

# Class and Inequality in American Politics

POL 345Y - Fall 2019  
Harrison Hall 210  
Wed & Fri 11:40 am – 1:00 pm

Instructor: Dr. Kevin Reuning (ROY-ning)  
Email: [reunink@miamioh.edu](mailto:reunink@miamioh.edu)  
Course Website: Canvas  
Office: Harrison Hall 222  
Office Hours: Monday: 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm  
Wed & Fri: 1:30 – 2:30 pm  
and by appointment

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## Course Description

After decades of growing economic inequality, inequality has become central to American politics. The surprise election of Donald Trump is often explained as the result of a growing disconnect between elites and working class white voters. While the mobilization of the Occupy Wall Street movement less than a decade ago shows that voter anger at inequality is not limited to one political ideology. In this class we will explore how economic inequality shapes the political space and why policies directed at economic inequality often fail. We will also explore how economic inequality intersects with other types of inequality.

## Student Learning Objectives

1. Students will be able to define economic inequality and explain how it relates to political inequality.
2. Students will demonstrate evidence-based reasoning by writing a paper on a particular political issue and how economic inequality impacts that issue.
3. Student will critically assess the methodologies used to study economic inequality and its impact and recognize the limitations of those methodologies.
4. Students will be able to explain how economic inequality impacts the contemporary American politics environment.
5. Students will be able to explain the role of inequality in a modern democracy and evaluate the normative implications.

## Required Books

Gilens, Martin. 2012 *Affluence and influence: Economic inequality and political power in America*. Princeton University Press.

Butler, Daniel M. 2014. *Representing the advantaged: How politicians reinforce inequality*. Cambridge University Press.

## Course Policies

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### Respect

This course will discuss and tackle issues where opinions can differ, and where opinions can be strongly held. We will do so with respect for all members of the class, in a way that everyone feels welcome to share and discuss. It is also important to remember that this is a *political science* class, not a discussion of politics. We will be discussing how economic inequality impacts political life, including our own. I do not expect anyone to be detached from the subject matter, as these are important subjects, but I do expect everyone to remain focused on the goals of the class: understanding how economic inequality shapes politics.

### Preparation

This is a 300 level courses and so you will be expected to do the readings for the day prior to coming to class. In addition, given the nature of the course, I expect you to be aware of current events. Class discussion will include translating what we have been discussing in class to current events. As such, you will be better prepared to participate if you are aware of what is happening.

*If it becomes clear that students are not doing the readings in preparation for class we will begin doing reading quizzes.*

### Technology

In the class you are expected to be focused on what is going on within the class. Laptops will be required on some days. On those days that laptops are not required you may bring one to take notes, etc. If the laptop becomes a distraction to those around you we will look at reevaluating this policy.

### Email Policy

I will check email between 8am and 6pm, and will try to always respond to any contact within 24 hours. Although I do not expect formality in email communications, I do expect you to respect that emails are not a costless act.

## Grade Distribution and Assignments

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Item	Percentage
Attendance	5%
In-Class Assignments	15%
Policy Analysis Project	
Policy Introduction	5%
Policy Groups	10%
Policy Analysis	10%
Policy Final	15%
Midterm	20%
Final	20%

### Attendance

You are expected to come to class. You are given 2 unexcused absences without loss of credit. Additional unexcused absences will lead to lost points:

- 0-2 unexcused absences: 5%

- 3 unexcused absences: 4%
- 4 unexcused absences: 3%
- 5 unexcused absences: 2%
- 6 unexcused absences: 1%
- 7 or more unexcused absences: 0%

In addition, you will still be expected to complete any in-class assignments that you missed. These will be due one week after you return to class. You are expected to contact me in order to get access to any missed assignments. Not completing a missed assignment because you were unaware of it is not an excuse.

### **Excused absences**

In accordance with Miami University policy (<https://blogs.miamioh.edu/miamipolicies/?p=2046>), I must be notified in writing prior to any excused absence. These will not count against your unexcused absences. You will still be expected to complete any in-class assignments. As for unexcused absences you must contact me to receive the assignment and they are due one week after your return to class.

### **Policy Analysis Project**

As part of this class you will decide on a policy that you find interesting and investigate if this policy intersects with economic inequality in particular ways. The policy you pick should be something relatively specific such as 'red flag laws' or 'Medicare for All' not a general policy area. We will discuss some potential options in class. Based on this you will write the following:

#### **Policy Introduction (Due September 25)**

The first assignment will be a two page (double spaced) description of the policy. You will describe what the policy is and the recent history of attempts to enact the policy. You will also give one paragraph providing arguments for the policy and one paragraph of arguments against the policy.

#### **Policy Groups (Due October 23)**

The second assignment will be two pages (double spaced) and will describe what groups are most influential in working to shape this policy. You should include groups on multiple sides of the issue and discuss who the groups are, what positions they have taken, and who they represent.

#### **Policy Analysis (Due November 13)**

The third assignment will be three to four pages (double spaced). You will apply what we have learned in class to the groups that are involved in your policy and the changes that have made to that policy domain. You should be able to explain how what you found in the previous section fits into our expectations (or fails to) given what we have read in class.

#### **Final Memo (Due December 4)**

As you turn in each section I will provide feedback on it and a grade. At the end of the semester you will put together each portion into a single document making any edits that you think are necessary and providing an introduction and conclusion. Along with the final document you will include a single page explaining what changes you made based on my feedback.

### Midterm

Will cover the first half of the course, up through our discussion of policy and poverty. It will take place on Wednesday, October 9th. We will have a review the session before where we will discuss the format of the exam.

### Final

Will cover the second half of the course, it will *not* be cumulative. It will take place on Wednesday, December 11th. We will have a review the session before where we will discuss the format of the exam.

### Extra Credit

I will provide several extra credit opportunities throughout the semester and will announce them in class and on Canvas.

### Late work policy

In order to receive a deadline extension you should contact me more than 24 hours before the deadline. If an assignment is turned in late without an extension but within 24 hours of the due date, your grade will decrease by 5 percentage points (a 95% would become a 90%). For every additional 24 hours after this it loses another 5%.

### Letter Grade Distribution

>= 93.00	A	73.00 - 76.99	C
90.00 - 92.99	A-	70.00 - 72.99	C-
87.00 - 89.99	B+	67.00 - 69.99	D+
83.00 - 86.99	B	63.00 - 67.99	D
80.00 - 82.99	B-	60.00 - 62.99	D-
77.00 - 79.99	C+	<59.99	F

### Academic Integrity

Miami University is a scholarly community whose members believe that excellence in education is grounded in qualities of character as well as of intellect. We respect the dignity of other persons, the rights and property of others, and the right of others to hold and express disparate beliefs. We believe in honesty, integrity, and the importance of moral conduct. We defend the freedom of inquiry that is the heart of learning and combine that freedom with the exercise of judgment and the acceptance of personal responsibility.

Miami demands the highest standards of professional conduct from its students, faculty, and staff. As a community of scholars, our fundamental purpose is the pursuit of knowledge. Integrity in research and creative activities and in academic study is based on sound disciplinary practices and expectations, as well as a commitment to the values of honesty and integrity.

Any student caught committing academic dishonesty will, at a minimum, receive a 0 for the assignment at hand. For more information on academic dishonesty and potential punishments visit <http://MiamiOH.edu/integrity>.

### Disability Services

If you are a student with a physical, learning, medical and/or psychiatric disability and feel that you may need a reasonable accommodation to fulfill the essential functions of the course that are listed in this syllabus, you are encouraged to contact the Office of Student Disability Services at 529-1541 (V/TTY), located in the Shriver Center, Room 304.

## Course Outline

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### Inequality History and Context

August 28 & 30

- NO CLASS ON FRIDAY

September 4

- Cassidy, John. 2013. “American Inequality in Six Charts.” *The New Yorker*.

September 6

- APSA Task Force Report: “American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality”
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### Explanations for Inequality

September 11

- Working Paper “The Great Debate’s Four Great Narratives: Making Sense of Inequality in the United States”

September 13

- Pew. 2014. “Most See Inequality Growing, but Partisans Differ over Solutions”
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### What is Class and why does it matter?

September 18

- Working Paper “Conceptualizing and Measuring Social Class in the United States”

September 20

- Schneider, Anne, and Helen Ingram. 1993. “Social construction of target populations: Implications for politics and policy.” *American Political Science Review* 87(2) 334-347.
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### Public Policy and Poverty

September 25

- **Policy introduction memo due at midnight**
- Smeeding, Timothy M. 2005. “Public policy, economic inequality, and poverty: The United States in comparative perspective.” *Social Science Quarterly* 86: 955-983.

September 27

- Kelly, Nathan J., and Christopher Witko. 2012. “Federalism and American inequality.” *The Journal of Politics* 74(2): 414-426.

October 2

- Daguerre, Anne. 2008. “The second phase of US welfare reform, 2000–2006: blaming the poor again?” *Social Policy & Administration* 42(4): 362-378.
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## **Review and Midterm**

**October 4**

- Review

**October 9**

- Midterm

**October 11**

- Fall Break **NO CLASS**
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## **Policy Preferences at the Top and Bottom**

**October 16**

- Page, Benjamin I., Larry M. Bartels, and Jason Seawright. 2013. "Democracy and the policy preferences of wealthy Americans." *Perspectives on Politics* 11(1):51-73.

**October 18**

- Chapter 2 and 3 of *Affluence and Influence*.
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## **Political Activism and Class**

**October 23**

- **Policy groups memo due at midnight**
- Schlozman, Kay Lehman Philip Edward Jones, Hye Young You, Traci Burch, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady. 2014. "Louder Chorus — Same Accent: The Representation of Interests in Pressure Politics, 1991-2011." Brookings Report
- Block, Fred. 2003. "Organizing versus mobilizing: Poor people's movements after 25 years." *Perspectives on Politics* 1(4):733-735.

**October 25**

- Chapter 4 and 5 of *Affluence and Influence*.
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## **Political Representation**

**October 30**

- Chapter 2 of *Representing the Advantaged*

**November 1**

- Chapter 4 of *Representing the Advantaged*

**November 6**

- Chapter 5 of *Representing the Advantaged*

**November 8**

- Chapter 6 of *Representing the Advantaged*
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## Political Parties

### November 13

- **Policy analysis memo due at midnight**
  - Rigby, Elizabeth, and Gerald C. Wright. 2013. "Political parties and representation of the poor in the American states." *American Journal of Political Science* 57(3):552-565.
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## Economic Inequality in Context

### November 15

- Ogorzalek, Thomas, Spencer Piston, and Luisa Godinez Puig "Nationally Poor, Locally Rich: Income and Local Context in the 2016 Presidential Election" (Working Paper)

### November 20

- Strolovitch, Dara Z. 2006. "Do interest groups represent the disadvantaged? Advocacy at the intersections of race, class, and gender." *The Journal of Politics* 68(4):894-910.

### November 22

- Pager, Devah. 2003. "The mark of a criminal record." *American Journal of Sociology* 108(5):937-975.
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### November 27 & 29

- **NO CLASS**

### December 4 & 6

- **Final Policy Memo due on December 4th at midnight.**
- Review & Catch Up

### December 11

- Final at 12:45 - 2:45 p.m
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## Additional Resources

- Howe Writing Center: <http://miamioh.edu/hcwe>
- Students also may occasionally have personal issues that arise in the course of pursuing higher education or that may interfere with their academic performance. If you find yourself facing problems affecting your coursework, you are encouraged to call Student Counseling Service (513-529-4634). For emergencies outside of business hours, the Community and Counseling and Crisis Center (844-427-4747) has a 24-hour hotline.
- Students come to Miami from a variety of economic backgrounds. If you are having financial trouble I urge you to make use of the services available through Miami Cares Resources: <http://miamioh.edu/emss/offices/student-success-center/student-resources/index.html> (under the Emergency Needs tab)