

SOCI 803, Institutions and Inequality
Fall 2019

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Office Hour: Wednesday 6:00 to 7:00

“(In)equality” exists in many forms and types. “Class equality,” “status equality,” and “power equality,” for example, are related but distinct. To increase equality may come at the cost of other values, such as liberty. But moreover, to promote one type of equality (say, equality of results) almost inevitably comes at the cost of other types (say, equality of opportunity). Capitalism is in many ways more “equitable” than feudalism, in other way less so. This paradox—that different types and dimensions of equality may work against each other—provides one major research problem for this course.

A paradox about institutions provides another research problem for the course. Institutions mediate the unequal relations of persons to larger structures of society and culture. Institutions are simultaneously facilitative and constrictive. This paradox is related to the dialectical nature of discipline, which is always required to create the level of organization and resource-mobilization necessary for change, and yet is often oppressive in its enforcement of rule and routine. While these related paradoxes apply to all institutions, they also suggest a key axis of variation among types of institutions--from those (such as communes) that are primarily facilitative to those (such as prisons) that are primarily constrictive.

The most general questions for the course, then, are as follows: Why are institutions so often dehumanizing, and what are the possibilities for making them more humane? How do institutions reproduce relations of power, domination, and exclusion? How can they be made more open, effective, and equitable? At what cost to the degree of certain forms of inequality are increases in other forms of equality won? And at what cost to other values?

Course readings suggest many and diverse frames of inquiry for students as they pursue their own research interests in preparing original term papers. Max Weber provides the seminal typologies of stratification, authority and institutional structure, as well as the most insightful understanding of bureaucracies. Everett Hughes was a founder of “the Chicago school,” a tradition that fostered the influential work of Erving Goffman and Howard Becker. Hughes emphasized the ethical dimensions and moral dilemmas of work, as well as focusing on the personal, temporal, and ecological dimensions of work and the professions. Philip Selznick and Morris Janowitz applied the pragmatic public sociology of John Dewey to problems of mid- to late- twentieth century institutions. “The New Institutionalism” developed at Stanford to become a major paradigm of institutional analysis in the late twentieth-century. Uncertainty, risk, and the disarticulation (Janowitz’s term) of complex systems chart the institutional transformations of late modernity, as theorized by Ulrich Beck and as painstakingly demonstrated (applying the theory of “normal accidents”) by Diane Vaughan. Khan’s case study of an elite New England prep school, and selected essays from Knorr Cetina’s and Preda’s recent handbook of finance, explore ways that central contemporary institutions foster and shape inequality. The course concludes with three provocative and inspiring articles from the *American Sociological Review* spanning the past half-century, suggesting the promise of social cooperation and the sociological imagination in promoting greater equality through creative institutional practice.

Course requirements

Each class will be conducted partly as a seminar, partly as a practicum. Pairs of students will rotate responsibility for leading the exegetical class discussion about each reading. Opportunities will also rotate for reporting on each student’s progress towards the term paper, with reference to the particular relevance of the readings to each student’s project. (Students will learn to recognize

setbacks in the research process as a significant form of progress.) The instructor will suggest additional readings to each student on an individualized basis, according to the student's particular research interest.

In the third week of the semester, the student will hand in a description of his/her topic of interest; in the fourth week, a preliminary formulation of the research problem; in the ninth week, a full research proposal; in the eleventh week, a preliminary draft; in the thirteenth week, a completed draft of the final report. This sequence of assignments is designed to make the prospect of delivering the final report, on Dec. 17, less apocalyptic. The last two class sessions will be devoted to student presentations and critique.

By 11PM the night before each class, every student should post to Blackboard a question meaningfully suggested by the week's reading, with specific textual reference. By 9AM on the day of class, every student should revisit Blackboard to respond to a question or questions posed by one or several other students.

The final paper should be 10-25 double-spaced pages. The final paper will count 60% of the course grade. Class participation will count the other 40%. Since attendance is essential for participation in a practicum, almost any absence from class is excessive, and will detract from your participation grade.

Course Schedule (Required texts to purchase indicated by asterisk--*)

Wk.

1. Aug. 28. Introduction
 2. Sept. 4. Weber, *Economy and Society*, pp. 3-26, 212-54, 541-56, 901-39, 956-1003, 1111-55, (1381-1462)
 3. Sept. 11. In-class exercise: "A Dialogue of Visions"
HAND IN STATEMENT OF INTEREST FOR TERM PAPER
(Sept. 17—Last day to drop.)
 4. Sept. 18. Everett Hughes, *The Sociological Eye*. (PDFs in Blackboard)
PRELIMINARY STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM
 5. Sept. 25. *Philip Selznick, *The Moral Commonwealth*, chs. 1-2, 9-12. Morris Janowitz, "Theory and Policy: Engineering Versus Enlightenment Models" (PDF in Blackboard)
 6. Oct. 2. *Erving Goffman, *Asylums*, "On the Characteristics of Total Institutions," and "The Moral Career of the Mental Patient."
 7. Oct. 9. No Class—Yom Kippur.
 8. Oct. 16. *Shamus Khan, *Privilege*, entire.
 9. Oct. 23. Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell, "The Iron Cage Revisited," ASR 1983 (PDF in Blackboard); Ronald Jepperson, <https://worldpolity.wordpress.com/2010/05/20/jepperson-review-of-sociological-institutionalism/>; *Powell and DiMaggio, eds., *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, chs. 1-3, 11, 14.
FULL RESEARCH PROPOSAL
 10. Oct. 30. *Ulrich Beck, *The Risk Society*, parts I-II, pp. 204-212, 231-5.
 11. Nov. 6. *Diane Vaughan, *The Challenger Launch Decision*, chs. 1-2, 6-10.
PRELIMINARY DRAFT
 12. Nov. 13. Karin Knorr Cetina and Alex Preda, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Finance*, (PDFs of selections in Blackboard).
 13. Nov. 20. Howard Becker, "Art as Collective Action"; William F. Whyte, "Social Inventions for Solving Human Problems"; Erik Olin Wright, "Transforming Capitalism Through Real Utopias" (PDFs in Blackboard)
DRAFT OF TERM PAPER
 14. Nov. 27. No class—Thanksgiving.
 15. Dec. 6. Student presentations.
- DEC. 17, 10 PM. FINAL PAPERS DUE IN THE BIN OUTSIDE MY OFFICE, ROBINSON B309.**