Course Description.

The premise of this class is that processes in and around organizations located within fields are centrally important to understanding the emergence of, persistence of, and change in forms of social inequality. As such, the focus of the class is on research and examples that illustrate the various ways that organizations in organizational fields such as work, schools, criminal justice, social welfare state, housing, and health, shape inequality. This focus is in contrast to the behavior of individuals outside of organizations, or the idiosyncratic behaviors of individuals within organizations. Scholars of inequality, particularly in labor markets, have called for examining the “mechanisms” or underlying processes generating inequality for more than a decade. This class uses those calls as a starting point.

We will examine several elements of formal organizations, focusing in particular on the first and the last: organizational practices, organizational gatekeepers, networks, legal environment, and organizational forms. We could conduct an entire class on any one of these areas, each is sufficiently rich. As such, the main goal of the class is to make connections across substantive domains instead of developing expertise in any one domain. Looking at them together should allow us to compare processes to each other. This will be the main challenge for the class: to interrogate the extent to which the processes we see in the examples from the readings are the same or different from each other, whether they capture much of what is important to understand about the dynamics of social inequality or whether important processes are missing, whether processes occur similarly across different organizational fields.

The readings are both theoretical and empirical. Some of the readings could fit into multiple themes, so read them first in light of the theme for that week, and in our discussion we can question whether the categorization makes sense. Some of the readings draw a complete picture of how the phenomenon described contributes to inequality while others leave open the question of how a new organizational practice or form might shape inequality. There are many examples and other works that could have been included here, and this syllabus is unfortunately U.S.-centric. I would like to charge you all with actively contributing new examples, both in the U.S. and internationally, current and historical, and drawing connections to other research.

Learning Goals

In this course, you will:
- Gain substantive knowledge about organizational processes that generate and ameliorate inequality
- Become familiar with major themes and issues in organizational sociology
- Think theoretically and synthetically about the processes across different organizational fields
- Assess the validity of different methodological approaches to the empirical study of organizations and inequality
- Identify significant and novel research questions related to the emergence, persistence, or change in inequality

You will work towards these goals by:
- Participating in in-depth weekly discussions of assigned readings
- Contributing 1-2 weekly discussion questions based on the readings
- Writing 5 memos that critically assess and synthesize the readings and generate new research ideas
- Generating discussion by doing short presentations and helping to lead the class for a session
- Writing a concrete final research proposal that you could use for a QP or another project

Structure of the Course  All readings are required and should be completed before class. I recommend doing the readings in the order indicated on the syllabus, if at all possible. While you are doing the readings, keep in mind: a) how does this reading address the themes of the week? b) what are the key processes at play in this reading? c) how does this reading relate to the other readings of the week, and to previous readings or outside examples?

I’ll provide an overview of the readings and the theme for the week at the beginning of class and the rest of the class will be discussion that everyone is expected to contribute to. I’ll also have you all help lead a session by providing short summaries/overviews of the readings, developing discussion questions to start the conversation, and bringing in outside examples for comparisons.

All reading material will be available on the Sakai site. For every reading I chose, there are a dozen others I could have selected. I’ve included some of the ones that I left off at the end of the syllabus. If you are particularly interested in a type of reading or topic, let me know and I can point you to more readings.

Before each class (by 5pm on Wednesdays), you’ll submit 1-2 discussion questions based on the readings on Sakai. You’ll submit a total of 5 memos (800-1200 words, by 12pm on Wednesdays) on the readings. You can choose which weeks you submit your memos, but they must be separated by at least a week. Please discuss readings across all of the weeks in the memo period in your memos. The memos are a chance for you to consolidate your thoughts on the readings, so please don’t use the space for summaries. Instead, make connections between readings or themes, point out conflicts or convergences, discuss implications for research, try out theoretical arguments. You’ll submit these via Sakai.

The research proposal should be a very concrete proposal for a research project that you’d like to
pursue related to the issues and themes of the course. By concrete, I mean that in addition to a theoretical motivation and literature review, it should include a careful discussion of what methods, data, and operationalization you would use to pursue the project. I want these proposals to be maximally useful to you in your research, so that means that you will need to get specific. We’ll build in some time to workshop these ideas later in the semester, but I’ll ask you to start thinking about options early in the semester. With your research proposal, I’d like you to submit a reading list of 20-30 key sources relevant to your project that you can use to build your project-specific knowledge if you decide to pursue the project. Everyone will present 5 slides on their project in the last class.

**Summary of Grading**

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion Participation</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>(includes leading seminar and submitting discussion questions)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Response Memos (5)</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Proposal (due Dec. 15)</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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**Class Policies** Because much of this class is discussion-based, to encourage the free exchange of ideas, the classroom should be safe, supportive, and productive. To facilitate such an environment, all class participants, students and faculty, must act with mutual respect and common courtesy. Please come talk with me about these issues at any point.

The Rutgers Sociology Department strives to create an environment that supports and affirms diversity in all manifestations, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, social class, disability status, region/country of origin, and political orientation. We also celebrate diversity of theoretical and methodological perspectives among our faculty and students and seek to create an atmosphere of respect and mutual dialogue. We have zero tolerance for violations of these principles and have instituted clear and respectful procedures for responding to such grievances.
READINGS

Week One Introduction and Setting the Parameters
The goal of this week is to establish the parameters of the class: Why should we take this type of approach to inequality (Reskin, Tilly)? What about organizations is important in understanding inequality (Reskin, Tilly, Pager and Shepherd)? What is the relationship between organizations and institutions (Powell)? What are we talking about when we talk about inequality (Tilly)? What are the differences between an organizational/institutional approach to inequality and an individual-centric approach (Reskin, Pager and Shepherd)? We will also talk about forms of sociological argumentation: what is a mechanism or a process and how does focusing on mechanisms/processes differ from other forms of sociological inquiry?

Reading for Thursday September 8:

Week Two Organizational Practices: Policies & Programs at Work
This week we’ll look at examples of policies and rules that organizations adopt at work and their consequences for inequality. The examples could be endless, so the goal is to think about categorizing types of policies and programs and thinking through their implications.

Reading for Thursday September 15:
Pat Roos and Mary Gatta. 2009. “Gender (in)equity in the Academy: Subtle Mechanisms and the Production of Inequality.” Research in Social Stratification and Mobility 27: 177-200.


**Week Three** Organizational Practices: Policies and Programs in Other Org. Fields

Reading for Thursday September 22:


**Week Four** Organizational Practices: Culture

Reading for Thursday September 29:


Week Five Organizational Practices: Racialization
Reading for Thursday October 6:


Week Six Organizational Practices: Technology and Algorithms
Reading for Thursday October 13:


Week Seven Organizational Gatekeepers
Reading for Thursday October 20:


Matthew Rafalow. Under review (please do not distribute or cite). “Disciplining Play: Digital Youth Culture as Capital at School.”

Mary Kate Blake. Unpublished dissertation chapter (please do not distribute or cite). “Disadvantaged Students and High School Counselors: Institutional Barriers to Academic, College, and Personal Counseling.”

Week Eight Legal Environment
Reading for Thursday October 27:


Week Nine  Networks and Integration
Reading for Thursday November 3:


Week Ten  Organizational Forms: Structure
Reading for Thursday November 10:


**Week Eleven** Organizational Forms: Privatization

**Reading for Thursday November 17:**


**Week Twelve** Organizational Forms: Decline of Forms (Class held Tuesday)

**Reading for TUESDAY November 22:**


**Week Thirteen** Organizational Forms: Growth of New Forms

**Reading for Thursday December 1:**


Week Fourteen Lightning Presentations

Reading for Thursday December 8:
None: Everyone will present 5 slides on their research proposal

Final Paper Due Dec. 15
SHORT LIST OF ADDITIONAL RESOURCES


Other work by Alexandra Kalev

Much more on algorithms: https://socialmediacollective.org/reading-lists/critical-algorithm-studies/