Economics 85600

INEQUALITY, ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY, AND PUBLIC POLICY

Autumn 2018

The class meets in Room 3309 on Wednesday afternoons from 2:00 to 4:00 pm according to the following schedule (which is subject to adjustments according to the professor’s perception of student needs and other opportunities).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 29</td>
<td>0. Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 12</td>
<td>1. Introduction and course structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 26</td>
<td>2. Overview of major themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 3</td>
<td>3. Top end inequality: facts, interpretations, policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 10</td>
<td>4. The intergenerational transmission of wealth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 17</td>
<td>5. Measuring intergenerational income mobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 24</td>
<td>6. Intergenerational mobility in theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 31</td>
<td>7. Trends in intergenerational mobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 7</td>
<td>8. The geography of Intergenerational mobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 14</td>
<td>9. Intergenerational mobility in theory (again)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 21</td>
<td>10. The causal impact of neighbourhoods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 28</td>
<td>11. Schooling and teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 5</td>
<td>12. Early years and families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 12</td>
<td>13. Labour markets and intergenerational mobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 19</td>
<td>14. Social welfare and equality of opportunity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teaching Methods

The successful student will take full advantage of the opportunities provided in class. Attending classes, handing in assignments on time, and consistently contributing to the class in all activities—whether group, pair, or individual—will all be considered as measures of success in effectively using your class time. The classroom is intended to be a safe place where students can question and practice, receive feedback from both the instructor and their peers, and rely on their classmates as partners and resources in the learning process.

The instructor’s role is to provide resources, guidance, and support, but students are responsible for engaging actively in the process. Students are responsible for completing readings before the class, being prepared for discussions, submitting assignments on time, volunteering material for consideration by the class, offering feedback to their classmates, and constructively incorporating the feedback they receive from both classmates and the instructor into their own work. Working in groups, students will also make in-class presentations of early drafts of their term papers.

Assessment Methods

The final mark will be determined as follows

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informed engagement</td>
<td>20 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student led class discussion</td>
<td>10 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper, first draft</td>
<td>10 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referee report</td>
<td>10 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper, second draft</td>
<td>30 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In class test</td>
<td>20 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A mark below 65% corresponds to a C, 65 to 69% to a B-, 70 to 74% to a B, 75 to 79% to a B+, and in a similar way 80 to 84%, 85 to 89%, and 90 or above to respectively A-, A, and A+. The passing grade for the course is a 65%.

Informed engagement and student led class discussion (20% + 10%)

Emphasis is given to your engagement in the course and the activities of the class. This is best demonstrated by motivated and informed involvement. This requires attending all scheduled classes, but also involves having completed the readings before the class and being prepared to engage in discussion. It involves your contributions to group work, completion of assignments by the required date, and attention to feedback from your peers and instructor.

But obviously if you are not present you cannot participate, and regular attendance is therefore expected as is punctually arriving for the beginning of class. Appropriate documentation justifying an extended absence is required. The policy on absences and late submissions is detailed in the following box.
Policy on absences and late submissions

Class attendance is necessary (but not sufficient) to successfully complete this course. Students are required to be punctual, arriving on time for class. Each missed class will result in the loss of five (5) percentage points of the Informed engagement mark. For example, if a student were to miss six classes he or she would be assigned 0 for the Informed Engagement portion of the final mark \((30 \,–\, 6 \times 5)\). In addition, students not present for a scheduled class presentation for which they are responsible will be assigned a mark of zero for the class presentation. For example, if a student were to miss four classes, one of which included a scheduled presentation for which they are in part responsible as a team member, the student would lose a total of 40 marks.

Late submissions of assignments and papers will not be accepted and will receive a mark of zero. This applies to all assignments including those submitted by email, and in this case, the time of receipt of the email by the professor is guarantor of the time of delivery. Exceptions are made only for illness or other serious situations deemed as such by the professor. All absences from class or exams, and all late submissions due to illness must be supported by a medical certificate. The professor reserves the right to accept or reject the reason put forth if it is not medical. Reasons such as travel, work, and errors made while reading the exam schedule are not usually accepted. In the event of an illness or related complications, only the counseling service and the university clinic may issue valid certificates to justify a delay or absence.

Students are advised to notify the professor as soon as possible if a religious holiday or other event forces their absence during an evaluation.

A portion of each class will be devoted to a student led discussion of a particular reading or a set of readings. Generally these readings will complement the professor’s lecture during the same class, supplement the lecture, or offer the opportunity to examine and discussion competing interpretations or policy options. Students will work individually, in pairs, or in small groups, taking turns to lead the class in a discussion motivated by a set of questions the professor will provide in advance. Each student is required to participate in a lead role once during the course.

Paper first draft, referee report, paper second draft \((10\% + 10\% + 30\%)\)

Students are required to complete a term paper, submit a first draft of the paper, and also offer a referee report of another student’s first draft.

The first draft of the paper is due before the beginning of the class on November 7th, to be submitted electronically to the professor at < mcorak@gc.cuny.edu >. Papers dated as arriving past 2:00pm on November 7th will not be graded, and students will receive a zero for this portion of the grade.

Each student will receive a copy of another student’s first draft and is required to write a referee report of the draft, clearly stating the main themes and message of the paper, and offering substantive suggestions for improving. These referee reports are due by 9:00am on November 12th, to be submitted electronically to the professor at < mcorak@gc.cuny.edu >. At the professor’s discretion they will be forwarded to the original author anonymously. This requires that the referee reports be submitted to the professor with no identifying information, in particular they are not to include the student’s name.

The final (second) draft of the paper is due before the beginning of the class on December 12th, to be submitted electronically to the professor at < mcorak@gc.cuny.edu > as a pdf properly formatted and edited following accepted academic standards. Papers dated as arriving past
2:00pm on December 12th will not be read, and students will receive a zero. Students have a choice of three types of topics to address for their term paper topic: they may choose to conduct a detailed country study, they may choose to write a review of a book chosen from a list in consultation with the professor, or they may choose to write a thematic literature review of one of the themes discussed in the course.

The first choice is a detailed country study of inequality and social mobility, addressing the state of understanding and nature of available data, examining the most important drivers, and where possible setting out the options for the most appropriate policy directions. Students may, where appropriate, also pursue original research with appropriate data. The studies may be chosen from one of the following: Brazil, Mexico, China, India. The possibility of choosing a country not on this list may be explored with the professor, and is at the professor’s discretion.

The second possible topic is to undertake a critical book review. The book review must be written in a way that clearly uses the materials and themes discussed in the course to assess the major messages, methods, and implications of one of the following books:


Students must choose from this list in consultation with the professor, who retains the final right to assign a book to the student. Books not on this list may be proposed by students, but again only subject to the final approval of the professor.

The third topic involves a more in depth review of one of the topics covered in the course, a review that is based on a fuller reading of the required and optional readings listed in one of the course themes. This would involve exploring one of the course themes in detail, and
examining the substantive measurement, theoretical, and/or policy issues that motivate the literature. Students will be required to choose the theme in conjunction with the professor, and will be invited to incorporate additional readings that they view as important. Choosing this option will require the student to submit a reading list to the professor before the topic is approved.

**In class test (20%)**

An in class test will be conducted toward the end of the course to assess students’ knowledge of the core course materials. The structure and date of this test will be negotiated with the students at some point during the second half of the course.

**Required readings, and readings for student led discussion**

The readings are listed in order of priority. The first readings are generally the required and principle readings. The remaining readings are optional, and students may pursue them according to their interests. But all the readings form the basis for the lecture conducted in class.

The readings highlighted in bold are the readings for the basis of the student led discussion during the second half of the class. At the beginning of each class the professor will seek volunteers to lead the discussion of these readings for the next class. Students are only required to volunteer once, and may be required to work individually, in pairs, or in small groups.

Some classes do not have student led discussions associated with them, and at the professors discussion these classes may be used to offer special lectures from students or other experts.

1. Introduction and course structure, September 12th

2. Overview of major themes, September 26th


3. Top end inequality: facts, interpretations, policies, October 3rd


4. The intergenerational transmission of wealth, October 10th


5. Measuring intergenerational income mobility, October 17th


6. Intergenerational mobility in theory, October 24th


7. Trends in intergenerational mobility, October 31st


8. The geography of intergenerational mobility, November 7th


9. Intergenerational mobility in theory (again), November 14th


10. The causal impact of neighbourhoods, November 21st


11. Schooling and teachers, November 28th


12. Early years and families, December 5th


13. Labour Markets and Intergenerational Mobility, December 12th


