

HPSC0063

The Social Sciences of Inequality

Course Syllabus

2021-22 session | Dr. Tiago Mata | t.mata@ucl.ac.uk

This module is an historical examination of the social sciences in the long twentieth century. Although we know much about the history of individual disciplines - psychology, economics, sociology, political science -, we know comparatively little about how the sciences of society have cooperated and competed in the public and political spheres.

The module shows that the social sciences have redrafted the architectures of the state, of organizations and of mass culture. To guide our itinerary of twentieth century social science, we examine the problem of 'inequality' has been conceptualized across time and across disciplines. Inequality has been understood as having racial, cultural, or political economic dimensions. These competing conceptions have animated programs of social change of lasting legacy to the present day. In this course we will also pay special attention to the social science of statistics and eugenics developed at UCL.

Course Information

Basic course information

Course website:	See Moodle
Moodle Web site:	https://moodle.ucl.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=7466
Assessment:	1 oral presentation 20%, 1 written essay 80%
Timetable:	Tuesdays 2-3 pm, IOE - Bedford Way (20) – 826; see Moodle for access to asynchronous activities and lecture recordings
Prerequisites:	No pre-requisites.
Required texts:	Readings listed below.
Course tutor(s):	Dr. Tiago Mata
Contact:	t.mata@ucl.ac.uk (or call through Teams)
Web:	http://www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/staff/mata
Office location:	22 Gordon Square, Room 2.1.
Office hours:	By appointment by person or through Microsoft Booking online

Schedule

UCL Week	Topic	Date	Activity
6	Why this module?	5 October	Read Porter and Ross
7	Population and political economy	12 October	Read Malthus/Q&A
8	Class and socialism	19 October	Read Manifesto/Q&A
9	Race and eugenics	26 October	Read Pearson/Q&A
10	Cities and the social survey	2 November	Read DuBois/Q&A
11	Reading Week		
12	Workshop on UCL and social science	16 November	
13	Intelligence and IQ tests	23 November	Read Jensen/Q&A
14	Colonial legacies	30 November	Read UNESCO/Q&A
15	Culture of poverty	7 December	Read Lewis/Q&A
16	Algorithms of exclusion	14 December	Read Nelson and Benjamin/Q&A

Blended format

In the 2021-22 session we will be adopting a blended learning model. What this means for this module is lectures pre-recorded, a few moodle activities linked to face to face weekly discussions.

On the module's moodle page you will find 2-3 weekly videos of lecturing material that should be watched before Tuesday. There will also be activities to prepare you for the week's themes. The face-to-face session (Tuesday, 2-3 pm) will typically include a short discussion of the week's readings (see readings section below), and an activity that changes with the week's theme (see moodle for details).

Assessments

Summary

	Description	Deadline	Word limit
Oral presentation with written summary	Social science at UCL	Tuesday 16 November 5:00 pm	Pdf of slides and one page summary
Written essay	Contemporary social science in context	Tuesday 21 December 5:00 pm	3500 words

Assignments

In the spirit of research-led science and technology studies the assessment for this module involves a collaborative research activity that will challenge you to produce novel work in history and social theory.

In the first assessment you will, as a class, reconstruct parts of the history of social science at UCL. In the other you will individually engage with contemporary social research on inequality and will prepare that work through peer discussion.

Assignment 1. Presentation about social science at UCL, 1860-1960.

Individually or in groups (to be determined by classroom size) you will investigate and

describe the scope and content of social research at UCL.

You will choose from a set of pre-circulated topics on social science teaching and research at UCL.

The expectation is not of comprehensiveness in description but rather to reveal a few surprising and or distinctive features of the institution and of academic research of the period. The key learning outcome is to demonstrate through student original research that 1. the boundaries of social science were porous and 2. how social research mapped with emerging societal and political concerns.

For the research you will draw from library research, Senate House and UCL archival collections, such as Calendars, memoirs, press reports, histories of departments and of UCL. The topics of weeks 2-8 are potentially relevant to the assignment, and the lecturer will be available for specific guidance.

On Tuesday, 16th of November, you will share your findings in a 12 minute presentation to class (these may be recorded or done live). These presentations will be followed by classroom discussion and will be subject of an online class activity.

The presentation will be assessed under three main criteria:

- communication: helpful, informative visuals, clear digestion of information, fluency of speaking, coherence of argument;
- conciseness and comprehensiveness of the one page summary;
- quality of content, asking whether the presentation conveys the fundamental facts about the subject.

The one-page summary is due on November 16, 5 pm, after the classroom discussion.

Assignment 2. Contemporary social science in context, a 3,500 word essay

A key claim of this module is that a historical sociology of the social sciences can clarify and expand our understanding of contemporary social problems.

In this essay you will be asked to choose a piece of contemporary social research on inequality (one article, a set of articles by one author or team, a journal symposium, a book) to first review its contributions and second to place that content in historical context using the resources of the module.

Depending on the primary research chosen students may wish to:

- highlight a legacy of concepts, or
- contrast how contemporary and past have made inequality commensurable, or
- explore the policy implications of current social science and look for past affinities, or
- (more possibilities will be discussed in class)

The key learning outcome is to see students applying the module's analytical frame and historical knowledge to shine a light on concepts, practices and consequences of contemporary social science that would otherwise go unnoticed. The broader aim of this exploration is to enrich and sharpen our understanding of social injustice.

You will be guided on the choice of primary source for the essay. On the 30th of November and 7th of December one of the class activities will comprise of preliminary discussions of the primary sources to aid essay preparation.

Besides introduction and conclusion, the essay must be in two main parts.

I. About a third to half of the essay must review and synthesize the ideas of a piece of research asking how it approaches the social problem of inequality. This section of the essay can be merely descriptive although it should select themes that support the analysis that follows on the second part.

II. In the second part of the essay you must contrast your chosen text with social science of the past, discussed in the module but not restricted to the module. You must argue for what that past reveals about the promise and shortcomings of the contemporary research you are auditing.

On presentation, referencing and submission guidelines (see STS student handbook). Assessment 2 must be submitted via the 'Turnitin' function on the module's Moodle page on 16 of December.

Aims & objectives

The module is a thematic survey course on the history of social science. One expects students to develop knowledge of key figures and key concepts of that history, and an appreciation of the cross disciplinary dynamics that have shaped scholarly inquiry on inequality from the late 19th century to the present day. The students are not expected to develop an understanding of the history of social science in its totality. The primary objectives of the course are the development of key skills of inquiry and analysis.

At the end of the course students should be able:

- to ask and answer cogent and focused questions about the evolution of social science and to pursue these questions through structured enquiry, selecting and interrogating an appropriate range of materials, including archival and historiographical sources of evidence;
- to understand how social scientists acted in the always different context of the past, learning to probe unfamiliar structures of belief and practice and appreciate the complexity and diversity of their cultural and institutional situations;

- to read and analyse social science texts and other primary sources, both critically and empathetically, while addressing questions of genre, content, perspective and purpose;
- to appreciate the problems involved in the interpretation of the complex, ambiguous, conflicting and often incomplete historical record and thus be aware of the limitations of our knowledge of the past and the dangerous allure of simplistic explanations;
- to marshal arguments in written and oral form, drawing on and presenting all the above skills. Such argument has structure and is relevant and concise. In the case of written argument it is expressed in clear, lucid and coherent prose. Orally, it involves the capacity to sustain a reasoned line of argument in the face of others, to listen, to engage in debate, and amend views as necessary in the light of evidence and argument.

Reading list

The following readings are organised by week. The readings labelled ESSENTIAL are necessary for comprehension of the week's subject and will be the centerpiece of a class activity. ADDITIONAL readings are background material to the lecture part of the class and may expand on the lecturing, on UCLReadingList I marked some as "recommended" and others as "optional."

5 October. Why this module?

Inequality is one of the most pressing political issue of our age. The imprint of inequality is expressed in every dimension: financial, cultural, public health, geographical, to name only a few. But what does social science have to do with it? The argument of this module is that social science has shaped our understanding of inequality for good and ill. Look at the origins of the term "social science" and its various meanings and uses. We pay special attention to how discourses on society became an integral part of the contemporary University system. We review analytical resources to study the social sciences of inequality.

ESSENTIAL reading:

Porter, T. (2003) "Introduction" in Porter, T., & Ross, D. (Eds.). *The Cambridge History of Science*. v.7 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

ADDITIONAL reading:

Backhouse, R. and Fontaine, P. (Eds.). (2014) "Introduction" in *A Historiography of the Modern Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Comte, Auguste (1896 english edition) *Introduction to Positive Philosophy*, chapters 1 and 2.

Merton, R. K. (1948) 'The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy', *The Antioch Review*, 8(2).

Pinto, P. R. and Paidipaty, P. (2020) 'Introduction: Measuring Matters', *History of Political Economy*, 52(3), pp. 413–434.

Rose, N. (1991) 'Governing by numbers: Figuring out democracy', *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 16(7), pp. 673–692.

12 October. Population and political economy.

We begin with a review of the classic thinking on the topic of poverty at the turn of the 19th century. Britain holds a special place in these discussions because it had from the late medieval period into the modern era, the first “welfare system.” The so-called Poor Laws were by the 19th century deeply controversial. We look at what they were and why these were criticized by “political economists.”

ESSENTIAL reading:

Malthus, T. R. [1798]1985. *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. London, England: Penguin Books.

ADDITIONAL Reading:

Blaug, Mark (1963) “The Myth of the Old Poor Law and the Making of the New.” *Journal of Economic History* 23: 151–84.

Gilbert, Geoffrey (1997) Adam Smith on the Nature and Causes of Poverty, *Review of Social Economy*, 55:3, 273-291.

Lindert, Peter (1998) “Poor Relief before the Welfare State: Britain versus the Continent, 1780–1880.” *European Review of Economic History* 2: 101–40.

Polanyi, Karl (1944) *The Great Transformation*. New York: Farrar and Rinehart.

19 October. Class and socialism.

Karl Marx was not unlike many of the early social scientists, trained in philosophy and with an eye to shaping the society he lived in. Marx set out to critique and reform the “political economy” that Malthus had helped to codify, moving it away from liberalism towards an apology of a new society where the maxim “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” would be law. We look at the legacy of class analysis and utopian thinking left by Marx and the socialism movement of which he was part.

ESSENTIAL reading:

Marx, K. and Engels, F. (1848 [c.2008]) *The Communist manifesto*. London: Pluto Press. [use jstor copy]

ADDITIONAL Reading:

Anthony B. Atkinson, Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez (2011) ‘Top Incomes in the Long Run of History’, *Journal of Economic Literature*, 49(1).

Baert, P. (1998) *Social theory in the twentieth century*. London: Polity.

Bendix, R. (1974) “Inequality and Social Structure: A Comparison of Marx and Weber.” *American Sociological Review*, 39(2), pp. 149-161.

Sargent, L. T. (2010) *Utopianism: a very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wright, E. O. (1998) “A general framework for the analysis of class structure.” in *The debate*

on Classes. London: Verso.

26 October. Race and eugenics.

Statistical reasoning developed in the last quarter of the 19th century. It developed a new way of observing society that promised to reveal, in large numbers, laws of human nature and of social life. The promise of this kind of knowledge was soon caught in a debate over how to explain the emerging statistical patterns. Influenced by ideas of racial difference and human evolution a research agenda formed around the binary of “nature or nurture.” UCL has the unsettling privilege of having been one of the key centers for biostatistics and eugenics. We look at the UCL actors and beyond at the record of eugenics in Britain and the USA.

ESSENTIAL reading:

Pearson, Karl (1912). *Social Problems, their Treatment, Past, Present, and Future: A Lecture*. London: Dulau & Co.

ADDITIONAL reading:

Desrosières, A. (1998) “Averages and the Realism of Aggregates” “Correlation and the Realism of Causes” “Statistics and the State: France and Britain.” in *The politics of large numbers: a history of statistical reasoning*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.

Farrall, L. A., (2019) *The origins and growth of the English eugenics movement, 1865-1925*. London: UCL Department of Science and Technology Studies (STS).

Porter, T. (1986) “Part FOUR. Polymathy and Discipline” in *The rise of statistical thinking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Stepan, N. (1982) “Race and the Return of the Great Chain of Being” and “Race is Everything” in *The idea of race in science: Great Britain, 1800-1960*, Hamden, Conn: Archon Books.

2 November. Cities and social survey.

Surveys have a long history as devices to claim sovereign power in the East and in the West. It was a different kind of survey that emerged half a century ago. It’s focus was not on the demarcation of territory and dominion but rather on peering into the depths of deprivation. Starting in London and reaching to Chicago, Philadelphia, and many more cities large and small, the survey created a movement for social change that claimed the city as an object of enquiry. We examine what it means to do social science in place.

ESSENTIAL reading:

Dubois, W.E.B. 1967 [1899]. *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*. pp. 1-9; 385-397.

ADDITIONAL reading:

Bulmer, M., Bales, K., and Sklar, K.K. (1991) “The Social survey in historical perspective” in *The social survey in historical perspective, 1880-1940*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 1-48.

Bateman, BW. (2001) “Make a Righteous Number: Social Surveys, the Men and Religion

Forward Movement, and Quantification in American Economics” *History of Political Economy* 33(supl.), pp. 57-85.

Deegan, M. J. (2013) ‘Jane Addams, the Hull-House School of Sociology, and Social Justice, 1892 to 1935’, *Humanity & Society*, 37(3), pp. 248–258.

Gieryn, T. F. (2006) “City as Truth-Spot” *Social Studies of Science*, 36(1), pp. 5 – 38.

Rodgers, Daniel T (1998) “The self-owned city” in *Atlantic crossings: social politics in a progressive age*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

16 November. Workshop

The meeting will comprise of presentations and class discussion about the history of UCL's Social Science.

23 November. Intelligence and IQ tests.

One of the most enduring and damaging controversies in psychology regards the biological foundations to intelligence. Formal intelligence testing studies have shown markedly correlations of race and gender underpinning performance. Echoing the ideas and methods of eugenicists, these psychologists have maintained that “nature” cannot be dismissed. We review a century long record of controversies and try to explain why the subject has not lost its force.

ESSENTIAL reading:

Jensen, Arthur “How Much Can We Boost IQ and Scholastic Achievement?” *Harvard Educational Review* (January 1969): 1-123.

ADDITIONAL reading:

Kamin, Leon J. (1974) *The Science and Politics of IQ*. Routledge: London. Chapters 1-3.

Norton, B. (1979) ‘Charles Spearman and the general factor in intelligence: Genesis and interpretation in the light of sociopersonal considerations’, *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 15(2), pp. 142–154.

Osborne, R. T. (1994) ‘The Burt collection’, *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 30(4), pp. 369–373.

Schneider, W. H. (1992) ‘After Binet: French intelligence testing, 1900–1950’, *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 28(2), pp. 111–132.

Tucker, W. H. (1997) ‘Re-reconsidering Burt: Beyond a reasonable doubt’, *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 33(2), pp. 145–162

30 November. Colonial legacies.

The post-World War II period was shadowed by threat (Cold war menacing nuclear war) but it was also an age of great expectation with international institutions designed to execute a vision of national emancipation and universal prosperity. Social and economic sciences seemed to have the blueprints to elevate all from misery. And yet, inequality and squalor persisted around the world and particularly between the North and South of the globe. We

examine accounts that sought to explain the global gap with reference to legacies and relationships of power and economic domination and we examine the enduring appeal of race as alternative explanation to those patterns of political economy.

ESSENTIAL reading:

'UNESCO Four statements on the race question' (no date). Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000122962>.

ADDITIONAL reading:

Bangham, J. (2015) 'UNESCO, mass communication and human genetics in the early 1950s', *History of the Human Sciences*, 28(5), pp. 80–107.

Brattain, M. (2007) 'Race, Racism, and Antiracism: UNESCO and the Politics of Presenting Science to the Postwar Public', *The American Historical Review*, 112(5), pp. 1386–1413.

Furtado, C. (1964) Chapter 4 on underdevelopment in *Development and underdevelopment*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gil-Riaño, S. (2018) 'Relocating anti-racist science: the 1950 UNESCO Statement on Race and economic development in the global South', *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 51(2), pp. 281–303.

Nelson, C. and Grossberg, L. (1988) Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Selcer, P. (2012) 'Beyond the Cephalic Index', *Current Anthropology*, 53(S5), pp. S173–S184.

Wallerstein, I. (1974) "The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis" *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 16(4), 387–415.

7 December. Culture of poverty.

The 1940s and 1950s were decades of triumphant affluence for most of Western societies and the plight of poverty and social exclusion a strange puzzle. Among the public folk psychology was on the rise and among academic funders and visionaries psychology was increasingly seen as the unifying discipline that could bring order to the social sciences. The social psychologists set their focus on the family and how deviations from a patriarchal, nuclear model rooted social exclusion.

ESSENTIAL reading:

Lewis, Oscar (1967) *La vida: a Puerto Rican family in the culture of poverty-- San Juan & New York*. London: Secker & Warburg, preface and first chapter "A day with Fernanda".

ADDITIONAL reading:

Katz, M. B. (1989) Chapter one "The undeserving poor" in *The undeserving poor: from the war on poverty to the war on welfare*. New York: Pantheon Books.

O'Connor, Alice (2002) *Poverty Knowledge*. Princeton University Press. chapters 3 and 4.

Viet-Wilson, John (1999) 'The National Assistance Board and the 'Rediscovery' of Poverty' in Fawcett, H, and Lowe, R, (ed) *Welfare Policy in Britain. The Road from 1945*, St. Martin's Press, Basingstoke.

14 December. Algorithms of exclusion.

On our final meeting, we bring the discussion forward to the present day. The meeting looks at contemporary discussions close to STS. We look at research that argues that a new kind of (non-human) actor is shaping the way public resources are allocated to those in need. Algorithms, big data and AI, are seen by many as “deeply” biased and by stealth bringing about a new mechanism for the making of difference and a new kind of social exclusion.

ESSENTIAL reading:

Nelson, A. (2016) Chapter 9 “Radical Politics after the genome” in *The social life of DNA: race, reparations, and reconciliation after the genome*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Benjamin, R. (2019b) Chapter 1 “Engineered Inequity” in *Race after technology: abolitionist tools for the new Jim code*. Cambridge: Polity.

ADDITIONAL reading:

Benjamin, R. (2019a) ‘Assessing risk, automating racism’, *Science*, 366(6464), pp. 421–422.

Eubanks, Virginia (2018) “The Digital Poorhouse” in *Automating Inequality*. St. Martin’s Press.

Noble, S. U. (2018) Chapter 2 “Searching for girls” in *Algorithms of oppression: how search engines reinforce racism*. New York: New York University Press

Vallas, S. and Schor, J. B. (2020) ‘What Do Platforms Do? Understanding the Gig Economy’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 46(1), pp. 273–294.

Course expectations

See Moodle for a more extensive guidance.

Students are expected to attend and participate in class discussions by preparing the readings marked as ESSENTIAL and relevant weekly moodle activities. Students are expected to submit both assignments.

Important policy information

Details of college and departmental policies relating to modules and assessments can be found in the STS Student Handbook www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/handbook

All students taking modules in the STS department are expected to read these policies.
