

Equality and American Democracy

Political Studies 281

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Course Description

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal..."

— Declaration of Independence

"Equality is not given us, but is the result of human organization insofar as it is guided by the principle of justice. We are not born equal; we become equal..."

— Hannah Arendt

In the United States, one-tenth of the population owns 71% of the nation's wealth; the bottom 40% has less than 1%. The New York City school-age population is over 70 percent African American or Hispanic; at Stuyvesant High School, one of the city's best, less than 4 percent of the students come from these groups. On average, American women earn 83 cents for every dollar men earn in comparable jobs. How should we regard these and other inequalities? Are they objectionable? Tolerable? On what grounds? What should be done about them, if anything? This course explores several philosophical theories of egalitarianism and applies them to American case studies in inequality on the local and national levels. Students will gain new tools for navigating debates over affirmative action, gender discrimination, income inequality and other pressing controversies. Readings include legal materials and works by Scanlon, Rawls, Parfit, Burke, Hayek, Anderson, Okin and Williams, among others.

Structure

Class sessions will be conducted seminar-style. We will explore the issues through frequent in-class writing, discussion and debates. Consistent active engagement of every student is essential to the success of the course.

Course Texts

The following books are available at the bookstore — two of the three can be rented rather than purchased if you want to save some money:

- John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Harvard University Press, 2001)
- Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration* (Princeton University Press, 2010)
- Joan Williams, *Reshaping the Work-Family Debate* (Harvard University Press, 2010)

In addition, there are thirty or so readings on Reserves Direct, which you will need to download, print and read in advance of the class sessions for which they are assigned.

Requirements

Preparation for class: Everyone must come to each class ready to participate. Prior to each class meeting students must complete the reading assignment listed on the syllabus for that day and prepare a reading journal entry thereon (see below).

Reading Journal: You must dedicate a notebook to informal in-class and out-of-class writing on our texts. You are free to choose a format that works for you, but I would suggest using a “quote and response” format for at least some of your entries. With this format, you copy down a short passage from the day’s reading and then attempt to explain it, critically engage it, or ask questions of it. This can mean exploring an author’s argument, developing a response, querying its premises, pitting two ideas against each other, etc. When I examine and evaluate your response journal (which I will do, with short notice, several times during the term), I will look for evidence that you are reading carefully and thinking through questions raised by the readings. Your consistent interaction with the texts in your journal is crucial to effective and reflective participation in class discussions. You are expected to write (~1-2 pp.) in your journal in preparation for each class meeting; label each entry with the author & title of the work and the class date.

Presentation: Once during the term, beginning Week 6, each student will facilitate discussion on a day’s reading assignment. You will give a short (5-10 minute) summary of what you took to be the main arguments/features of the reading selection and pose questions for discussion. You should come prepared with enough good questions to keep discussion moving, though the professor will have an agenda of his own to supplement yours. Look over the syllabus, think about which readings look most interesting to you and sign up for your slot during Week 4.

Writing Assignments: In addition to less formal in-class and out-of-class writing, each student will write two short essays and one longer final paper. Topics for the shorter papers will be provided by the professor; students will propose their own topics for the final essay, which will include a research component and a short presentation.

Grading

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| Participation (*) | 25% |
| Reading Journal | 25% |
| Two Essays (5-6 pp.; 10%, 15%) | 25% |
| One Research Paper (7-9 pp.) (including presentation) | 25% |

() Encompasses punctuality, attendance, presentations and overall contributions to class discussions and debates. Note that participation does not mean simply talking in class. It means being well prepared, contributing thoughtfully to discussions, listening carefully to others and engaging fellow students’ concerns and questions. Latenesses and absences will adversely affect your participation grade.*

Calendar and Reading Assignments

Note: all readings other than the Rawls, Anderson and Williams chapters should be **downloaded** and **printed** from the PS 281 Reserves Direct webpage. Be sure to bring all readings to class on the day we are discussing them.

Part I: Two Questions About Equality

Week 1 **What Is Equality?**

Mon. 8/29 Introduction to the course; Thinking about Inequalities
Tues. 8/30 Johnston, "Introduction" (2000); Aristotle, "Proportional Equality" from *Politics* (4th century BCE)

Week 2 **Why Strive for Equality?**

Mon. 9/5 Scanlon, "The Diversity of Objections to Inequality" (1997), sects. 1 and 3 *only* (pp. 41-47, pp. 51-57); Porter, "How Superstars' Pay Stifles Everyone Else" (2010); Kristof, "Equality, a True Soul Food" (2011)
Tues. 9/6 Wilkinson, "Thinking Clearly About Economic Inequality" (2009); Chait, "Mind the Gap" (2009); Klein, "The Coincidences of Inequality" (2009)
****Essay 1 assigned****

Part II: Three Ways to Be (or not to be) an Egalitarian

Week 3 **Rawlsian Equality**

Mon. 9/12 Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, pp. 1-61
Tues. 9/13 Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, pp. 61-134

Week 4 **The Priority View and Democratic Egalitarianism**

Mon. 9/19 Parfit, "Equality or Priority?" ****Essay 1 due****
Tues. 9/20 Anderson, "What is the Point of Equality?" (1999)

Week 5 **Against Equality**

Mon. 9/26 Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) (excerpts)
Tues. 9/27 Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (1978), ch. 6

Part III: Equality and Race

Week 6 **Segregation and Equality**

Mon. 10/3 Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration* (2010), preface & chs. 1-3
Tues. 10/4 *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954); Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration*, chs. 4-5

**** Fall Break, Mon. 10/10 - Tues. 10/11 ****

Week 7 **Affirmative Action in Higher Education**

Mon. 10/17 *Regents v. Bakke* (1979); Newton, "Reverse Discrimination as Unjustified" (1979) ****Essay 2 assigned****

Tues. 10/18 *Gratz v. Bollinger, Grutter v. Bollinger*(2003) (selections)

Week 8 Affirmative Action in Higher Education, cont.

Mon. 10/24 Bok, *The Shape of the River* (1998) (preface + chs. 1-2)

Tues. 10/25 Bok, *The Shape of the River* (1998) (chs. 8-10); Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration* (2010), ch. 7

Week 9 Case Studies in Racial Disparity I: education

Mon. 10/31 Mazie, "Equality, Race and Gifted Education: An Egalitarian Critique of Admission to New York City's Specialized Schools" (2009)

Tues. 11/1 *Parents v. Seattle* (2007) (selections) ****Essay 2 due****

Week 10 Case Studies in Racial Disparity II: employment

Mon. 11/7 *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.* (1971); Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration*, ch. 8

Tues. 11/8 Will, "The Wreck of a Spoils System" (2009); Mazie, "Race, Color-Blindness and Equality in Recent Supreme Court Jurisprudence" (2011) ****Essay 3 assigned****

Part IV: Equality and Gender

Week 11 Women's Struggles in the Home

Mon. 11/14 Okin, *Justice, Gender and the Family*, ch. 1 (1989), pp. 3-24

****Essay 3 topic proposal due****

Tues. 11/15 Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Postsocialist' Age" (1997)

Week 12 Gender in the Workplace; Feminist Theory

Mon. 11/21 Williams, *Reshaping the Work-Family Debate* (2010), intro + chs. 1-3 (pp. 1-108)

Tues. 11/22 Williams, *Reshaping the Work-Family Debate* (2010), ch. 4 (pp. 109-150)

Week 13 Class, Culture and Gender

Mon. 11/28 Williams, *Reshaping the Work-Family Debate* (2010), chs. 5-6, conclusion (pp. 151-219)

Tues. 11/29 Okin, "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" (1999); al-Hibri, "Is Western Patriarchal Feminism Good for Third World/Minority Women?" (1999); Gilman, " 'Barbaric' Rituals?" (1999) ****Essay 3 first draft due****

Part V: Domestic Responses to Global Poverty

Week 14 A Latte or a Life?

Mon. 12/6 Singer, *The Life You Can Save* (2009), preface + chs. 1-2 (p. xi-xv, 3-22)

Tues. 12/7 Singer, *The Life You Can Save* (2009), ch. 3 (pp. 23-41)

Part VI: Final Paper Presentations

Week 15 Completion Days — paper presentations

Mon. 12/13
Tues. 12/14

student presentations
student presentations *****Essay 3 final draft due*****