

Social Stratification PhD Area Examination FINAL DRAFT (August 18, 2009 by David Hachen)

Examination Objectives

The objective of the social stratification PhD area examination is to assess a graduate student's ability to conduct first-rate research and teach both undergraduate and graduate level courses in the area of social stratification. We expect that students will not just have a thorough knowledge of social stratification concepts, theories and prior research, but also the ability to *use* their knowledge to formulate research questions and conduct research in this area. Students are expected to have an overall breadth of knowledge about social stratification as well as specific expertise in two or three sub-areas of their choosing. While we expect students to be knowledgeable about past research and theorizing in this area, the objective of the exam is not just to assess student mastery of what others have said and found. Rather the exam is designed to assess your ability to articulate your own informed views, assessments, critiques and insights on a range of social stratification topics drawing upon prior research and theorizing. Expertise in the area of social stratification entails not only mastery of the literature but also the ability as an expert to articulate and argue for your own perspective.

Among the topics and sub-areas that we expect you to about are:

- Classical Theories (Marx, Weber, Durkheim)
- Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives (neo-Marxist, neo-Weberian, Functionalist, Occupational, Elite, Gradational)
- Social Class and Social-Economic Status
- Social Mobility
- Status Attainment
- Income Inequality
- Labor Markets
- Poverty
- Race & Ethnic Inequalities
- Gender Inequalities (theories, occupational sex segregation, discrimination, earnings inequality)
- Comparative Social Stratification Systems
- Changes in Social Stratification Systems
- Consequences of Social Stratification on attitudes, tastes, behaviors, participation

Examination Preparation

Taking social stratification seminars is only the first step in preparing for the exam. The sociology faculty offer the following seminars in the area of social stratification:

- SOC 63826 – Social Classes and Stratification
- SOC 63524 – Employment in a Changing Economy

- SOC635839 – Unequal America
- SOC 63239 – Sociology of Education: Part I

Students are expected to have taken at least two stratification seminars, the overview course, Social Classes and Stratification, and one other seminar. If other seminars have not been offered during the students first 2 years, students expecting to take the area examination should take at least 1 direct reading with a faculty member in this area.

The process of preparing for the examination is an essential part of the examination process. Here are some of the things students should do to prepare for the exam:

- Meet with the chairperson of the Stratification Exam Committee.
- Determine what their specialty (depth) sub-areas will be and convey this to the chairperson.
- Put together a reading list and share it with the examination committee for feedback on omissions. You can and should adapt the reading lists of students who have taken the exam in the past.
- Read and study the material on the reading list.
- Review past exams, answer prior exam questions, and come up with ideas about questions that could appear on the exam and answer them. If desired, ask one or more committee members to review practice answers.

Prior reading lists and examinations are available from the area exam chair.

Examination Format & Procedures

The exam takes place over 2 days, with 4 hours scheduled for the exam on each day. For each day, the exam is organized into three parts. For the first day's exam, two of the parts will consist of essay questions, while a third part typically consists of terms or short answer questions. The second day's exam typically focuses on specific topics that the student has chosen as their depth areas, with each part containing essay questions. Throughout all the various parts of the examination, students will be given a choice of essay questions or terms they can answer, giving students some flexibility in what specific questions they want to answer.

We expect that in answers will include references to the literature. We do not expect full citations. Author's last names and when necessary to distinguish multiple works by the same author, relevant years of publication are sufficient. You can include titles of articles or books if you want, but this is not necessary.

Examination Results

The faculty committee consisting of three people will read and evaluate your examination. They will then discuss their individual assessments and assign one of three grades for the exam: pass with distinction, pass, or fail. In rare cases the committee may decide to require a partial retake, usually requiring that a student retake one of the day's examinations. In such situations the chairperson of the

committee will negotiate with the student the time of the retake, taking into account that we expect students retaking part of the exam to spend adequate time studying to overcome the weaknesses identified by the committee. The retake is likely to have totally different questions than the original exam did.

The committee will try to provide results within two to three weeks but faculty conflicts or exam scheduling (e.g. right before Christmas or during the summer) may result in longer turnaround times. After the committee renders its decision, the student will be notified of the results by e-mail. The student will then be asked to schedule a meeting with the committee chair to discuss both strengths and weaknesses of the students' performance. This meeting will be scheduled for all students, regardless of whether they pass or fail the exam. Other committee members may provide written feedback to each student, or they may set up a separate meeting to discuss the students' exam performance. This decision will be left at the discretion of faculty on the committee.