**Comprehensive Exam in Inequalities, Fall, 2022**

The questions below constitute the qualifying exam for **inequalities**. To complete the exam, you must answer one question from each of the three sections below in an essay format. Each answer should be a self-contained essay approximately 8–10 pages long (i.e., 2,000–2,500 words).

Although you must cite to referenced work in each essay, one comprehensive bibliography for all three questions will be sufficient. You may consult materials from the reading list you’ve been provided, as well as any other scholarly sources you’ve read during the exam period. This qualifying exam is to be completed in two weeks. The evaluation of the exam will take two weeks. You will be notified of your performance by email.

Make sure that the office has your up-to-date contact information. Please use the identifying student number that you have been assigned at the top of your exam. The exams are graded confidentially and numbers only will be used to identify the author of the exam. See the *Graduate Handbook* for any further details.

**Answer one of the following:**

1. Describe the trends of income inequality in the United States over the past half a century.
   1. What role do race, ethnicity, and gender play in these trends of income inequality?
   2. In your description, cite empirical research to illustrate each of these sources of inequality when discussing inequality dynamics.
   3. Such inequality may impact one’s susceptibility to Covid-19 infection and mortality. Discuss the impact and how one’s race and ethnicity may further compound such impact.
2. When studying social inequality, two related concepts often come up, “stratification” and “mobility.”
   1. Define these concepts and discuss their relations to each other and to inequality.
   2. Which concept is at the heart of the discussion of “the American Dream”? Discuss what has happened to this dream in the U.S.
   3. Last year (2020), Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin, albeit a firm believer herself in the American Dream, thought it would be a lot easier to achieve the American Dream in her country than in the United State ([Washington Post](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/02/03/finland-american-dream/) 2020). Discuss and comment on her rationale and such a comparison.

**Answer one of the following:**

1. For methodological and cultural reasons, inequality is typically studied within a single country. However, inequality is a global / transnational phenomenon in at least two ways. Distribution can be thought of (and measured) at this level-of-analysis and inequality mechanisms exist beyond state borders (e.g. trade, migration). What does the relevant research tell us about global/transnational/comparative inequality including the major empirical findings? Would these findings and this level-of-analysis alter or come into conflict with the way we typically see inequality – that is, from a single country perspective?
2. Sociologists study economic inequality in different social arenas. For example, individual demographic characteristics, labor markets/occupations, workplace organizations, neighborhoods/regions, and “big class” differences based on property ownership and professional/managerial status. In what ways are these arenas in conflict with one another and why? In your opinion, what social arena provides the best way to study inequality and why?

**Answer one of the following:**

1. Higher Education is often viewed as a pathway for social mobility. Numerous studies question,

1) the equity of higher education access and completion,

2) the effect of higher education on income and employability, and

3) the role of educational debt in dampening the association between individual wealth and higher education.

Describe and discuss the core theoretical approaches and empirical findings of literature relating to these three arguments. How do you access their importance in evaluating higher education as a viable pathway for social mobility in the United States (and, as you wish, elsewhere)?

1. When explaining social inequality, sociologists often focus on *mechanisms*. These mechanisms sort people into different groups that have different life chances across the inequalities spectrum. In this essay, using the readings from your reading list, describe what these mechanisms are and how they fit together (or not) to produce the social inequality we see.