The aim of this course is to cover recent debates, competing theories and empirical research on social inequality. The analytical starting point is that to study social inequality means examining the interplay between labour market, family and state. “Classic” social stratification research has traditionally focused on inequality of educational opportunities and social mobility. It has thus studied how social background (class of origin) affects educational achievement and the individual social position (class of destination). The central question in this respect is whether contemporary societies are becoming more or less meritocratic, ie whether the influence of the family of origin on individual life chances (education, occupational achievement) is less strong than in the past. While the driving question of classic social stratification is still relevant, more recent research has enriched the traditional framework of analysis by considering family dynamics, female employment, immigration and changes in the occupational classes. The general question, then, becomes whether the advent of the post-industrial service society has also altered the bases of social inequality. Are new patterns of social inequality emerging in post-industrial, service societies? If yes, how can we characterize and explain them? The seminar will, thus, address both the classic and more recent questions driving the research on social inequality. A special emphasis will be put on the explicative mechanisms underlying the observed pattern of inequality.

The seminar depends on everyone having reflected on the suggested readings for each session. To prepare for the discussions, participants are asked to prepare brief questions on the readings in advance of each session and send them to me. In addition, each participant will be required to present the readings of one of the sessions and will be allowed 20 minutes for her/his presentation. Another member of the seminar will be appointed as discussant. His/her task will be that opening the critical debate concerning the readings and the report. Occasionally we could also have a debate with two presenters defending an opposing view in a current debate in sociological research on social inequality. In any case, the concrete aim of each session is to identify some testable hypothesis and/or a list of research questions that could be addressed with an empirical analysis. Regular attendance and active contribution to the discussions are crucial for the crediting of the seminar.

Participants are encouraged to write an empirically based term paper addressing one of the hypothesis or research questions that will come up during the discussion in each seminar session. If you want to write a term paper for this seminar, please send a copy to the seminar's professor and to Monika.Rzemieniecka@eui.eu by 31 May 2011.
Preliminary Syllabus

13/1/2011 Week 1

Introduction. Why studying social inequality? How to study it?

Outline of course and scheduling of assignments; suggestions for additional topics or readings

Recommended readings


Additional readings


20/1/2011 Week 2

Inequality in educational opportunities by social background I : Persistent inequality? How to explain it?


Additional readings

Rational choice explanations


Maximally maintained inequality


Persistent inequalities?

27/1/2011 Week 3

Inequality in educational opportunities by social background II: the primary/secondary effects debate. Other household and life-course effects.


Bernardi, F. and Cebolla, H. (2010), *Compensation and imperfect information: Do previous school results matter differently depending on students’ social background?*, Unpublished manuscript.


Additional readings


3/2/2011 Week 4

Intelligence and the reproduction of inequality


Additional readings


10/2/2011 Week 5

Meritocracy, social inequality and social justice


Additional readings


**And of course, the origin of everything:**

17/2/2011 Week 6

**Educational returns in the labour market**


Breen, R. and Goldthorpe, J. (1999), Class, Mobility and Merit. The Experience of Two British Birth Cohorts, *European Sociological Review*, 17 (2) 81-102

**Additional readings**


24/2/2011 Week 7

**Social mobility**


Additional readings

Breen, R. (2004), Social Mobility in Europe, Oxford University Press, Chapter 1.


3/3/2011 Week 8

**Ethnic inequality in education and in the labour market**


Additional readings


Reyneri et al. (2011). Special Issue of *International Migration* on Ethnic Penalties in the labour markets in Italy, Spain, Germany and Denmark. Forthcoming.

10/3/2011 Week 9

Poverty and Social Exclusion


Additional readings


Gregg, P. and Wadsworth, J. 2001 ‘Everything you ever wanted to know about worklessness and polarization at the household level but were afraid to ask’. Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics, 63

17/3/2011 Week 10

Post-industrial society, change in the occupational class structure and its consequences for social inequality

Esping-Andersen (1999), Social Bases of Post-industrial Economies, Chapter 6: The Structural Bases of Post-industrial employment


Additional readings


Esping-Andersen (1993), Changing classes, Sage (Cap. 1)


24/3/2011 Week11

Female employment and household inequalities


Additional readings


Stier, H. et.al. 2001 ‘Welfare regimes, family supportive policies and women’s employment along the life course’. American J. of Sociology, 106, 6: 1731-60