly Elegy

- Vance pgs. 178-257
- Rader “I was born in Appalachia. ‘Hillbilly Elegy’ doesn’t speak for me”

Week 10—Government Response to Inequality

Oct 23: Federal Response to Inequality

- Franko & Witko pgs. 18-49
- **Annotated bibliography due**

Oct 25: State Response to Inequality and Paper Workshop

Week 11—Responses to Inequality: Taxes and Wages

Oct 30: Taxes and the Earned Income Tax Credit

- Franko & Witko pgs. 96-124 and pgs. 145-162

Nov 1: The Minimum Wage

- Franko & Witko pgs. 125-144
- Long “Wage Growth is Being Wiped Out Entirely by Inflation”

Week 12—Wrap-Up and Exam Week

Nov 6: Exam Review and Paper Workshop

- **Theory section due**

Nov 8: Exam Day

- **Exam #2 in class**

Week 13— Policy Effectiveness and Inequality

Nov 13: Welfare, Fiscal Policy, and Inequality

- Hayes and Medina Vidal “Fiscal Policy and Economic Inequality in the U.S. States.”

Nov 15: Peer Reviewing Workshop

- **Bring paper drafts to class**

Week 14—Paper Workshop and Thanksgiving Break

Nov 20: Paper Workshop

- **Revised full paper drafts due on D2L**

Nov 22: NO CLASS—THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 15—Race, Public Opinion, Welfare Policy, and Income Inequality

Nov 27: Race and Welfare

- Gilens “Race Coding and Opposition to Welfare”

Nov 29: Public Opinion on Welfare

- McCall & Kenworthy “Americans’ Policy Preferences in the Era of Rising Inequality”

Week 16—Unions and Education

Dec 4: The Effect of Unions on Economic Inequality

- Bucci “Organized Labor’s Check on Inequality in the American States”

Dec 6: Education and Inequality

- Mettler “Creating Degrees of Inequality”
- **Papers due on D2L by midnight**

Finals Week—Exam #3 Tuesday December 11th 2:00-3:50 PM