

HPSC0063

History of the Social Sciences: Inequality

Course Syllabus

2019-20 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:	[TO FILL IN]
Assessment:	1 oral presentation 20%, 1 written essay 80%
Timetable:	Tuesdays 2-4 pm, Foster Court 217
Prerequisites:	No pre-requisites.
Required texts:	Readings listed below.
Course tutor(s):	Dr. Tiago Mata
Contact:	t.mata@ucl.ac.uk t: 020.3108.4412
Web:	http://www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/staff/mata
Office location:	22 Gordon Square, Room 2.3.
Office hours:	Tuesdays, 12-1 pm, Thursdays 12-1pm

Schedule

UCL Week	Topic	Date	Activity
21	The ideal of social science and its possible history	14 January	n/a
22	The classics of social theory	21 January	read Marx and Weber
23	Inequality, a pre-history	28 January	read Malthus
24	Statistical selves / Talk by Galton Collection curator, Dr. Hannah Cornish	4 February	read Pearson
25	Surveying the city	11 February	read DuBois; declare topic for assignment 1
26	Reading Week		
27	IQ	25 February	read Jensen
28	Workshop on UCL's Department of Eugenics	3 March	assignment 1, presentation
29	Cultures of poverty	10 March	read Lewis
30	Patterns of (under-)development	17 March	read Gunder Frank
31	Automated inequality: wealth and algorithms	24 March	read Piketty and Eubanks, assignment 2, essay

Assessments

Summary

	Description	Deadline	Word limit
Oral presentation with written summary	Artifacts and stories about UCL's Eugenics Department	Tuesday 3 March 5:00 pm	Slides and one page outline of talk
Written essay	Critical analysis of the social science of UCL's Eugenics Department	Wednesday 25 March. 5:00 pm	3500 words

Assignments

In the spirit of research-led science and technology studies the assessment for this module will be a joint class project. Together we will collect, curate and analyse artefacts and narratives about one of UCL's premier departments whose work straddled disciplinary boundaries, the department of applied statistics (later department of Eugenics) (see: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/statistics/department/history>).

On February 11 we will review what resources exist at UCL to aid in the preparation of the two assignments - you will be given a bibliography to aid your searches, you will be encouraged to examine the materials at UCL's Special Collections and at the its Museums, particularly the Galton collection.

Assignment 1. Group oral presentation about the Department of applied statistics.

In groups of two or three (to be determined) you will chose scholars/texts/artifacts related to the history of statistics and eugenics at UCL and research the biography of each of them.

In a class workshop on 3rd of March each group must present in 15 minutes, with 5 minutes for discussion, the progress of their research, sharing with the class the story of their chosen subjects. The purpose of the assignment is to practice your communication skills and to set expectations for the depth and breadth of the final essay.

The presentation will be assessed under three main criteria:

- communication, with consideration for audibility and visibility of speakers; eye contact used to involve audience; fluency of speaking; responses to questions; group members

presenting coherently together;

- quality of supporting material, notably images, audio or video clips, slide layout and design, and the conciseness and comprehensiveness of the one page summary;
- quality of content, asking whether the presentation conveys the fundamental facts about the subject – an individual, object, or text; adequately referencing sources and drawing on secondary literature.

By the end of the day of March 3rd, groups must submit the slides and a one page summary of the presentation through Moodle.

Assignment 2. Individual essay of 3,500 words

The essay will be an analysis of some episode or character of UCL's Applied Statistics/Eugenics/Statistics Department history that speaks to the themes of this module, i.e. what conception of social science was advanced by these scholars and their practices?

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

I. The bulk of the essay, of about 2000 words, must review and synthesise the ideas of UCL's applied statisticians deliberately querying: what was their conception of social science and what they had to say about the topic of inequalities.

II. In this part of the essay of about 1000 words, students must contrast the findings above with appropriate readings of the course and insights from our classroom discussions.

The components of the essay have distinct objectives with emphasis on description and collection of primary texts (I), their comprehension (I), and comparative analysis with secondary literature (II) and thus will be graded separately, with the weights of 30, 35, and 35% respectively.

Alongside the above stated objectives, which shall be reviewed in class, the essay will be graded also in terms of the clarity and conciseness of its exposition and it must be fully referenced.

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 25th of March.

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. On most weeks these readings include a set (identified with *) that will be the centerpiece of a class activity. ADDITIONAL readings are background material to the lecture part of the class and may be useful for writing your final assignment.

14 January. The ideal of social science and its possible history.

At the heart of this module is the question: can there be a history of social science? In the first meeting we motivate this question by looking 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.

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.

[<https://socialsciences.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3ll3/comte/Philosophy1.pdf>]

21 January. Reading the classics of social theory.

The standard way to give coherence to the idea of social science, and its history, is to pay attention to a set of eminent intellectuals who are said to be the originators of the disciplines of sociology, economics and political science. The ideas and writings of Thomas Hobbes, Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and John Maynard Keynes are forever contested, examined, and set against each other. We will discuss the historiographical limits of this standard practice.

ESSENTIAL reading:

Bourdieu, Pierre (1986) "Forms of Capital" English version published in J.G. Richardson's *Handbook for Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, pp. 241–258.

[<https://web.archive.org/web/20090326142541/http://econ.tau.ac.il/papers/publicf/Zeltzer1.pdf>]

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

(*) Weber, M. (1946 [1919]) "Politics as vocation" *Essays in Sociology*, H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.) New York: Oxford University Press.

[https://archive.org/details/weber_max_1864_1920_politics_as_a_vocation]

ADDITIONAL Reading:

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

28 January. Inequality – a pre history

With this meeting we turn to the central theme of the module, inequality. We begin with a review of the classic thinking on the topic of poorness 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.

4 February. Statistical selves.

In this meeting we will introduce the frame for the two assignments of the course on the history of UCL's Department of Applied Statistics. 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, the play of "nature and nurture."

On half of this session will be devoted to a presentation and discussion about the contents of the Francis Galton collection at UCL, the presentation/discussion will be led by Dr. Hannah Cornish.

ESSENTIAL reading:

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

[<https://archive.org/stream/socialproblemsth1912pear#page/n57/mode/2up>]

ADDITIONAL reading:

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

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.

11 February. Surveying the city.

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:

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.

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

[see: <https://archive.org/details/philadelphianegr001901mbp>]

ADDITIONAL reading:

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.

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

25 February. IQ.

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 tease out what is new at new false up of this subject.

ESSENTIAL reading:

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

ADDITIONAL reading:

Fancher, Raymond E. (1987) *The Intelligence Men: Makers of the I.Q. Controversy*. WW Norton: New York.

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

3 March. Workshop

The meeting will comprise of presentations and class discussion about the history of UCL's Department of Applied Statistics.

10 March. 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

ideas of social psychologists on poverty were salient and influential. Aligned with Cold War concerns, their focus was on family life 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, excerpts.

ADDITIONAL reading:

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.

17 March. Patterns of (under-)development.

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 a global consensus and international institutions designed to execute a vision of national emancipation and universal prosperity. Social and economic sciences seemed to have the blueprints to eliminate poverty and exclusion. 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.

ESSENTIAL reading:

(*) Gunder Frank, A. (1967) "V. Foreign investment in Latin American Underdevelopment" in *Capitalism and underdevelopment in Latin America: historical studies of Chile and Brazil*. Monthly Review Press.

ADDITIONAL reading:

Rostow, W. W. (1991 [c. 1960]) *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 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.

24 March. Automated inequality: wealth and algorithms.

On our final meeting, we bring the discussion forward to the present day. The meeting looks at two ways of thinking inequality that dominate contemporary discussions. One refers to the self-perpetuating logic of wealth concentration. In 2014, an unusually long and difficult book full of statistics and equations became an international bestseller. The success was even more unlikely given that the writer was a young French economist of limited notoriety. *Capital in the Twenty-First century* was the result of decades of statistical data collection, involving a team from across the Western world. Piketty showed that inequality in wealth has increased since the early 1980s and that on many indicators it reversed the gains made

in the middle years of the twentieth century. The second way to think about inequality is to observe how 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 kind of social exclusion. We set these two accounts side by side and see how they link up with earlier debates.

ESSENTIAL reading:

(*) Piketty, Thomas (2015) "Putting Distribution Back at the Center of Economics: Reflections on Capital in the Twenty-First Century" *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 29(1); 67-88.

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

ADDITIONAL reading:

Atkinson, A.B., Piketty, T., Saez, E. (2011) "Top Incomes in the Long Run of History," *Journal of Economic Literature*, American Economic Association, vol. 49(1), 3-71.

Llewellyn, Mike (2014), “Thomas Piketty’s “Capital in the Twenty-first Century” explained” [<https://ideas.ted.com/thomas-piketys-capital-in-the-twenty-first-century-explained/>]

Course expectations

Students are expected to attend and participate in class discussions by preparing the readings with * above. 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.
