



SENATE COMMITTEE ON CURRICULAR AFFAIRS
COURSE SUBMISSION AND CONSULTATION FORM

Principal Faculty Member(s) Proposing Course

Name	User ID	College	Department
JOHN MARSH	JEM55	Liberal Arts (LA)	Not Available

Academic Home: Liberal Arts (LA)

Type of Proposal: Add Change Drop

Course Designation

(ENGL 236N) Inequality: Economics, Philosophy, Literature

Course Information

Cross-Listed Courses:

Prerequisites:

Corequisites:

Concurrents:

Recommended Preparations:

Abbreviated Title: Inequality
Discipline: General Education
Course Listing: Inter-Domain

Special categories for Undergraduate (001-499) courses

Foundations

- Writing/Speaking (GWS)
- Quantification (GQ)

Knowledge Domains

- Health & Wellness (GHW)
- Natural Sciences (GN)
- Arts (GA)
- Humanities (GH)
- Social and Behavioral Sciences (GS)

Additional Designations

- Bachelor of Arts
- International Cultures (IL)
- United States Cultures (US)
- Honors Course
- Common course number - x94, x95, x96, x97, x99
- Writing Across the Curriculum

First-Year Engagement Program

- First-Year Seminar

Miscellaneous

Common Course

GE Learning Objectives

GenEd Learning Objective: Effective Communication

GenEd Learning Objective: Creative Thinking

GenEd Learning Objective: Crit & Analytical Think

GenEd Learning Objective: Global Learning

GenEd Learning Objective: Integrative Thinking

GenEd Learning Objective: Key Literacies

GenEd Learning Objective: Soc Resp & Ethic Reason

Bulletin Listing

Minimum Credits: 3

Maximum Credits: 3

Repeatable: NO

Department with Curricular Responsibility: Liberal Arts General Education Program (UPLA_LAGEN)

Effective Semester: FA 2018

Travel Component: NO

Course Outline

A brief outline or overview of the course content:

In the first half of the course, students study recent economic and sociological accounts of the rise of inequality in the United States. For the most part, these discussions focus on income and wealth inequality. How is inequality measured? What are the competing explanations for its rise? What are the spillover effects of this rise? What role does education play in its reproduction or amelioration? And, more generally, what, if anything, should be done about it? In addition to economic inequality, students study (briefly) how inequality—again, mostly measured economically—relates to inequalities in race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. The course then turns to philosophical inquiries into equality and inequality. This unit is structured as a debate between broadly liberal approaches to equality (John Rawls and others) and the conservative response to it (Robert Nozick and others). Finally, the course turns to works of literature about equality and inequality. Different instructors may select different works of literature. As I teach it, students read Walt Whitman, the great spokesman for equality; James Agee, the quiet but inspired documenter and denouncer of inequality; and Toni Morrison, who examines how several different forms of inequality manifest themselves—violently and tragically—in the life of one family.

A listing of the major topics to be covered with an approximate length of time allotted for their discussion:

Economics and Sociology

Week 1: Introduction and The Rise of Inequality

Week 2: The Rise of Inequality, cont'd

Week 3: The Effects of Inequality

Week 4: The Experience and Extent of Poverty in the US

Week 5: Education

Week 6: Mobility

Week 7: What Is To Be Done?

Week 8: Race, Ethnicity, and Inequality

Week 9: Gender, Sexuality, and Inequality

Philosophy

Week 10: The Liberal Case for Equality

Week 11: The Conservative Response

Literature

Week 12: Whitman

Week 13: Whitman and Agee

Week 14: Agee and Morrison

Week 15: Morrison

Course Description:

The Cubists were a group of painters including George Bracques, Pablo Picasso, working in Paris in the 1910s who, in addition to other painterly innovations, depicted objects not from one perspective but from multiple perspectives simultaneously. The final painting could sometimes look like a blur, but, or so the theory went, such multiplicity of perspectives could offer a truer, more complete representation of reality than any single perspective. In this class, we shall adopt a Cubist strategy of taking multiple perspectives. But instead of a guitar or a nude, our object of study will be inequality, and the multiple perspectives will not be different angles of seeing but different disciplines: economics, sociology, education, philosophy, and literature. How does each discipline define inequality? What does each have to say about it? And what does each argue, if anything, should be done about it? The class will mostly focus on economic inequality, but as you will discover, discussions of economic inequality quickly involve discussions of other forms of inequality (principally race and gender) besides economic inequality, and we shall consider those as well.

The name(s) of the faculty member(s) responsible for the development of the course:

Name: JOHN MARSH (JEM55)

Title:

Phone:

Address:

Campus: UP

City:

Fax:

Course Justification

Instructional, Educational, and Course Objectives:

This section should define what the student is expected to learn and what skills the student will develop.

At a basic level, students should leave the class with answers to the Five W's of inequality:

Who suffered—or benefited—from the takeoff in inequality?

What happened? How do economists, sociologists, and writers measure and describe inequality? And what are some of its spillover effects? When did the takeoff in inequality occur?

Where did it occur? That is, did it occur across countries equally, or did some countries experience more or less inequality over the last few decades?

And, the most crucial questions of all, why did inequality take off? And why should anyone care that inequality has taken off?

I call why the most crucial question because it inspires another. What question, What is to be done? I want students to see that how one describes why inequality took off influences what one believes should be done about it. If, for example, you conclude that inequality arose because of skill-biased technological change, then you may want to try to make it easier for workers to acquire those skills. Conversely, if you believe that inequality arises because workers have lost bargaining power in the labor market, then you might want to try to restore bargaining power to them, perhaps by making it easier to join unions. Or if you think inequality arises when the returns to wealth consistently outpace economic growth, then you will turn to taxes and redistribution to counter it. Or, if you believe the labor market is properly and efficiently rewarding scarce skills, and that workers will eventually catch up with the incentives that the market is signaling, then you might want to do nothing at all, since any intervention into the market risks distorting those signals. Regardless, I want students to leave class with their own account of why inequality took off and what, if anything, they think should be done about it; but I also want them to see their own conclusion as one of many, to have arrived at it only after weighing other arguments and accounts. In a word, I suppose, I want them to approach the question critically.

By introducing philosophical debates about equality and inequality, I want students to go beyond the question of why inequality has taken off, or what to do about it, to ask whether and on what grounds one should do something about it. Is there a right to equality? Equality of what? Outcome or opportunity? And does the right to equality trump other rights, like, say, the right to property? Further, what role can the state legitimately play in securing equality? Unlike the questions about efficiency and policy that arise in economic debates about inequality, philosophical inquiries raise the matter of ethics, of rights and potentially conflicting rights. Here too the point is less to arrive at an answer—though I want students to work out an answer for themselves to these questions—than to arrive at an answer only after considering the myriad of arguments for and against whatever position they ultimately adopt.

The unit on literature has a different objective. Yes, the literature engages the ethics of inequality. (James Agee, for example, denounces inequality more fiercely than anyone else students will read all semester.) But at least in this class the literature should allow students to understand the emotional pull equality and inequality have on humans. Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" does not merely protest inequality but illustrates, in thrilling language, the glory of equality, of how a commitment to it derives from a certain vision of the universe and of God. In his documentary writing about Alabama tenant farmers in the 1930s, James Agee, even more than economists and sociologists, introduces the Marxist notion that inequality is not a theoretical problem but, rather, a zero sum game. In other words, many are poor—desperately, inhumanely poor—so a few can be rich, and he expects readers to share his moral outrage. Like Agee, though even more so, Morrison offers readers a chance to understand what it feels like to occupy a position on the income (or race or gender) spectrum that may differ from their own identity. (In a word, it feels awful.) In short, in reading the literature of equality and inequality, I want students to understand why the question of inequality resonates as much as it does. It seems to strike at our commitment to fairness, which some of us may define differently than others, but which each of us feels powerfully and not entirely rationally.

Finally, I would like students to understand how different disciplines see a problem—in this case inequality—through different frames. More on this below, but suffice it to say that the class is a class about inequality, but it is also a class about these disciplines, about the sort of questions they ask and the sort of answers those questions produce and cannot produce.

Evaluation Methods:

Include a statement that explains how the achievement of the educational objective identified above will be assessed.

The procedures for determining students' grades should be specifically identified.

Based on my reading of the literature, I believe students learn most through formal writing—rather than, say, quizzes or exams. As such, most of the work students do in the class are essays, each of which is intended to assess how well they have met one or more of the course objectives described above. Early on in the semester, for example, students write a short paper in which they must describe two different accounts of the take off in inequality and derive policy prescriptions from it. One question on the midterm—which is take-home—asks students to summarize three competing descriptions of why there is so much poverty in the United States and then say why they find one more compelling than the others. Another question asks them to describe different accounts of the relationship between education and economic inequality and then to argue whether, on balance, they believe it does more to reduce or reproduce it.

For the unit on philosophy, I ask students to do one of my very favorite writing assignments, which is to figure out what they believe and then argue the opposite. In this case, do they find themselves sympathizing with Rawls and his commitment to distributive justice or Nozick and his defense of historical entitlements? Regardless, argue the opposite. The assignment forces them to deal

with—indeed to articulate—the best version of the argument they oppose. Some people change their minds after writing the paper, but all emerge with a more critical, more informed position.

The final paper, on literature, asks students to think about the language of equality and inequality. How do writers turn these abstractions into concrete detail? (To take one extraordinarily obvious example, consider the blue eyes that the African American main character of Morrison's novel self-hatingly desires.) How do the symbols of equality and inequality shift over the course of a given work? Why? To what end?

My final exam is short, just one question. An economist, a philosopher, and a poet walk into a public school. What story does each tell? What does each see? What does each miss? The question leaves students thinking not just about the content of the course but the contributions—and limitations—of the different disciplines that study it.

The final grade in the class breaks down as follows:

Economics Paper (3-5 pages) 20%
Midterm (3-5 pages) 20%
Philosophy Paper (3-5 pages) 20%
Literature Paper (4-6 pages) 25%
Final (2-4 pages) 15%

Relationship/Linkage of Course to Other Courses:

This statement should relate the course to existing or proposed new courses. It should provide a rationale for the level of instruction, for any prerequisites that may be specified, or for the course's role as a prerequisite for other courses.

The course is an introductory level course. It assumes no (or little) knowledge in any of the disciplines.

Relationship of Course to Major, Option, Minor, or General Education:

This statement should explain how the course will contribute to the major, option, or minor and indicate how it may function as a service course for other departments.

The course is an integrated general education course.

A description of any special facilities:

None.

Frequency of Offering and Enrollment:

Once per year or every other year with 25 enrollment.

Alignment with General Education Objectives

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION – the ability to exchange information and ideas in oral, written, and visual form in ways that allow for informed and persuasive discourse that builds trust and respect among those engaged in that exchange, and helps create environments where creative ideas and problem-solving flourish.

KEY LITERACIES – the ability to identify, interpret, create, communicate and compute using materials in a variety of media and contexts. Literacy acquired in multiple areas, such as textual, quantitative, information/technology, health, intercultural, historical, aesthetic, linguistic (world languages), and scientific, enables individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, to lead healthy and productive lives, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.

CRITICAL AND ANALYTICAL THINKING – the habit of mind characterized by comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating a conclusion. It is the intellectually disciplined process of conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.

INTEGRATIVE THINKING – the ability to synthesize knowledge across multiple domains, modes of inquiry, historical periods, and perspectives, as well as the ability to identify linkages between existing knowledge and new information. Individuals who engage in integrative thinking are able to transfer knowledge within and beyond their current contexts.

CREATIVE THINKING – the capacity to synthesize existing ideas, images, or expertise in original ways and the experience of performing, making, thinking, or acting in an imaginative way that may be characterized by innovation, divergent thinking, and intellectual risk taking.

GLOBAL LEARNING – the intellectually disciplined abilities to analyze similarities and differences among cultures; evaluate natural, physical, social, cultural, historical, and economic legacies and hierarchies; and engage as community members and leaders who will continue to deal with the intricacies of an ever-changing world. Individuals should acquire the ability to analyze power; identify and critique interdependent global, regional, and local cultures and systems; and evaluate the implications for people's lives.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ETHICAL REASONING – the ability to assess one's own values within the social context of problems, recognize ethical issues in a variety of settings, describe how different perspectives might be applied to ethical dilemmas, and consider the ramifications of alternative actions. Individuals should acquire the self-knowledge and leadership skills needed to play a role in creating and maintaining healthy, civil, safe, and thriving communities.

What component(s) of the course will help students achieve the General Education Learning Objectives covered in the course? Provide evidence that students in the course have adequate opportunities to achieve the identified learning objectives.

I have my own beliefs about why economic inequality took off in the last forty years, and what we should do to reverse it. Philosophically, I am, for the most part, guided by John Rawls's notion of justice as fairness and the attitudes toward equality and

inequality that follow. And I am genuinely moved and inspired by the atomic and cosmological commitment to equality that Walt Whitman describes in "Song of Myself." I also have zero interest in persuading my students of the rightness of any of these beliefs. What I am interested in teaching students is how to think for themselves, which, ironically enough I suppose, means exposing them to what others have thought and said about an issue before they form their own opinion. I have hesitations about the term, but I recognize that tradition refers to that objective and habit of mind as critical thinking. With John Stuart Mills, I am grateful—and I want students to learn to be grateful—to those who attack "most unsparingly our most cherished views."

I learned a long time ago, while trying to teach literary and critical theory to undergraduates, that it is best to teach the debates, and I bring a similar approach to nearly every other class I teach that addresses issues where arguments and opinions divide. In my experience, teaching the debates offers the shortest path students can take to critical thinking.

This class takes a similar approach. Indeed, my only serious criticism of the textbook we use—*Inequality in the 21st Century*—is that, with one or two exceptions, it does not include enough voices arguing for the merits and the justice of inequality. (It does include Richard Freeman's argument that some inequality is good for you, but it omits Gregory Mankiw, perhaps the most articulate contemporary spokesman of that position. I add his 2013 essay "Defending the One Percent" to the syllabus.) All of which is to say that the first and foremost learning objective of the class is critical thinking, and the readings and assignments are organized to generate that critical thinking. Students do not, for example, just read Thomas Piketty on why inequality took off over the last forty years and, in his mind, is fated to continue to grow over the next forty. They also read competing accounts of the take off in inequality: Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz on the role of education and technology in generating inequality; Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson on the role of politics; Bruce Western and Jake Rosenfeld on the role of unions; etc. Similarly, students do not just read John Rawls and his argument for equality; the next week they read selections from Robert Nozick's response to Rawls, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*.

As for integrative thinking, as an inter-domain course the class has integrative thinking built into its bones. In the first half of the class, students approach the question of inequality from the perspective of economics and sociology. In the next unit, they approach it from the perspective of philosophy and political theory. In the final unit, they see what literature has made of it. In my course description, I adopt a Cubist metaphor: that an object is best seen and understood not from any one perspective but from many simultaneously. We cannot simultaneously combine multiple perspectives into one like a painter can, but we can do so serially over the course of a semester.

Finally, despite insisting that I do not care what position regarding economic inequality—or any form of inequality—my students take, only that they take a critically informed one, I would add that I do want them to recognize the issue as one of moral and ethical importance, and that as responsible citizens they must take a position. That is, I want them to understand that the issue of economic and other forms of inequality involves some of the deepest questions of ethics. What tradeoffs between equality and efficiency are you willing to make? Does my right to equality of opportunity trump your right to property? What role can the state legitimately play in securing equality? Students will—I hope they do—arrive at different answers to these questions, but I try to make it impossible for them not to arrive at an answer.

How will students be assessed to determine their attainment of the Learning Objective(s) of General Education covered in this course? This assessment must be included as a portion of the student's overall performance in this course.

As I describe above in the section on Evaluation, I favor formal writing to assess what students have learned. Moreover, each of the writing assignments is intended to assess how well students have met one or more of the learning objectives for the course. For example, early writing assignments focus on critical thinking. One asks students to write a short paper in which they must describe two different accounts of the take off in inequality and derive policy prescriptions (including possibly none) from it. The take-home midterm asks students to summarize three competing descriptions of why there is so much poverty in the United States and then say why they find one more compelling than the others. Another question asks them to describe different accounts of the relationship between education and economic inequality and then to argue whether, on balance, they believe it does more to reduce it or reproduce it. Each assignment asks them what they think, but they only get to say what they think after describing what others have thought.

My assignment for the unit on philosophy introduces the notion of ethics, yet it continues the focus on critical thinking. Indeed, in many ways it is the ultimate test of critical thinking. It asks students to figure out whom they sympathize with in the debate between Rawls and Nozick and then argue the opposite position. The assignment forces students to deal with—indeed to articulate—the best version of the ethical argument they oppose.

My final exam emphasizes integrative thinking. As I describe it above, it states: An economist, a philosopher, and a poet walk into a public school. What story does each tell? What does each see? What does each miss? The question asks students to think not just about the content of the course but the contributions—and limitations—of the different disciplines that study it.

General Education Domain Criteria

General Education Designation: Inter-Domain

GH Criteria

- Explain the methods of inquiry in humanities fields and describe how the contributions of these fields complement inquiry in other areas
- Demonstrate competence in critical thinking about topics and texts in the humanities through clear and well-reasoned responses
- Critically evaluate texts in the humanities— whether verbal, visual, or digital— and identify and explain moral or ethical dimensions within the disciplines of the humanities
- Demonstrate knowledge of major cultural currents, issues, and developments through time, including evidence of exposure to unfamiliar material that challenges their curiosity and stretches their intellectual range
- Become familiar with groups, individuals, ideas, or events that have influenced the experiences and values of different communities

What components of the course will help students achieve the domain criteria selected above?

In this class, students learn, among other things, what makes the humanities different from other disciplines. To my mind, that difference lies in the care the humanities take with language. Indeed, much of the debate in philosophy about equality concerns what, precisely, one means by the term equality and, conversely, inequality. Equality of what, exactly? Outcome? Opportunity? And measured how? These definitions and discussions about definitions may seem merely semantic, but they establish the foundation for other, more pragmatic discussions about equality and inequality. Without some attention to language, however, participants in that discussion risk talking past each other. In other words, the humanities lay the foundation for work in other disciplines, which, knowingly or unknowingly, build on these discussions about definition.

This attention to language persists in the study of literature, too. In this class, in every literature class I teach, I go to some pains to make sure that we treat works of literature as works of literature and not just sociological messages. That involves many strategies, not least a close study of the language that composes a work. In our discussions of any given work of literature, I repeatedly direct students to passages and ask why the writer chose this word and not another. What is the effect, I ask, of this word rather than that one? Where else does one see similar language arising in the work? Has it changed at all? Why? What is the effect of the variation? What conclusions can we draw, overall, from comparatively small acts of language or variations in language?

For example, the opening lines of Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" invoke atoms and the exchange of atoms. ("I celebrate myself/ And what I assume you shall assume/ For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.") I walk students through a discussion of the lines, which can be read one of two ways. First, my atoms are just as good as yours, and vice versa, and therefore, when I celebrate myself, I celebrate you, too, since your atoms are just as good as mine. We don't literally share atoms, but we have the same ones. The other way to read the line is that we literally share atoms. Whitman was fascinated by the circulation of atoms: from exploding suns to the formation of planets to everything, including living, breathing human beings, on those planets. He was also fascinated by the more mundane circulation of atoms between those living, breathing human beings while on the planet. (My exhaled carbon dioxide atoms become, through photosynthesis, your oxygen atoms.) Considered from that perspective, every atom belonging to me doesn't as good belong to you but will—or theoretically could—eventually belong to you and vice versa. In which case belong is really the wrong word to describe our relationship to our atoms. Regardless, his opening case for equality rests on this circulation of atoms, and these circulating atoms return as a motif throughout the poem. It is a motif, however, that one sees only if one pauses at the outset of the poem to pay attention to how Whitman is using language. The point is that whether talking about equality abstractly, in the case of philosophy, or concretely, in the case of Whitman, one cannot "do" the humanities, especially literature, without doing language.

In addition to language, the other method of inquiry that distinguishes the humanities from other areas, and which I invite students to see, is its emphasis on history. Of course this method of inquiry is not exclusive to the humanities, but more than other disciplines the humanities try to understand its object of study historically, as the product of the past and, to a certain extent, the guarantor of a future. To take but one example relevant to this class, discussions of inequality obviously differ given the historical context in which one conducts them. James Agee's *Cotton Tenants*, for example, written in the midst of the Great Depression, needs to be read in light of that historical moment when inequality—and poverty—was less theoretical problem than sidewalk scene. The same, of course, goes for Whitman's "Song of Myself," written on the eve of the Civil War, when, again, debates about equality and inequality—in this case, human slavery—would soon leave the page for the battlefield. So too Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, which is written in the aftermath of the Civil Rights movement yet set a generation earlier, on the eve of World War II. Both of those contexts matter intensely to any understanding of the novel and what it has to say about equality and inequality. In other words, inequality and equality are not abstractions but everyday realities, and the humanities, with its focus on history, help us appreciate those realities.

In addition to the methods of inquiries that make the humanities special, or at least different, I also want students to leave the class with a sense of how the humanities engage the question of ethics. Here I can only emphasize what I said above, which is that the humanities, especially the philosophical debates but also the works of literature, go beyond the question of why inequality has taken off, or what one should do about it, to ask whether and on what grounds one should do something about it. That is, the humanities engage the ethics rather than, strictly speaking, the economics of equality and inequality.

Finally, the humanities, and here I am thinking especially of the literature we read, tries to expose students to lives—the lives of the poor above all but also the lives of African Americans and women—who find themselves on the losing end of economic inequality. Whitman makes this sympathy with others a theme of his poem, and it is, in many ways, the reason for being of Agee's book and the Walker Evans photographs that accompanied it when Agee expanded and published *Cotton Tenants* as *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. "Who need be afraid of the merge?" Whitman asks in *Song of Myself*, and he certainly is not. Throughout that work, he imagines himself in the place of those radically different from him: prostitutes, runaway slaves, lonely but lustful women, even Christ on the cross. Some critics object to how casually he believes he can transcend his own identity and occupy another's experience, especially when that other is so different from him in terms of race, gender, or class. But we cannot help but wonder what it is like to walk in another person's shoes, and while empathy may never be perfect, the perfect, it seems, should not be the enemy of the good. Moreover, such empathy, it could be, is required to summon the will to do something about inequality. John Rawls, with his "veil of ignorance" thought experiment, would certainly seem to make transcending one's own identity necessary to achieving distributive justice. This kind of empathy does not only happen in the humanities—to be sure, it appears indirectly in much sociological writing about the everyday lives of the poor—but it is something the humanities do well. As sociologists can show with mounting and dispiriting evidence, we live increasingly homogenous lives, more and more surrounded by those who resemble us in terms of identity, especially race and class. The humanities can possibly aid in reversing those trends, but in the meantime they can certainly help in transcending them, in helping us imagine the lives of those from whom we have segregated ourselves. This objective is old and not unproblematic hat to English professors, but it is one, I have found, that means a great deal to students.

GS Criteria

- Explain the various methods of inquiry used in the social and behavioral sciences and describe how the contributions of these fields complement inquiry in other areas
- Identify and explain major foundational theories and bodies of work in a particular area of social and behavioral sciences
- Describe the ways in which many different factors may interact to influence behaviors and/or institutions in historical or contemporary settings
- Explain how social and behavioral science researchers use concepts, theoretical models and data to better

understand and address world problems

Recognize social, cultural, political and/or ethical implications of work in the social and behavioral sciences

What components of the course will help students achieve the domain criteria selected above?

Students who take this class receive a swift but, I hope, thorough introduction to some of the major foundational theories and bodies of work in at least two disciplines: economics and sociology. For instance, it is not simply that students will learn about economic inequality, which has become one of the most active areas of research in both economics and sociology over, say, the last decade or so. Rather, it is that they will learn the methods of inquiries and concepts that economists and sociologists have used to conduct this research. In order to understand Thomas Piketty, for example, one needs to understand the difference between income and returns to capital; to understand Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz and the role that the race between technology and education may have played in producing inequality, one needs to understand how supply and demand function in labor markets like they do in virtually any other market; the same knowledge of labor markets helps to explain the role that unions play in raising wages and holding down inequality. Similarly, one can frame the issue of unions—or CEO pay—in terms of rent and rent collecting. On and on. All of which is to say that one cannot learn about economic inequality without also learning many of the key terms and concepts of economics generally, and this emphasis on foundations and fundamentals is an essential part of the course.

The same emphasis on foundational knowledge goes for sociology, too, but the sociological components of the course perhaps provide a better example of how students in this class begin to understand “the ways in which many different factors may interact to influence behaviors and/or institutions in historical or contemporary settings.” Several weeks of the class are devoted to the role education plays in economic inequality. For some scholars, education offers the solution to economic inequality. For others, myself included, education does more to secure and reproduce class divisions than it ever does to undo them. In order to understand this debate, though, students must understand all the forces—economic, familial, racial—that come to bear on an individual as she navigates her way through the various institutions of education.

To take one obvious but profound example, the sociologist Annette Lareau has observed how middle- and working-class families raise their children in different ways, and how these different child-rearing practices profoundly alter the life chances of their children before they even begin school. (The title of another article by a quartet of sociologists studying intergenerational mobility captures the upshot of Lareau’s work: “It’s a Decent Bet That Our Children Will Be Professors Too.”) Or consider the well-known effect of stereotype threat on African-American student achievement. Or the widening academic achievement gap between the rich and the poor. With luck, students come to see the institution of education not as one that is free from the sociological pressures that influence people in their everyday lives but, rather, as one that is very much subject to those pressures. Those pressures do not disarm education in the fight against economic inequality, but they do require that students think about education in more sophisticated ways than, in my experience, they tend to do.

Finally, throughout this proposal, I have tended to discuss the ethics of inequality in the context of the humanities, particularly philosophy and, to a lesser extent, literature. But of course that leaves a false impression. After all, it was two economists—Piketty and Saez—who provided the Occupy Wall Street Movement with the terminology for its slogan, “We Are the 99%.” Regardless of how one feels about that movement, the migration of terms from economic paper to political slogan ought to remind us (and students) that the study of economic inequality, the study of all inequalities, has far-reaching political and ethical implications. If, as John Rawls argued, justice is fairness, then these fields contribute data—quantitative and qualitative—to that debate. More than just data, though, these fields challenge students to think about what, if anything, we should do about economic and other forms of inequality. Far from remaining descriptive, that is, they provoke students to think prescriptively. Even more so than in the humanities, too, ethical debates in the social and behavioral sciences—especially economics—remind students that every ethical choice produces winners and losers, that every normative statement entails one tradeoff or another, whether between equality and efficiency or competing rights. Ethical debates in these disciplines, that is, bring a real-world detail to them that sometimes goes missing in more theoretical discussions.

Integrative Studies

Explain how the intellectual frameworks And methodologies of the two Knowledge Domains will be explicitly addressed in the course and practiced by the students.

Please see the discussion above under General Humanities and Social and Behavioral Sciences.

Demonstrate that each Of the two domains will receive approximately equal attention, providing evidence from course topics, assignments, or other course components, and that students will integrate material from both domains.

The class—deliberately—is split right down the middle between the social and behavioral sciences and the humanities. The first half of the class is devoted to economics and sociology; the second half is devoted to philosophy and literature. The writing assignments divide more or less equally, too. The first paper and the substantial take-home midterm cover economics, sociology, and education. The second and third papers cover philosophy and literature, respectively. And the final exam puts it all together.

Briefly explain the staffing plan. Given that each Inter-Domain course is approved for two Knowledge Domains, it will be taught by an instructor (or instructional team) with appropriate expertise in both domains.

It may seem strange for a literary critic to presume to teach economics. Indeed, I imagine I would look at in much the same light as if an economist presumed to teach literature. But from the start of my academic career, my scholarship has looked at the connections between literature and labor, culture and economics. More importantly, a few years ago I began studying in earnest the literature on economic inequality, and the book that I wrote, *Class Dismissed: Why We Cannot Teach or Learn Our Way out of Inequality*, passed muster not just with the well-known labor economist who was the editor for the book but with readers and reviewers, too, some of whom were bona fide economists. In general, I share the misgivings many people have about whether scholars trained in one discipline have the training or standing to teach students about another. In this case, though, I believe I have done the spadework necessary to do the field justice.

As for a literary critic teaching philosophy, that will strike many as less of a stretch. But here too background and training matter. Therefore, in addition to reading deeply and widely in the philosophical debates about equality and inequality, I would also want to emphasize that I learned a great deal about these debates when John Christman, who is in the Philosophy Department, and I taught a graduate seminar on Inequality a few years ago. Here too I believe I can do the field justice.

Describe the assessments that will be used to determine students' ability to apply integrative thinking.

I have tried to describe these above. If the course—and its assessments—have a limitation when it comes to integrative thinking, it is that I have perhaps divided the semester up by discipline more than I would like, and certainly more than the other inter-domain course I and a colleague have proposed, which simultaneously brings the two disciplines (labor and industrial relations and literature) to bear on a sequence of units. After experimenting with different structures for this course, however, I've concluded that it works best the way I have outlined it above. Students must put in the time to learn how to think about inequality economically and sociologically. It feels jarring and potentially counterproductive to interrupt that process with other disciplinary perspectives. So I have settled, not without misgivings, on the structure above. And while each unit builds off of and refers back to another—it helps, for example, to have actual data about inequality when discussing Rawls—I use the final exam to test students' ability to think about the subject in an integrated way and to emphasize the importance of doing so.

Campuses That Have Offered () Over The Past 4 Years

semester	AB	AL	BK	BR	BW	CR	DS	ER	FE	GA	GV	HB	HN	HY	LV	MA	NK	PC	SH	SL	UP	WB	WC	WS	XC	XP	XS	YK
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UPLOADED DOCUMENTS FOLLOW:

English 236N: Inequality: Economics, Philosophy, Literature

Professor John Marsh

E-mail: jem55@psu.edu

Office: 405 Burrowes Building

Office Hours: Tuesday 12:30 – 1:30 pm; Wednesday 1 – 2 pm; Thursday 12 – 1 pm; and by appointment

Course Attributes

Credits: 3

Prerequisites: English 15 or 30

Designations: General Education Inter-domain (GH/GS)

Course Description

The Cubists were a group of painters—Georges Braques, Pablo Picasso—working in Paris in the 1910s who, in addition to other painterly innovations, depicted objects not from one perspective but from multiple perspectives simultaneously. The final painting could sometimes look like a blur, but, or so the theory went, such multiplicity of perspectives could offer a truer, more complete representation of reality than any single perspective. In this class, we shall adopt a Cubist strategy of taking multiple perspectives. But instead of a guitar or a nude, our object of study will be inequality, and the multiple perspectives will not be different angles of seeing but different disciplines: economics, sociology, education, philosophy, and literature. How does each discipline define inequality? What does each have to say about it? And what does each argue, if anything, should be done about it? The class will mostly focus on economic inequality, but as you will discover, discussions of economic inequality quickly involve discussions of other forms of inequality (principally race and gender) besides economic inequality, and we shall consider those as well.

General Education Learning Objectives

Critical and Analytical Thinking — the habit of mind characterized by comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating a conclusion. It is the intellectually disciplined process of conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.

Integrative Thinking — the ability to synthesize knowledge across multiple domains, modes of inquiry, historical periods, and perspectives, as well as the ability to identify linkages between existing knowledge and new information. Individuals who engage in integrative thinking are able to transfer knowledge within and beyond their current contexts.

Social Responsibility and Ethical Reasoning — the ability to assess one's own values within the social context of problems, recognize ethical issues in a variety of settings, describe how different perspectives might be applied to ethical dilemmas, and consider the ramifications of alternative actions. Individuals should acquire the self-knowledge and leadership skills needed to play a role in creating and maintaining healthy, civil, safe, and thriving communities.

Course Learning Objectives

When you leave this course, I expect you to have learned five things:

First, you should leave with a basic knowledge of economic inequality in the United States. That means knowing how economists and sociologists measure and describe inequality; when the takeoff in inequality occurred; who ~~suffered~~—~~or benefited~~—~~from~~ rising inequality; how inequality manifests itself in other areas of life; theories about why inequality took off; and, perhaps most important of all, what, in your and others' opinion, should be done about it.

Second, you should leave class familiar with the philosophical debates about equality and inequality. These debates ask if there is a right to equality and, if so, equality of what? Outcome or opportunity? Moreover, does the right to equality trump other rights, like, say, the right to property? Further, what role can the state legitimately play in securing equality? At the end of the semester, you should know how others have answered these questions and begun to work out answers for yourself.

Third, you should leave class with an understanding of the thematics of equality and inequality. In other words, how have ~~writers~~—~~in our class~~, Walt Whitman, James Agee, and Toni Morrison—~~turned~~ the abstractions of equality and inequality into concrete detail, into works of literature? Why have they done so? To what end?

Fourth, since this is a class in integrative thinking, you should leave class with an understanding of the ways that each ~~discipline~~—~~economics~~, philosophy, and ~~literature~~—~~frame~~ and studies a given topic. What can each discipline ~~contribute~~—~~and~~ what may each ~~miss~~—when it takes up an issue?

Finally, because most of your graded work will be essays, you should leave class a better ~~writer~~—~~clearer~~, more concise, and more persuasive—~~than~~ when you started.

Course Outline

Economics and Sociology

Week 1: Introduction and The Rise of Inequality

Week 2: The Rise of Inequality, cont'd

Week 3: The Effects of Inequality

Week 4: The Experience and Extent of Poverty in the US

Week 5: Education

Week 6: Mobility

Week 7: What Is To Be Done?

Week 8: Race, Ethnicity, and Inequality
Week 9: Gender, Sexuality, and Inequality

Philosophy

Week 10: The Liberal Case for Equality
Week 11: The Conservative Response

Literature

Week 12: Whitman
Week 13: Whitman and Agee
Week 14: Agee and Morrison
Week 15: Morrison