

Syllabus  
**Income Inequality, ECN 424**  
 Fall 2020

Tu/Th, 12:55 pm - 2:20 pm  
 Synchronous [Zoom](#) class

<b>INSTRUCTOR</b>	Todd Easton	<b>OFFICE HRS.</b>	
<b>CLASSROOM</b>		<b>MONDAY:</b>	3:00 – 4:00 pm
<b>OFFICE TELEPHONE</b>	503-943-7209	<b>TUESDAY:</b>	2:30 – 3:30 pm
<b>HOME TELEPHONE</b>	503-234-2453	<b>WEDNESDAY:</b>	7:00 – 8:00 pm
<b>EMAIL</b>	easton@up.edu	<b>THURSDAY:</b>	2:30 – 3:30 pm
<b>OFFICE NO.</b>	Franz 312	<b>Or</b>	by appointment

**Course Prerequisite:** ECN 121 or the permission of the instructor

### Office Hours

Office hours will be held on Zoom. If you can, schedule a visit using the [Easton Scheduler](#) course on Moodle. You are enrolled in that class automatically if you are enrolled in ECN 424. The [Zoom link to office hours](#) is also in the Easton Scheduler course. If I am free, it's **fine** to drop in to office hours. You don't need an appointment.

### Course Description

During the semester we will examine the determinants of incomes in market economies, including education, training, experience, ability, hours worked, discrimination, saving, inheritance, unions, and government transfers. We will also study the causes of changes in the extent of inequality and social impacts of inequality. Finally, we will consider government policies to reduce inequality, including anti-poverty policies.

### Learning Goals

<b>X</b>	<b>Communication Competencies</b> Students write individual research papers on a topic of their own choosing, demonstrating effective written communication of a well-supported argument.
	<b>Problem Recognition, Prioritization, and Decision-Making Competencies -</b>
	<b>Ethics and Social Responsibility Competencies</b>
	<b>Leadership, Team and Personal Competencies</b>
	<b>Business Knowledge Competencies</b>
	<b>Global Acumen Competencies</b>

### Course Objectives

To help students understand and investigate:

- 1) the determinants of family incomes,
- 2) the determinants of income inequality and wealth inequality,
- 3) the consequences of poverty and inequality, and
- 4) key debates regarding government policy to address inequality and poverty.

### Text

Our main text is by a prominent, mainstream labor economist. It provides a thorough introduction to what economists know about wage determination and decisions workers make about how much to work. This is

crucial background for understanding income inequality, since the compensation workers receive from their employers is almost 70% of personal income.

George Borjas, *Labor Economics*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition, 2020 (ISBN 978-1-260-00472-4, bound)  
(ISBN 978-1-260-48439-7, loose-leaf)

A provisional schedule of topics to be covered, along with associated assignments, appear below in the Course Calendar. Three things you should know about that schedule:

- 1) Some assignments will be made available electronically. To gain access to them, go to Moodle and click on the “Course Calendar” link near the top of our course page. Then, go to the relevant class day and click on the link for the desired assignment.
- 2) For a given date, the schedule indicates the reading you should prepare before that day’s class.
- 3) I may assign additional readings, or change the timing of readings, later. If I do, I will tell you and adjust the Moodle Course Calendar.

### Class delivery

This class will be taught on Zoom, synchronously. Unless you live in a distant time zone, or are ill, I will expect you to attend class. To find the link to our Zoom class meetings, go to our Moodle page. Then, click on the fourth link from the top of the page. It is labeled “Class Meetings on Zoom.”

### Course Requirements:

The latter part of this section describes four elements of this course: participation, preparation, a paper, and exams. The three boxes below help explain how your grade on each element will determine your course grade.

I reserve the right to make changes in the course elements and/or element weights. I will do that only if I think that making changes will increase the likelihood that students reach class objectives. Before I make any change, I will consult the class.

### Determining your course grade

That grade will be a weighted average of the element grades. The first box shows each element and its weight in this average. The second box shows the number equivalent I use for each grade. (These number equivalents are nearly identical to the ones the University uses to calculate your grade point average.) Once I calculate the weighted average, I need to translate it into a letter grade. The third box shows how I do this.

Element	Weight
class participation	15%
homework	15%
seminar paper	25%
midterm exam	20%
final exam	25%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

Grade	Number Equivalent
A+	4.3
A	4.0
A-	3.7
B+	3.3
B	3.0
B-	2.7
C+	2.3
C	2.0
C-	1.7
etc.	

Weighted Average	Class Grade
3.85 or higher	A
3.50 – 3.84	A-
3.15 – 3.49	B+
2.85 – 3.14	B
2.50 – 2.84	B-
2.15 – 2.49	C+
1.85 – 2.14	C
1.50 – 1.84	C-
etc.	

I reserve the right to make changes in the system described above, after consulting the class, if I think it will increase the likelihood that students reach class objectives.

## Participation

I encourage all students to participate during class. Your participation will contribute both to your understanding and to other students' enjoyment and understanding of the course. It will also help me be cheerful and enthusiastic. *Fabulous* participation includes:

- attending class regularly, punctually, with your camera on;
- coming to class prepared;
- promptly answering Zoom polls during class;
- staying on task in class and in Zoom breakout rooms;
- asking questions to clarify points I make or points made in the reading;
- answering questions I pose correctly;
- responding if I email you; and
- coming to office hours, if I ask you to.

A student who does all the things listed above will receive an A for participation. On the other hand, a student who does few of them will earn an F.

## Homework

We will have two or three homework assignments during the semester. They will give you an opportunity to practice important skills introduced in the reading or in class. They will be graded using the same scale as mentioned above for the quizzes.

## Seminar Paper

The paper is an opportunity to deepen your grasp of one inequality-related topic and practice communicating in crisp, clear prose. It will answer a research question you develop. An assignment sheet, rubric, and model paper are posted to the “Seminar Paper” section near the top of our class Moodle page. Most seminar papers will read and discussed in class, as you can see at the end of the Course Calendar.

The sort of thesis-based essay described by the assignment sheet is the default for the paper assignment. I encourage you to consider alternatives. One possibility would be to do volunteer work and to write a paper that reflects on the experience. A second option would be to do a data analysis paper. That might be especially appropriate if you are a senior and plan to take the Applied Economic Research class next semester. Another possibility would be to make a video for class viewing (For example, you might interview people working on a problem related to the class—e.g. workplace readiness—and edit those interviews into a video.)

## Exams

Exams will contain mostly short answer and essay questions. The questions will stress issues discussed in class, but 10% of the weight will fall on material only covered in the reading or only mentioned briefly in class. Because reviewing material covered during the entire semester will help solidify your grasp of the course, the final exam will be comprehensive.

## Course Calendar

Class, Day, & Date	Topics, Reading, Exams, & Homework
1, Tues. Aug. 25	Getting to know one another An introduction to American income inequality (including disparities by education, race, ethnicity, and gender)

2, Thur. Aug. 27	<p>Assignments, grading, etc.  <b>Reading:</b> Course syllabus</p> <p>An introduction to our model of labor markets  <b>Reading:</b> Borjas, Ch. 1 (pp. 1-10)</p> <p>An introduction to a key statistical tool, linear regression  <b>Reading:</b> Borjas, Appendix to Ch. 1 (pp. 11-18)</p>
3, Tues. Sept. 1	<p>Labor supply: how workers decide how much to work  <b>Reading:</b> Borjas, Ch. 2 (pp. 19-41)</p>
4, Thurs. Sept. 3	<p><b>Due:</b> Homework Assignment #1 (regression &amp; labor supply)</p> <p>Labor supply: differences in labor supply elasticities among groups, women's labor force participation, transfers and work effort  <b>Reading:</b> Borjas, Ch. 2 (pp. 41-61)</p>
5, Tues. Sept. 8	<p>Labor demand in the short run, a bit on the long run, and labor market equilibrium  <b>Reading:</b> Borjas, Ch. 3 (pp. 76-85, 100-101)</p>
6, Thurs. Sept. 10	<p>Labor demand: the minimum wage  <b>Reading:</b> Borjas, Ch. 3 (pp. 106-117)</p>
7, Tues. Sept. 15	<p>Monopsony and the minimum wage  <b>Reading:</b> Borjas, Ch. 4 (pp. 160-165)</p> <p>Minimum wage: the current policy debate  <b>Reading:</b> Arindrajit Dube, "<a href="#">Designing Thoughtful Minimum Wage Policy at the State and Local Levels</a>," The Hamilton Project, June 19, 2014, pp. 1-9</p>
8, Thurs. Sept. 17	<p>Human capital: education &amp; earnings  <b>Reading:</b> Borjas, Ch. 6 (pp. 201-219)</p> <p>Human capital: benefits of school quality  <b>Reading:</b> Borjas, Ch. 6 (pp. 220-224)</p>
9, Tues. Sept 22	<p>Wage structure: what happened since 1980 &amp; possible explanations  <b>Reading:</b> Borjas, Ch. 7 (pp. 238-247, 250-257)</p> <p>Autor, D. H. "<a href="#">Skills, Education, and the Rise of Earnings Inequality Among the 'Other 99 Percent.'</a>" <i>Science</i>, (May 22, 2014), pp. 843–851.</p> <p>Urvi Neelakantan and Jessie Romero, "<a href="#">Slowing Growth in Educational Attainment</a>," Economic Brief, Federal Reserve of Richmond, July 2018, pp. 1-4 (up to "School Choice")</p>

10, Thurs. Sept. 24	<p><b>Due:</b> Homework Assignment #2</p> <p>Discrimination: discrimination based on prejudice (but just skim "The Equilibrium Black-White Wage Differential") &amp; statistical discrimination  <b>Reading:</b> Borjas, Ch. 9 (pp. 299-315)</p>
11, Tues. Sept. 29	<p>Relative earnings of African Americans, Hispanics, &amp; Asians  <b>Reading:</b> Borjas, Ch. 9 (pp. 315-327)</p> <p>David Leonhardt, "<a href="#">The Black-White Wage Gap Is as Big as It Was in 1950</a>," <i>New York Times</i>, June 25, 2020 (2 pages)</p>
12, Thurs. Oct. 1	<p>Relative earnings of African Americans  <b>Reading:</b> Michael Gaddis, "<a href="#">Discrimination in the Credential Society: An Audit Study of Race and College Selectivity in the Labor Market</a>," <i>Social Forces</i>, Volume 93, Number 4, June 2015, pp. 1-24</p>
13, Tues. Oct. 6	<p><b>Midterm Exam</b></p>
14, Thurs. Oct. 8	<p>The gender pay gap: Discriminatory and non-discriminatory sources  <b>Reading:</b> Borjas, Ch. 9 (pp. 328-334)</p> <p>Claire Cain Miller, "<a href="#">The 10-Year Baby Window That Is the Key to the Women's Pay Gap</a>," <i>New York Times</i>, April 9, 2018 (3 pages)</p> <p>John Cassidy, "<a href="#">The Hole in the Glass Ceiling Is Getting Bigger</a>," <i>The New Yorker</i>, October 2, 2014 (3 pages)</p>
October 12 to October 16	<p><b>Fall Vacation</b></p>
15, Tues. Oct. 20	<p><b>Due:</b> Research questions, trial thesis statements, &amp; sources for paper</p> <p>Policies to shrink the gender pay gap  <b>Reading:</b> Erin Coghlan and Sara Hinkley, "<a href="#">State Policy Strategies for Narrowing the Gender Wage Gap</a>," Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, U.C. Berkeley, April 10, 2018 (4 pages)</p> <p>Sarah Jane Glynn, Milia Fisher, and Emily Baxter, "<a href="#">7 Actions that Could Shrink the Gender Wage Gap</a>," Center for American Progress, September 18, 2014 (4 pages)</p>
16, Thurs. Oct. 22	<p>Rising incomes in the top 1%  <b>Reading:</b> Josh Bivens and Lawrence Mishel, "<a href="#">The Pay of Corporate Executives and Financial Professionals as Evidence of Rents in Top 1 Percent Incomes</a>," <i>Journal of Economic Perspectives</i>, 2013 (19 pages)</p> <p>"<a href="#">The Top 1 Percent: What Jobs Do They Have?</a>," <i>New York Times</i>," January 14, 2012</p>

<p>17, Tues. Oct. 27</p>	<p>Evaluating a paper  <b>Reading:</b> Paper assignment sheet &amp; <a href="#">Model paper</a></p> <p>Income inequality, rents, and firm profitability  <b>Reading:</b> Jason Furman and Peter Orszag, "<a href="#">A Firm-Level Perspective on the Role of Rents in the Rise in Inequality</a>" 2015 (18 pages)</p>
<p>18, Thurs. Oct. 29</p>	<p>Income mobility across generations  <b>Reading:</b> Borjas, Ch. 7 (pp. 303-307)</p> <p>Julia Isaacs, "<a href="#">Economic Mobility of Families Across Generations</a>," Chapter 1 from <i>Getting Ahead or Losing Ground</i>, Economic Mobility Project, 2008 (skip the executive summary, read the article itself, 7 pages)</p>
<p>19, Tues. Nov. 3</p>	<p><b>Due:</b> Rough draft of paper (by 5 pm)</p> <p>Geographical variations in mobility  <b>Viewing:</b> Raj Chetty, " " TEDxStanford, May 2016 (14 minutes)</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Raj Chetty, Chapter 1, "<a href="#">Socioeconomic Mobility in the US: New Evidence and Policy Lessons</a>," in <i>Shared Prosperity in America's Communities</i>, 2016 (19 pages)</p>
<p>20, Thurs. Nov. 5</p>	<p>Race and mobility  <b>Reading:</b> Greg Rosalsky, "<a href="#">What A 1968 Report Tells Us About the Persistence Of Racial Inequality</a>," Planet Money (National Public Radio), June 9, 2020</p> <p>Emily Badger, et al., "<a href="#">Extensive Data Shows Punishing Reach of Racism for Black Boys</a>," New York Times, March 19, 2018 (10 pages)</p> <p>Health and mobility  <b>Reading:</b> Anna Aizer and Janet Currie, "<a href="#">The Intergenerational Transmission of inequality: Maternal Disadvantage and Health at Birth</a>," <i>Science</i>, May 23, 2014 (10 pages)</p>
<p>21, Tues. Nov. 10</p>	<p>Policies to promote early childhood development  <b>Reading:</b> Isabel Sawhill and Joanna Venator, "<a href="#">Reducing Unintended Pregnancies for Low-Income Women</a>," The Hamilton Project, June 19, 2014 (8 pages)</p> <p>Elizabeth U. Cascio and Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach, "<a href="#">Expanding Preschool Access for Disadvantaged Children</a>," The Hamilton Project, June 19, 2014 (9 pages)</p>

22, Thurs. Nov. 12	<p>Wealth inequality  <b>Reading:</b> Annie Lowrey, "<a href="#">The Wealth Gap in America Is Growing, Too</a>,"  Economix Blogs, New York Times, April 2, 2014 (2 pages)</p> <p>Taxes and inequality  <b>Reading:</b> The Tax Policy Center, "<a href="#">Distributional Analysis of The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act as Passed by the Senate</a>," December 2017 (8 pages)</p> <p>Chye-Ching Huang and Nathaniel Frenzt, "<a href="#">What Do OECD Data Really Show About U.S. Taxes and Reducing Inequality?</a>," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, May 12, 2014 (7 pages)</p>
Sunday Nov. 15	<b>Last day</b> to see a writing assistant for extra credit
Mon. Nov. 16	<b>Due:</b> Final draft of paper (by 5 pm)
23, Tues. Nov. 17	<p>Why hasn't economic policy done more to reduce inequality?  <b>Reading:</b> Adam Bonica and others, "<a href="#">Why Hasn't Democracy Slowed Rising Inequality?</a>," <i>Journal of Economic Perspectives</i>, Summer 2013 (18 pages)</p> <p>Thomas Edsall, "<a href="#">Why Don't We Always Vote in Our Own Self-Interest?</a>," New York Times, July 19, 2018 (6 pages)</p>
24, Thurs. Nov. 19	<b>Seminar Papers, Day 1</b>
25, Tues. Nov. 24	<b>Seminar Papers, Day 2</b>
Nov. 26 to Nov. 27	<b>Thanksgiving Vacation</b>
26, Tues. Dec. 1	<b>Seminar Papers, Day 3</b>
27, Thur. Dec. 3	Summing Up
Tuesday Dec. 8	<b>Final Exam</b> 10:30 am to 12:30 pm

## University Policies and Resources

### Remote Learning and Covid-19

The focus on remote learning for fall semester 2020 presents unique challenges to both faculty members and students in the online environment. Working together, we can create a successful learning community by following some important guidelines.

- To be successful in remote learning, all students must have access to a functioning computer with a working microphone, camera, and headphones or headset. Students who do not have access to such technology may contact the Office of Financial Aid for possible assistance.
- All course content will be available through course Moodle pages accessible through the UP Portal (PilotsUP). Students should have a working knowledge of both Zoom and Microsoft Teams.
- Students are expected to attend all class sessions, whether synchronous or asynchronous, according to the instructor's direction, and follow guidelines for class conduct during online sessions (e.g. muting, camera on/off, etc.)
- If a student does not feel well enough to attend class remotely, they should communicate with their instructor as to how to make up missed work.
- For the benefit of students who are not able to attend class due to illness, extreme time zone differences, or temporary internet problems, all classroom sessions will be recorded and made available on the course Moodle site. **Students may not distribute or share any course images or recordings without the permission of the instructor.**

### **University of Portland's Code of Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is openness and honesty in all scholarly endeavors. University of Portland is a scholarly community dedicated to the discovery, investigation, and dissemination of truth, and to the development of the whole person. Membership in this community is a privilege, requiring each person to practice academic integrity at its highest level, while expecting and promoting the same in others. Whether instruction is delivered in person or remotely, breaches of academic integrity will not be tolerated and will be addressed by the community with all due gravity.

### **Ethics of Information**

The University of Portland is a community dedicated to the investigation and discovery of processes for thinking ethically and encouraging the development of ethical reasoning in the formation of the whole person. Using information ethically, as an element in open and honest scholarly endeavors, involves moral reasoning to determine the right way to access, create, distribute, and employ information including: considerations of intellectual property rights, fair use, information bias, censorship, and privacy. More information can be found in the Clark Library's guide to the [Ethical Use of Information](#) at [libguides.up.edu/ethicaluse](http://libguides.up.edu/ethicaluse).

### **Assessment Disclosure Statement**

Student work products for this course may be used by the University for educational quality assurance purposes.

### **Accessibility Statement**

The University of Portland endeavors to make its courses and services fully accessible to all students, within course, program and University essential requirements. Students are encouraged to discuss with their instructors what might be most helpful in enabling them to meet the learning goals of the course in the remote learning environment. Students who experience a disability are also encouraged to use the services of Accessible Education Services (AES), located in the Shepard Academic Resource Center (503-943-8985). If you have an AES Accommodation Plan, you should make a virtual appointment to meet with your faculty member to discuss how to implement your plan in this class. Requests for extended exam time should, where possible, be made two weeks in advance of an exam, and must be made at least one week in advance of an exam or quiz. For Clinicals/Student Teaching/Labs held in-person: You should meet with your faculty member to discuss emergency medical information or how best to ensure your safe evacuation from the building in case of fire or other emergency.

### **Mental Health Statement**

As a college student, you may sometimes experience problems with your mental health that interfere with academic experiences and negatively impact daily life. If you or someone you know experiences mental health challenges at UP, please contact the University of Portland Health and Counseling Center at [www.up.edu/healthcenter](http://www.up.edu/healthcenter) or at 503-943-7134. Their services are free and confidential, and if necessary they can provide same day appointments. In addition, after-hours phone counseling is available if you call 503-943-7134 and press 3 outside of business hours. Also know that the University of Portland Campus Safety Department (503-943-4444) has personnel trained to respond sensitively to mental health emergencies at all hours. Remember that getting help is a smart and courageous thing to do – for yourself, for those you care about, and for those who care about you.



### Non-Violence Statement

The University of Portland is committed to fostering a community free from all forms of violence in which all members feel safe and respected. Violence of any kind, and in particular acts of power-based personal violence, are inconsistent with our mission. Together, we take a stand against violence. Join us in learning more about campus and community resources, UP's prevention strategy, and reporting options on the [Green Dot website, www.up.edu/greendot](http://www.up.edu/greendot) or the [Title IX website, www.up.edu/titleix](http://www.up.edu/titleix).

### The Learning Commons

The Learning Commons invites all students to connect with our trained writing assistants and peer tutors as an *effective learning strategy* for greater success in their college courses.

Working with our writing assistants and tutors also makes your online learning experience at UP more socially connected.

Our peer educators offer a rich synchronous face-to-face experience in **Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or GoBoard** in the following areas:

**The Writing Center:** Students can book an appointment at [www.up.mywconline.net](http://www.up.mywconline.net). For help at a time not offered on the scheduler, students can send an email request to [writing@up.edu](mailto:writing@up.edu). Please note that you will create an WCONLINE account the first time you request an appointment.

**All other tutoring programs** can be accessed by using our bit.ly link (<https://bit.ly/learning-up>). Please make appointments at least 12 hours in advance.

- **Math Resource Center:** For support in 100-300 level math courses, including Finite Math (MTH 141) and Statistics (MTH 161).
- **Nursing Tutoring:** For individual and group peer tutoring in any of the 100–400 level nursing classes, as well as BIO 205, microbiology, and anatomy and physiology courses for nurses.
- **The Language Studio:** Students can access French, German, Spanish, and Chinese language tutors.
- **Natural Sciences Center:** Students can make appointments for biology, chemistry, and physics tutoring for 200 and 300 level courses.
- **Business Tutoring:** For support in economics, accounting, finance, OTM, and business law.
- **Speech & Presentation Lab:** Students can improve their presentation writing and online delivery skills.
- **Group Work Lab:** Students can meet as a group to develop their project with a Group Work Lab consultant for online group projects.

Tutoring works best when students use it proactively and consistently during the semester. For example, students can use the Writing Center for brainstorming ideas for a paper and later for working on a first draft. Likewise, those seeking tutoring can work with a tutor a few times leading up to a test. We also welcome small group appointments for 2-4 students at a time; such social learning can be very effective.

Questions about the Learning Commons and our programs can be directed to Jeffrey White at [white@up.edu](mailto:white@up.edu).