

## ISC 205-01 (A Minerva Course)

# INEQUALITY: ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES

Teresa Meade and Eshragh Motahar/Fall 2015

## OFFICE INFORMATION

### Teresa Meade

- *Hours:* Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:00-4:00; other times by appointment.
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### Eshragh Motahar

- *Hours:* Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:00-3:00. Additional hours are available by appointment. To make appointments please click [here](#).
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## A. COURSE

A 2015 Pew Research Center analysis found that the gap between America's upper-income and middle-income families has reached its highest level on record, posing what many view as a threat to the future of our democracy. Although society has always been unequal, why has it reached such historically high proportions now? Why is the world racked with the effects of gross inequality: mass migrations, war, scarcity and famine? This course attempts to answer those questions using an interdisciplinary approach. We consider such factors as social class, race/ethnicity/gender determinants, as well as the role of governmental and market forces, technology, and international policy as contributors to the widening divide between rich and poor people, nations and geographic regions.

The fundamental goals of this course are to investigate (a) how inequality is constructed, (b) how it is perpetuated, and (c) what are its effects? The course will draw on lectures from scholars in many fields, including literature and the humanities, history, psychology, economics, political, social, scientific and environmental studies. As students from many disciplines you are invited to approach this subject from a variety of perspectives. While no one need come to a single conclusion about the reasons for inequality, this course will make us aware of the multiplicity of causes, decisions and circumstances that have enforced hierarchies over time.

## B. Assignments

REQUIRED: David Cay Johnson (editor), *Divided: The Perils of Our Growing Inequality*, The New Press, 2014. In addition specific reading requirements assigned by guest lecturers will be posted to the course's main webpage ([here](#)). So, please make sure to visit that page frequently.

RECOMMENDED: There is a wealth of resources available in the form of books, articles, video clips, documentaries, and so on. We have provided a resource list for you [here](#). Again, check this site frequently as it will get updated when new material becomes available.

The class lectures will provide an overall view of the various issues under study; that is, provide breadth and clarification. Lectures are thus *not* substitutes for reading the assigned material.

## C. EXAMS, PROJECTS, AND CLASS POLICY

1. There will be various projects/activities, as follows (due dates indicated in the middle column):

-Midterm	Wednesday, October 7	20% of course grade
-Final	TBA	30% of course grade
-Portfolio/Term Project	Friday, 11/20, 5:00 PM	35% of course grade
-Attendance & Participation		15% of course grade

2. For guidelines regarding the midterm, final and portfolio, see the relevant sections of the course website. Note that participation means attending all classes, participating actively in class discussions, and attending a minimum of two discussion dinners held for the visiting scholars to the course. For a sign-up sheet click [here](#).
3. **Time management** is an integral part of your education. Therefore, make sure to plan in a way to tackle all the projects in a timely manner. The dates of various projects/activities are listed on the syllabus and announced on the first day of classes so that you can plan accordingly. For example, we recommend that you sign up for the Minerva house dinner as soon as possible to ensure that you get a date that works with your schedule. If an emergency should arise that interferes with your performance in the class, please contact us and the relevant College dean or official so that arrangements can be made for a make-up date/late submission. If the above procedures are not followed, your grade on that project/activity will be zero. Please note that it is YOUR responsibility, NOT the professors', to make ALL the necessary arrangements.
4. We are sensitive to issues of disability and we comply with Union College's policy of allowing accommodations. Be sure to provide us with the proper documentation from the Director of Student Support Services, or bring any necessary accommodations to our attention **by the end of the first week of class**. All discussions will remain confidential.
5. Since adequate ways of assessing students' performance are already in the syllabus, *there will be no additional work* required or accepted as a means of improving grades. While not offering extra credit, we will announce speakers, plays, films or cultural events taking place on campus or in the community that we feel enhance our understanding of the content of the course. You are encouraged to attend and to include information drawn from such events in your portfolio, taking care to demonstrate the connection between the event and the subject of your research.
6. **Professional Conduct.** In order for everyone to benefit from the educational process, adherence to professional conduct in the classroom is expected. Cell-phone use, late arrival, leaving the classroom while the class is in session, conversation which interferes with class activity, and similar unprofessional conduct is not acceptable. **Computer use (laptop/notebook/iPad, Apple Watch, etc.) in the classroom is not allowed** unless you obtain prior permission. We assume that you will demonstrate exemplary courtesy and attentiveness to the visiting scholars and Union College professors.
7. **Responsibility.** College rules and regulations governing issues such as academic honesty apply to all projects/activities in this course (see the relevant sections of the *Student Handbook*). According to the Honor Code, "Union College recognizes the need to create an environment of mutual trust as part of its educational mission. Responsible participation in an academic community requires respect for and acknowledgement of the thoughts and work of others, whether expressed in the present or in some distant time and place. Matriculation at the College is taken to signify implicit agreement with the Academic Honor Code, available at [honorcode.union.edu](http://honorcode.union.edu)." **Please affirm your adherence to the Union College Honor Code by signing the statement circulated to all participants in the course.**



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