

HONR 1000:
Class, Inequality, and American Democracy
Oklahoma State University
Honors Seminar
Diversity (D) & Social/Behavioral Science (S) General Education
Synchronous Online Course
Tuesdays & Thursdays 1:30-2:45

I. Instructor Information

Instructor: Dr. Joshua Jansa
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Office Hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays 3:30-5:00 via Zoom, or by appointment
Work Phone: 405-744-0420

II. Course Overview

In the United States, the richest three Americans—Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, and Warren Buffet—hold as much wealth as the poorest 160 million Americans. That’s a higher level of economic disparity than colonial times, when there were millions of income-less slaves. The United States has entered a Second Gilded Age. With resources increasingly unequally divided, it is unclear whether elected officials listen to their poor and working class constituents. This presents a challenge to a representative democracy built on political equality. Can American democracy survive when there is such disparity between citizens?

In answering this question, this course addresses why inequality matters, why inequality has risen in recent years, which public policies exacerbate inequality and which mitigate it, how class and income affects political participation, how race and gender intersect with class, and why there is a persistent race and gender wealth gap. The ultimate goal is to understand the impact of inequality on the health of democracy, including whether the poor and working class have equal voice in the policy process and whether increased inequality has fostered resentment, authoritarianism, and populism in American elections.

III. Honors and General Education Goals

This is a lower-division honors course with general education credit in the areas of Diversity (D) and Social and Behavioral Science (S). Courses designated (D) prepare students for engaged citizenship in the diverse, multicultural society of the United States. Courses designated (S) help students to be able to explain human behavior and society through theoretical constructs and empirical observation (including quantitative or qualitative methods). To achieve these goals, course work is structured so that students will learn to:

- Critically analyze generalizations about society and explore theoretical structures.
- Understand the role of empirical observation using quantitative or qualitative methods.
- Reflect on identity through the examination of one or more underrepresented groups in the U.S.

- Examine the ways underrepresented groups define and express themselves and the context in which these definitions are constructed.
- Critically analyze theories and systems of cultural, societal, political, or economic power.
- Demonstrate their understanding through written work that provides them the opportunity to enhance their writing skills.

Specifically, for this course students will learn about the course topic through data and narrative. Students will explore quantitative 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. For example, students will be assigned personal accounts about economic struggles in America. Class time is dedicated to discussing experiences, connecting those experiences to the empirical data, and, ultimately, putting a human face on class and inequality.

Students' comprehension of the material will be assessed via extensive written work (reflective of general education goals and honors credit) worth a significant portion of the grade. Further, at least 50% of the material is devoted to understanding the role of social class in America, with special attention to race and gender dimensions of class, inequality, and voice in American politics. The course material and assignments are outlined below.

IV. Getting Started in Canvas and on Zoom

This is an online honors course taught synchronously, meaning we will have live class sessions online every Tuesday and Thursday at 1:30 pm. These class sessions will happen via Zoom. To access the class session, use the link below and follow the instructions for setting up Zoom on your computer.

- Join class using this link:
<https://zoom.us/j/94588165557?pwd=ejdieUJ1Y29KMUdzVkRRbmxhRlJZUT09>
- Or, by using this Meeting ID: 945 8816 5557
- And Passcode: 111813
- Or, join class via Skype for Business: <https://zoom.us/skype/94588165557>

You can also access all readings, activities, announcements, and exams through Canvas. To access the course site, go to <https://canvas.okstate.edu/> and sign-in with your okey username and password. Start by reading this syllabus. It is posted under the Syllabus module on the course home page. If you have any problems accessing the course site, please let me know as soon as possible!

You are also encouraged to connect with me, especially if any problems or questions arise, during virtual office hours using Zoom. Office hours are Tuesday & Thursday 3:30-5:00 via Zoom. I will use the "wait room" feature on Zoom to ensure that we have a private conversation while other students wait their turn to attend office hours.

- Join office hours using this link:
<https://zoom.us/j/96800371469?pwd=MWx0RFRnTVdtbEx3NFIUSTJPSnp6UT09>
- Or by using this Meeting ID: 968 0037 1469

- And Passcode: 243814

V. Assignments and Grading

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

| | |
|----------------|-----|
| Term Paper: | 30% |
| Class Blog: | 25% |
| Participation: | 15% |
| Exam #1: | 15% |
| Exam #2: | 15% |

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: There will be no rounding up of final course grades, nor a grade curve. There will also be no additional extra credit opportunities given at the end of the semester.

Exam #1

Exam #1 will be given online on October 13 at class time through Canvas. Instead of meeting via Zoom for class, you will be able to use the time to complete the exam. The exam may be a mix of fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, identification, and essay questions. Exam #1 will test your knowledge of the material from the beginning of the course to the exam date. This exam is worth 15% of your course grade.

Exam #2

Exam #2 will be given online at the University exam time through Canvas. The exam may be a mix of fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, identification, and essay questions on material from the first exam to the end of the course. This exam is worth 15% of your course grade.

Participation

Class time will be a mix of lecture, class discussion, and learning activities. Even though we are online you are expected to fully and actively participate. 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 making comments that demonstrate that you've completed the readings and making an effort to have a productive conversation. If you are called upon and are unprepared, your participation points will be negatively affected. For the shy, sharing 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 Zooming in.

Class Blog

You will also be asked to contribute to a “class blog” using the discussion board features on Canvas. You are required to make 2 original blog posts and 4 responses to what others have posted throughout the semester.

The goal is for the discussion board to mimic a live blog. Each post will be a “thought piece” style blog that is 600-800 words long and has links to other web content. A “thought piece” (also known as a “blessay”, “digital essay”, or sometimes “data/intellectual journalism”) is a short to medium-length online expository essay. This style of writing has grown in prominence in recent years, and practicing it will help sharpen students’ skills for their post-college careers.

I will provide a full guide and rubric to what makes a good thought piece blog post as well as examples of thought pieces. I will also create a schedule for the class, so you will know ahead of time when you will be writing a post, when you will be commenting, and when you will have the week off from contributing.

Each post is due by midnight on Monday and comments are due by midnight on Wednesday.

Each post should be related to the week’s content. The focus of your post is yours to decide. There are a number of ways to approach these posts, including:

- Exploring how the readings address the question of whether democracy can survive with growing disparity between citizens.
- Address the insights and limitations of the data presented in the readings.
- Discuss what was jarring or resonant to you when reading about someone’s experience with work, class, poverty, or inequality in America.
- Write about an aspect of the day’s reading that you don’t understand and why you find it difficult to understand (i.e. what is missing that the authors should have addressed?)
- Place the readings in larger historical or theoretical context.
- Formulate an insightful question or two about the reading and then attempt to answer your own questions.
- Compose a poem, song, or other creative way of capturing the main points of the readings.

No matter which approach you take, you should strive for thoughtfulness and nuance. Your first blog post and comments will be worth half as much as your later blog posts and comments. This provides you an opportunity to learn and grow as a public writer and commenter. You will be graded by the rubric below, with points doubling for your second post. This is worth 25% of your grade, so be sure to take your time when posting or commenting. You should put a lot of effort into these posts, treating it as if you and your classmates were publishing an outward facing blog.

Term Paper

You will also write a term paper addressing the following prompt: Where do you fit in America’s social class structure, and how does this affect 1) your attendance at Oklahoma State University and 2) your likelihood of participating in politics?

To answer these questions, you should examine data on income, education, opportunity, and political participation and situate yourself in these empirical trends. Then, discuss how your situation affected your attendance at OSU and your participation in American democracy. Support your

answers with evidence from data and narratives encountered in class or that you found using outside research. Situating yourself in the country's class structure may not be done entirely through data—you may also connect your experiences to the experiences of those we read in class or that you've found in outside research. You may also use discussions and sources raised throughout the semester on the class blog. In fact, the process of writing and commenting on the blog should help you develop the focus of your paper throughout the semester. Note that this is not an autobiography. The vast majority of your answer should be on how you fit in larger trends using qualitative or quantitative information.

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 term paper throughout the semester. These check-ins will count toward your final grade. These check-ins are noted on the course schedule below. 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 should be 8-10 pages long and is worth 30% of your final grade.

Extra Credit

Extra credit opportunities may be made available from time-to-time at my discretion. There will be at least one extra credit opportunity: listen to a podcast related to class, inequality, and democracy and answer a few response questions. These questions are posted on Canvas.

VI. Instructor and Student 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 practice the skills tied to the key general education goals of Diversity (D) and Social and Behavioral Science (S). 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 also expected to ask questions about the material when necessary. We may touch on sensitive subjects. You are welcome to share your opinions and experiences when appropriate. Others will share their experiences and perspectives and you are expected to listen and respond in a constructive manner.

VII. 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. After 5 days, the assignment will be scored a 0. I also cannot accept any work after December 12th at 11:59 PM (the end of finals week) because final course grades are due soon after to the University. The late penalty will apply unless you have a documented, unforeseen, extraordinary circumstance that prevented you from completing an assignment on time. I should be notified as soon as possible of the circumstance. I will work with students experiencing such circumstances on a case-by-case basis to come up with the best plan for getting the work done well and in a timely manner.

VIII. Communication

Email is the best way to contact me. I will only respond to emails from your okstate.edu email address. **We can chat via email, or we can use email to set up a time to chat on the phone or Zoom.** Just email me to set up a time to talk. It is important for you to stay in touch, particularly if any problems arise. You are also encouraged to connect during virtual office hours, following the Zoom instructions above.

IX. 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>.

X. 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.

XI. 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. Schlozman, Kay Lehman, Henry E. Brady, and Sidney Verba. 2018. *Unequal and Unrepresented: Political Inequality and the People's Voice in the New Gilded Age*. ISBN: 978-0691180557 ***

You should purchase these books, or borrow them from a library or loan service. You are required to complete additional readings, but these will be provided to you on Canvas.

* print copy on reserve at OSU library and 3 e-book copies available through OSU library

** print copy on reserve at OSU library

*** unlimited e-book copies available through OSU library

XII. 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— Growing Inequality and Why It Matters

Aug 18: Introduction: Growing Inequality in the U.S.

- Read the syllabus
- Inequality.org “Income Inequality in the United States.”

Aug 20: Why Inequality Matters

- APSA “American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality”
- Marmot “The Influence of Income on Health”

Week 2—Inequality, Mobility, Poverty, and Opportunity

Aug 25: Inequality or Immobility?

- Cowen “It’s Not the Inequality; It’s the Immobility”
- Chetty et al “Where is the Land of Opportunity?”

Aug 27: Concentrated Poverty & Redlining by Race

- Florida “America’s Biggest Problem is Concentrated Poverty”
- Badger “How Redlining’s Effects Lasted for Decades”
- **In class: blogging workshop**

Week 3—Inequality and Education

Sept 1: Inequality and High School

- Kearney & Levine “Inequality, Mobility, and the Decision to Drop Out”

Sept. 3: Inequality and Higher Education

- Mettler “Creating Degrees of Inequality”
- **In class: term paper workshop**

Week 4—Why Has Inequality Increased So Much?

Sept 8—Economic Change & Inequality

- Hacker & Pierson pgs. 11-72

Sept 10: Political Change and Inequality

- Hacker & Pierson pgs. 95-136

Week 5—Politics and Inequality Today

Sept. 15: Democrats, Republicans, and Inequality

- Hacker & Pierson pgs. 161-193

Sept. 17: Policy Inaction, Drift, and Inequality

- Enns et al. “How U.S. Political Institutions Have Benefited the Rich”
- **Due: term paper thesis and outline of class & education portion**

Week 6—Unequal Representation in American Politics

Sept. 22: Unequal Voice

- Schlozman, Brady, and Verba pgs. 23-49

Sept. 24: The Divergent Preferences of the Poor

- Schlozman, Brady, and Verba pgs. 83-111

Week 7—Unequal Representation in American Politics Pt. 2

Sept 29: Consequences

- Schlozman, Brady, and Verba pgs. 147-168

Oct 1: Representing the Poor in Congress

- ~~Gilens and Page “Testing Theories of American Democracy”~~
- Schlozman, Brady, and Verba pgs. 169-184
- **Due: revised term paper thesis and outline of political participation portion**

Week 8—Solutions for Underrepresentation by Class

Oct 6: Surrogate Champions & Other Solutions to Underrepresentation

- Schlozman, Brady, and Verba 227-254

Oct 8: Unions as a Check on Political and Economic Inequality?

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

Week 9—Exam & Left Behind America

Oct 13: **Exam #1 on Canvas**

Oct 15: Poverty and Inequality Post-Recession

- No assigned readings – view documentary “Left Behind America”

Week 10—Individual Experiences with Poverty and Inequality

Oct 20: Poverty in Appalachia

- Vance pgs. 1-80

Oct 22: (Not) Getting by in America

- Irwin “To Understand Rising Inequality, Consider Janitors, Then and Now”
- **Due by Saturday 11:59 PM: identify specific data, graphs, sources for final paper**

Week 11—Experiences with Inequality, Family, and Crisis

Oct 27: **NO CLASS**—cancelled due to inclement weather

Oct 29: Family and Culture in Crisis

- Vance pages 81-177

Week 12—Social Class

Nov 3: **NO CLASS**; use this time to vote, complete extra credit, and work on paper draft

Nov 5: Is Class About Income, Education, or Culture?

- Reeves, Guyot, and Krause “Defining Social Class: Cash, Credentials, or Culture?”
- **Due by Saturday at 11:59 PM: full paper drafts turned in on Canvas**

Week 13—Hillbilly Elegy Wrap-Up and Critiques

Nov. 10—Hillbilly Elegy: On Becoming “Elite”

- Vance pgs. 178-257

Nov. 12—Reactions to *Hillbilly Elegy* and the Changing Economy

- Rader “I was born in Appalachia. ‘Hillbilly Elegy’ doesn’t speak for me”
- Ravenelle “Hustle and Gig: Workplace Struggles”

Week 14— Public Policy and Inequality

Nov 17: The Minimum Wage

- Picchi and Ivanova “Here’s Where Workers Are Getting a Pay Raise in 2020”

Nov 19: State Policy Innovations and Inequality

- Jansa “Inequality is higher in some states. Here’s why.”

Week 15—Thanksgiving Break

- **NO CLASS**

Week 16—Inequality and Crisis in American Democracy

Dec 1: Democracy and Inequality

- Kriekhaus et al “Economic Inequality and Democratic Support”

Dec 3: Wrap-Up and Exam Review

- **Due: Final term paper due on Canvas**

Finals Week—EXAM #2 on Thursday, December 10 at 2 PM online via Canvas

(this is the University assigned exam time, but I will give a full 24 hours to take the exam)