

ECON/POLS 282: Inequality and Public Policy

Haverford College
Department of Economics

Professor: Michael Levere (he/him) (mlevere@haverford.edu)

Class Meetings: MW, 2:30 pm-4:00 pm, Room TBD

Office Hours: Thursday 4 pm-6 pm, Chase 218

Lunch Hours: Thursday 12-1 pm I will eat in the dining center. Please join me to discuss anything pertaining to inequality, public policy, or anything else!

Required Books: None. Readings will be posted on Moodle or available from the library.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course we will explore the relationship between public policy and economic outcomes in the United States. We will examine causes of rising inequality over the last few decades and its effects on American democracy, applying our discussion to important policy topics. The first third of the course will focus on the causes and consequences of inequality, including the role of race, gender, and discrimination. We will discuss the role that inequality plays in voting and elections and the extent to which government represents the interests of Americans across the income distribution. We will then spend the remainder of the course examining eight applied policy topics – (1) taxes; (2) transfer programs; (3) employment; (4) education; (5) healthcare; (6) housing; (7) environment; and (8) criminal justice. In each, we will assess levels of inequality, including the role of race and gender, as well as analyze policies that serve to ameliorate or exacerbate inequality. We will wrap up with a comprehensive assessment of ways the political and economic policy landscape can evolve over the coming decades to ensure equality of opportunity.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Summarize recent trends in inequality in the United States
- Distinguish equality of opportunity from income and wealth inequality
- Evaluate the causes and consequences of political and economic inequality
- Judge the potential effects of proposed policies to reduce inequality
- Apply concepts of inequality to understand a range of policy topics

INFORMED PARTICIPATION (15%)

Our class meetings will include frequent opportunities for small group and large class discussions. You must come to class prepared to talk about the assigned readings. Informed participation refers to the quality of your contribution to these discussions.

TWO REACTION PAPERS (20%)

You will be expected to write two brief 1-2 page reaction papers – one to a reading in the

first third of the course and one to a reading on an applied policy topic that you are *not* presenting on. Please summarize the reading and your reaction to it. The reaction paper must be turned in *before* the class in which we discuss the reading.

IN CLASS PRESENTATION ON APPLIED TOPIC (30%)

I will expect you to become an expert on one of the eight policy topics. Together with one or two of your fellow classmates, you will give a brief 15-20 minute presentation summarizing the topic, why you think it is important, existing levels of inequality, and ways that policies can address inequality. I expect you to go beyond the assigned readings, presenting your own assessment of the most important trends pertaining to this topic. Please email me no later than **January 31** indicating your top three topics. More details to follow.

FINAL POLICY MEMO (35%)

In lieu of a final exam, you will be expected to write an 8-10 page policy memo. In it, you should design and advocate for an original public policy intervention aimed at reducing inequality. Your memo should provide an overview of the field your intervention targets, a clear and concise explanation of what the intervention will do, and a justification for why it will help reduce inequality. The memo should directly engage with research related to your topic (which can include readings from the course as well as other studies from academic journals or reports from government agencies/think tanks).

OTHER DETAILS

Inclusivity: I consider this classroom to be a place where you will be treated with respect, and I welcome individuals of all ages, backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, genders, gender identities, gender expressions, national origins, religious affiliations, sexual orientations, ability – and other visible and nonvisible differences. All members of this class are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming and inclusive environment for everyone in class.

Class website: All information and readings will be posted on the course Moodle page.

E-mail policy: I will always do my best to reply to any e-mail you send within 24 hours. My response will typically be of a similar length as your e-mail. If you have more detailed questions, I suggest you attend office hours. I am generally available outside my office hours as well, so please feel free to stop by my office or email to schedule an appointment.

Academic honesty: For any written assignments to be turned in, you may use any resources you like and can consult with classmates, provided that the work you turn in is your own and you acknowledge the names of helpful peers. Directly copying someone else's work, ideas, or answers is a violation of the honor code with serious consequences.

Additional support: I am committed to partnering with you on your academic and intellectual journey. I also recognize that your ability to thrive academically can be impacted

by your personal well-being and that stressors may impact you over the course of the semester. If the stressors are academic, I welcome the opportunity to discuss and address those stressors with you in order to find solutions together. If you are experiencing challenges or questions related to emotional health, finances, physical health, relationships, learning strategies or differences, or other potential stressors, I hope you will consider reaching out to the many resources available on campus. These resources include CAPS (free and unlimited counseling is available), the Office of Academic Resources, Health Services, Professional Health Advocate, Religious and Spiritual Life, the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the GRASE Center, and the Dean's Office. Additional information can be found at <https://www.haverford.edu/deans-office-student-life/offices-resources>

Additionally, Haverford College is committed to creating a learning environment that meets the needs of its diverse student body and providing equal access to students with a disability. If you have (or think you have) a learning difference or disability – including mental health, medical, or physical impairment – please contact the Office of Access and Disability Services (ADS) at hc-ads@haverford.edu. The Director will confidentially discuss the process to establish reasonable accommodations. It is never too late to request accommodations – our bodies and circumstances are continuously changing. Students who have already been approved to receive academic accommodations and want to use their accommodations in this course should share their accommodation letter and make arrangements to meet with me as soon as possible to discuss how their accommodations will be implemented in this course. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice in order to successfully implement.

Title IX: Haverford College is committed to fostering a safe and inclusive living and learning environment where all can feel secure and free from harassment. All forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, domestic violence, and dating violence are violations of Haverford's policies, whether they occur on or off campus. Haverford faculty are committed to helping to create a safe learning environment for all students and for the College community as a whole. If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination, harassment, or violence, know that help and support are available. Staff members are trained to support students in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more.

The College strongly encourages all students to report any incidents of sexual misconduct. Please be aware that all Haverford employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as counselors, clergy, and healthcare providers) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the Bi-College Title IX Coordinator: <https://www.haverford.edu/users/ktaylor4>.

Information about the College's Sexual Misconduct policy, reporting options, and a list of campus and local resources can be found on the College's website: <https://www.haverford.edu/sexual-misconduct>

Tentative Schedule

Lecture	Date	Day	Topic
1	January 19	Wednesday	Intro/Statistics crash course
2	January 24	Monday	Overview of income inequality
3	January 26	Wednesday	Overview of wealth inequality
4	January 31	Monday	Inequality as a political problem
5	February 2	Wednesday	Inequality as a political problem
6	February 7	Monday	Economic voting
7	February 9	Wednesday	Beliefs about inequality
8	February 14	Monday	Unequal representation
9	February 16	Wednesday	Unequal representation
10	February 21	Monday	Taxes
11	February 23	Wednesday	Taxes
12	February 28	Monday	Transfer programs
13	March 2	Wednesday	Transfer programs
14	March 14	Monday	Unemployment and minimum wage
15	March 16	Wednesday	Unemployment and minimum wage
16	March 21	Monday	Education
17	March 23	Wednesday	Education
18	March 28	Monday	Healthcare
19	March 30	Wednesday	Healthcare
20	April 4	Monday	Housing
21	April 6	Wednesday	Housing
22	April 11	Monday	Environment/climate change
23	April 13	Wednesday	Environment/climate change
24	April 18	Monday	Criminal justice
25	April 20	Wednesday	Criminal justice
26	April 25	Monday	Where do we go from here?
27	April 27	Wednesday	Where do we go from here?