

SOS4100 – Social Inequality in the 21st Century: Egalitarian Norway in Comparative Perspective

Course content

This course provides a comprehensive presentation of key dimensions of social inequality in contemporary societies in the early 21st century. We address core issues such as economic inequality, ~~and~~ intergenerational social mobility, health inequalities, gender inequality in education and work, and immigration and ethnic inequalities, ~~and gender inequality in education and work.~~

The aim of the course is ~~two~~three-fold:

- First, we provide students with an ~~empirical~~ understanding of how patterns of social inequality in the Norwegian welfare state ~~society~~ compares to other rich, developed countries.
- ~~Second, we share provide to~~ students ~~with~~ a set of theoretical perspectives and analytical tools to make sense of both cross-national variations in inequality patterns at the macro level, and the mechanisms that ~~shape social regularities and individual outcomes at the micro level.~~ produce unequal outcomes between individuals in a society at the individual level.
- Third, we present to students we focus on empirical evidence on how and why patterns of inequality emerge, change and persist, and change, and which policy interventions are effective in tackling various forms of social inequality.

The course will address these and related questions:

- ~~What are driving forces behind~~ Why have increasing socioeconomic inequalities in Western societies ~~increased~~ since the latter quarter of the 20th century?
- ~~To~~ Why and to what extent ~~is the impact of "the birth lottery" — i.e., which do the~~ parents you are born to ~~—on affect your future future~~ life chances ~~and social mobility related to the level of economic inequality in a given society?~~, and why does family background matter more in unequal societies?
- How are health inequalities shaped by the broader socio-economic inequalities and what are specific mechanisms linking these two types of inequalities?
- Why are so many immigrants unemployed, what obstacles do immigrants and children of immigrants face in the labor market, and how can we ensure equal access to employment and pay for different ethnic groups?
- ~~Do ethnic inequalities relative to native majority populations tend to widen or narrow when we compare immigrants who arrived as adults to their native-born children, and what are the key mechanisms behind immigrant socioeconomic integration?~~
- Why do men still earn higher wages than women despite the fact that women now complete more education than men in most developed countries?
- How do specific policy measures reduce social inequalities at the different stages of individuals' life course?
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Throughout, we focus on how societal institutions, such as ~~a strong~~the welfare state ~~and,~~ educational system, and labor market regulations shape countries' level ~~and dynamics~~ of inequality related to socioeconomic status, class, gender, and ethnicity, ~~and gender.~~

The syllabus is at a relatively advanced level, but reading it it does not require knowledge and understanding of advanced statistical methods beyond the MA level. Sand students will be required to read interdisciplinary scientific studies covering a wide array of relevant topics and from different disciplines.

The syllabus ~~primarily~~ focuses on ~~recent empirical studies and~~ state-of-the-art literature reviews and recent high quality empirical studies including non-academic reports, but also covers some foundational theoretical texts ~~and non-academic reports~~. We emphasize how good empirical research designs can be used to answer important the link between good research questions ~~and suitable empirical research designs to address these~~, which will be useful for later work on your master thesis.

The course will provide you with knowledge and skills that ~~is~~ are highly relevant for your employment opportunities, such as analytic skills and critical thinking, as well as insights into important topics such as socioeconomic inequalities according to family background, gender and ethnicity, employers' hiring practices, policy, welfare policy, health inequalities, the labor market, authority relations, organizational analysis, economic growth, human capital, and equality of opportunities.

Learning outcome

Knowledge

This course will provide you with:

- An analytical perspective on the links between sociological theories on inequality and empirical research.
- An overview of recent empirical studies of inequality related to socioeconomic position, gender, and ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic status
- Knowledge about how and why macro-level patterns of inequality emerge, change and persist.
- Knowledge about how evidence on effectiveness of certain policies and institutional structures is generated and transformed into policy interventions.
- A basic understanding of the methods researchers use to answer questions about social inequalities.
- ~~An analytical perspective on the links between sociological theories on inequality and empirical research~~

Skills

You will be able to:

- ~~Extract the most central concepts from a scientific article~~ Understand, explain, discuss and use core concepts, such as equality of opportunity, the gender pay gap, segregation, discrimination, social mechanisms, supply and demand, genetic heritability, social mobility, health equity, integration and assimilation, correlation and causation, etc.
- Provide critical discussions on issues related to social inequalities, and draw on important empirical studies in doing so.
- Be familiar with key debates that animate quantitative and qualitative research on inequality.*
- ~~Provide a critical discussion on choice of~~ Make good decisions about choice of ~~theoretical framework~~ and analytical design, given the topic of your investigation.
- ~~Provide a critical discussions on the topics covered in the empirical studies included in the syllabus~~ issues related to social inequalities, and draw on important empirical studies in doing so
- ~~Give a written and oral presentation of an empirical study, and provide a justification of your choice design~~ solid empirical studies of social inequalities
- Conduct research on topics related to social inequality and ~~Develop~~ a master thesis topic associated with this course

General cCompetences

This course will provide you with:

- Improved analytical skills and critical thinking, as well as the ability to critically assess the quality of social scientific studies and make related ethical considerations
- Ability to to understand, discuss and argue about various aspects social inequalities.
- Gain a deeper respect for good understanding of the distinction between academic knowledge based on solid empirical evidence and versus perceptions based on opinions and other personal observations perceptions.
- Knowledge about how social scientific studies can be used in policy development and how policy may affect social inequalities.

• Gain a deeper respect for ethical considerations involved in scientific work in general and studies of social inequality in particular