

Social Inequality and Identity Syllabus

SOCI/ANTH 390 – Spring 2026

The objectivity of the institutional world, however massive it may appear to the individual, is a humanly produced, constructed objectivity.

-Berger and Luckmann (1966: 79), *The Social Construction of Reality*

Professor: Dr. Erick Axxe (he/they)

Office: Mills 220

Class time: TR 9:45-11AM

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Office phone: 501.450.1445

Class location: Mills 307

Student hours: I will be available to meet on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays from 2:30-4 pm (except when classes are not in session). I encourage you to make use of these times, as I am happy to talk through course material, assignments, or broader academic questions. Students with [appointments](#) will be prioritized, but you are always welcome to stop by. If these times do not work with your schedule, please feel free to email me to arrange an alternative meeting time. I am here to support your learning and success in this course.

Course Description

This course examines how social identities and inequalities are created, maintained, and challenged in everyday life. Focusing on race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and other forms of identity, the course explores how differences become socially meaningful and how unequal access to power, resources, and recognition is produced through institutions such as education, work, family, media, and the state.

Drawing on sociological and anthropological research, students will learn how identities are shaped by social structures as well as lived experience. The course emphasizes how inequality becomes durable and how cultural ideas, norms, and “common sense” help make unequal arrangements appear normal or deserved. Throughout the semester, we will analyze both large-scale social patterns and the everyday interactions, emotions, and narratives through which people experience and negotiate identity.

In addition to race, class, and gender, the course examines other forms of identity (such as citizenship, religion, age, and morality) often in global and comparative perspective. Students will develop skills in critical reading, discussion, and analytical writing, and will apply course concepts to contemporary social issues and media. By the end of the course, students will be equipped with a set of analytical tools for understanding how inequality and identity shape social life, and how people respond to and resist unequal conditions.

The course meets in person twice a week (see schedule above for details). Students are expected to complete reading responses, two presentations, co-facilitate a class session, and submit a final paper and presentation. Course materials and announcements will be shared via Microsoft Teams.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify and analyze major social categories of inequality;
- Explain how identities and inequalities are produced and reproduced through social institutions;
- Connect lived experiences of identity to broader systems of inequality;
- Compare identity and inequality across cultural and social contexts;
- Understand how people respond to inequality;
- Communicate clear, evidence-based analyses of inequality and identity.

Required Materials and/or Technologies

I will discuss how to access these texts during the first week of class:

- Holland, Dorothy C., William Lachicotte Jr., Debra Skinner, and Carole Cain. 2001. *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
 - Please purchase.
- Lamont, Michèle. 2009. *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Meadow, Tey. 2018. *Trans Kids: Being Gendered in the Twenty-First Century*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
 - Excerpts will be provided on Teams.
- Ore, Tracy. 2023. *The Social Construction of Difference and Inequality: Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality*. New York, NY Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 - Please purchase.
- Snow, David A. A., and Leon Anderson. 1993. *Down on Their Luck: A Study of Homeless Street People*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
 - Excerpts will be provided on Teams.
- All other materials (readings, videos, podcasts, etc.) will be posted on Teams.

Grading and Faculty Response

How Your Grade is Calculated

Assignment Category	Percent of Grade
Reading responses	35%
Student-led class discussion	5%
Media and inequality mini presentation	10%
Final paper and presentation	40%
Participation and discussion engagement	10%
**Three unexcused absences will reduce your final grade by 10 percentage points. Each additional absence will reduce your final grade by an additional percentage point.	

Descriptions of Major Course Assignments

Reading responses

Description: This course depends on careful, thoughtful reading. To support our discussions, you will submit a short reading response for most class meetings. Reading responses should demonstrate that you have engaged seriously with the reading. They are not summaries or personal reflections. Responses will be graded on a complete/incomplete basis to encourage consistent preparation.

Student-led class discussion

Description: Each student will take responsibility for helping lead discussion on one day of the semester. Your role is to help the class think through the readings—not to lecture or summarize. You are encouraged to meet with the instructor in advance to plan your discussion.

You will be evaluated on preparation, quality of questions, and your ability to facilitate respectful, engaged discussion.

Media and inequality mini presentation

Description: Once during the semester, you will give a brief presentation connecting course concepts to a piece of popular media. This assignment will be designed to help you apply course ideas to the world around you and to see how inequality and identity are represented in everyday life.

Final analytic paper and presentation

Description: Instead of exams, you will write a final analytical paper that explores a topic related to inequality and identity. The paper should use both course readings and additional scholarly works to analyze how inequality is produced, structured, and maintained in a particular social context, group, institution, or historical moment. The final paper should be 10-12 pages, double-spaced, and written at an upper-division level of sociological analysis. The paper will be completed in stages:

1. Topic proposal (1 page)
2. Conceptual outline or annotated sources
3. Partial draft or analytical memo
4. Final paper
5. A 5–8-minute presentation of your topic

More detailed guidelines will be provided for each stage. The goal of this paper is to help you synthesize ideas from across the course and develop a sustained analytical argument.

Participation and discussion engagement

Active participation is essential in this course. We are expected to:

- Attend class regularly and arrive prepared
- Contribute thoughtfully to discussions
- Engage respectfully with our colleagues' ideas
- Participate in small-group activities and discussions

Participation is evaluated holistically. Speaking frequently is not the only way to demonstrate engagement; listening carefully, asking questions, and responding thoughtfully to others all count.

Late Assignments

Please refer to Teams for due dates. Due dates are set to help you stay on pace and to allow timely feedback that will help you complete subsequent assignments.

Unexcused, late assignments will receive a maximum of 85% of the original grade. Assignments will not be accepted a week after the original deadline.

Instructor Feedback and Response Time

I am providing the following list to give you an idea of my intended availability throughout the course.

- **Preferred contact method:** If you have a question relevant to the entire class, please contact me first through our course's [discussion board Q & A on Teams](#). If your question is specific to you, please email my Hendrix email address (axxe@hendrix.edu). I will reply to emails within **48 hours on days when class is in session at the college**.
- **Class announcements:** I will send all important class-wide messages through the General page on Teams.

- **Grading and feedback:** For assignments submitted before the due date, I will try to provide feedback and grades within **seven days**. Assignments submitted after the due date may have reduced feedback, and grades may take longer to be posted. You can access your grades on Microsoft Teams.

Grading Scale

89.5–100: A

79.5–89.49: B

69.5–79.49: C

59.5–69.49: D

Below 59.49: F

Hendrix Resources and Policies

Academic integrity: Our academic integrity policy may be found in the 2025-26 Catalog in section [D.6.c.Academic Integrity](#). Your written assignments should be your own original work. In formal assignments, you should follow ASA style to cite the ideas and words of your research sources. Using a large language model (e.g., ChatGPT, Google’s Bard) to produce work is prohibited.

Attendance: Attending class and being an active participant in the class community is one of the **most important contributors to your learning at Hendrix**. Attendance is especially important in this class since you will often engage in group learning activities. Active participation is expected in order to achieve higher grade levels in the course.

If you must miss class, **you should email Dr. Axxe before class** whenever possible. Absences without prior notification are considered unexcused, except in the case of genuine emergencies. Absences related to religious observances, illness, mental or physical health needs, athletic competition, or other institutionally recognized activities (e.g., conference travel or Model UN) are excused. You do not need to provide third-party documentation for absences related to illness. Providing inaccurate or misleading information about an absence is a violation of the Academic Integrity Policy.

When you are absent, you are responsible for reviewing missed materials and staying current with the course. In-class assignments may be made up for excused absences but not for unexcused absences. Because repeated absences—regardless of reason—can interfere with meeting course learning goals, I may reach out to you and your advisor if attendance becomes a concern. You may also be asked to complete additional work to demonstrate progress toward course objectives. If attendance does not improve and learning goals are not being met, the Office of Academic Success will be notified.

In accordance with Hendrix policy, after following this procedure I may, at my professional discretion, remove you from the course if unexcused absences over any three-week period reach or exceed 50%. In such cases, the Registrar will notify you via your Hendrix email prior to the withdrawal deadline. You may appeal this decision by contacting the Registrar within three business days of the notification; appeals are reviewed by the Academic Appeals Committee.

Statement on diversity: Hendrix College values a diverse learning environment as outlined in the College’s Statement on Diversity. All members of this community are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment for every other member of the community. If you believe you have been the subject of discrimination, please contact the Dean of Students Office or submit a [Title IX report](#). If you have ideas for improving the inclusivity of the classroom experience, please feel free to contact Dr. Axxe. For more information on Hendrix non-discrimination policies visit Hendrix.edu/nondiscrimination.

[Title IX Reports of Discrimination Based on Sex, including Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault, Stalking, Dating Violence, or Gender-Based Harassment.](#) (Follow link to see details.)

Health and wellbeing: Hendrix recognizes that many students face mental and/or physical health challenges. If your health status will impact attendance or assignments, please communicate with me as soon as possible. If you would like to implement academic accommodations, contact the office of Academic Success (AcademicSuccess@hendrix.edu). To maintain optimal health, please utilize campus resources like Hendrix Medical Clinic or Counseling Services (501.450.1448). [Student Health Services](#) provides free healthcare to Hendrix students. Services are provided by an Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) in collaboration with a local physician. Hendrix Student Health Services is now located in Conway Regional's Hendrix Medical Clinic at 1700 Altus in The Village at Hendrix. Your health and wellbeing are important.

ADA accommodations: As your instructor, it is my legal obligation to ensure that all students have equal access to course materials and equal opportunity to perform well in the course. In addition, “It is the policy of Hendrix College to accommodate students with disabilities, pursuant to federal and state law. Students should contact the Office of Advising & Academic Success (AcademicSuccess@hendrix.edu) to begin the accommodation process. Any student seeking accommodation in relation to a recognized disability should inform the instructor at the beginning of the course.”

The Writing Center: The Writing Center is a community of peers ready to assist you with your writing projects, in all genres and fields, and at any stage of development. We work with you in one-on-one meetings that you can book in advance or request during our office hours. Virtual appointments are available for medical reasons or by special arrangement. To book appointments, and for more information, visit <http://www.hendrix.edu/writingcenter/> or contact pruneda@hendrix.edu. We look forward to working with you!

Hendrix Bailey Library: Bailey Library's mission is to collaborate and empower all members of our community so that they become their best selves, cherish the scope of human knowledge, and positively contribute to the librarians are happy to help locate quality resources supporting research and classroom work and to assist with the critical evaluation of academic information. Librarians and Library Associates provide individual research assistance by appointment. The library building is open seven days a week, and access to the library's online resources is available 24/7. You can visit the library's website at <https://www.hendrix.edu/baileylibrary/> for more information, to book an appointment, and to access the library's Discovery search, Class Guides, and full-text article databases.

Technology: Much of the technology we interact with is made to be addictive. I suggest you find and use resources that will help you resist distractions. [Here's](#) a website with a list of website blockers. Similar software exists for apps on phones and tablets.

Additional Resources

Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. Furthermore, please notify me if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable me to provide any resources that I may possess.

- **Food Pantries:** [Here's](#) a list of local food pantries.
- **Zotero:** [Zotero](#) is a free citation management software.
- **Grammarly:** [Grammarly](#) is a free software that checks and suggests fixes to grammatical errors.
- An [inclusive data resource hub](#).