**What happens when the world helps teach your class: Using Wikipedia a pedagogical tool to engage students**

Mark K. Cassell

Professor of Political Science

Department of Political Science

Kent State University

mcassell@kent.edu

**\*\*Please do not cite without the author’s permission\*\***

Prepared for delivery at the Political Science Classroom: Strategies to Engage the Student Panel at the 2016 Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, San Diego, CA March 24-28, 2016.

*“My white male guilt makes me interested in inequality and how it impacts demographics differently”*

*-*Kent State student in Politics of Inequality course.

**Introduction**

Wikipedia, the multilingual web-based free online encyclopedia, is the largest and most popular resource in the history of the world.[[1]](#footnote-1) The English-version of Wikipedia alone has more than 27 million users reading, publishing or editing more than five million articles and 38.6 million pages ("Wikipedia:Statistics," n.d.). Wikipedia is likely to be the first website to come up on your Google search and it’s likely to be the first source your students turn to when researching a paper. And while the number of users and editors has declined in the past several years ("Wikipedia:Statistics," n.d.), Wikipedia is closer than any other reference to being the place where “every single human being can freely share in the sum of all knowledge” (Wikipedia Foundation, n.d.).

Yet for many faculty Wikipedia remains problematic. Critics claim that the website is unreliable (Kamm 2007), suffers from racial and gender bias (Paling, 2015), and is often misused. Rather than improve our understanding of the world, critics argue that Wikipedia is “dumbing down the world of knowledge” (Black 2010). Anecdotal accounts of faculty and students at my university suggests faculty remain uncomfortable with the website; often discouraging students from using the online encyclopedia and prohibiting the inclusion of Wikipedia articles as legitimate sources in research papers.

At the same time, an increasing number of faculty from a range of disciplines are incorporating Wikipedia writing and publishing into their lesson plans. The Wikipedia Education Foundation, a non-profit educational arm of Wikipedia, estimates that in Fall 2015 about 140 faculty required students to publish a Wikipedia article, up from 100 the previous semester. The fields covered range from Women’s Studies to Medicine to Fine Arts. A recent survey conducted by the Wikipedia Foundation of faculty who use the Wikipedia assignment finds that faculty believe the Wikipedia assignment to be at least as effective as traditional writing assignments in achieving certain learning objectives (See Figure 1). The results are as follows:

* 18 percent found the Wikipedia assignment more effective in improving writing skills;
* 82 percent found the Wikipedia assignment more effective in improving media and information literacy;
* 28 percent found the Wikipedia assignment more effective in teaching critical thinking skills;
* 54 percent report that the Wikipedia more effective in teaching collaboration; and
* 79 percent report Wikipedia more effective in teaching online communication skills.

Source: Wikipedia Foundation Survey of Faculty (2016)

Of course, surveys of faculty who use Wikipedia are likely biased. But a growing scholarly literature illustrates the pedagogical value of Wikipedia publishing assignments (Kennedy *et al.* 2015; Konieczny, 2014; Carrington & Robinson 2009; Chandler & Gregory, 2010; Notari, 2006; Kristian, 2015; Devore, Cecala, & Maerz, 2010; Page & Reynolds, 2014). Kennedy *et al.* (2015, 382), for example, describes how introductory courses in comparative politics and elections can be improved by incorporating the editing of Wikipedia article into the lesson plan: “Taking this step is expected to improve student learning and benefit a much broader community.” In incorporating the Wikipedia assignment into his Comparative Law course, Witzleb (2009, 86) notes that up-to-date material is difficult to come by and that “students researching and producing materials themselves received an immediate and tangible benefit from the exercise.”

The growing work on Wikipedia in the classroom demonstrates: first, that assigning students to draft and publish a Wikipedia contribution is no longer a novelty; and second, the pedagogical benefits from assigning a Wikipedia article are multifaceted and vary depending upon discipline, lesson plan, and how the assignment is incorporated into the class. Building on the work of others, this article takes up the question of how assigning a Wikipedia article can be used to effectively teach a controversial topic in political science.

**Teaching Controversial Topics**

Controversial topics are common across academic fields. Teaching about same-sex marriage, gun control, race, reproductive rights or even the Presidential election is fraught with significant challenges (Burkstrand-Reid *et al.*, 2011; Karen & Briggs, 2011; Cowan & Maitles, 2012). Topics are charged with emotion. Students arrive to class with entrenched beliefs that can sometimes undermine efforts to foster critical thinking skills. Opposing and contradictory viewpoints on controversial issues are easily interpreted as personal attacks degenerating into disruption, complete withdrawal, or both.

Based on the scholarship of teaching, three challenges stand out. The first is peer relations. Burkstrand-Reid *et al.* (2011, 4) argue that “the most feared entity in the classroom is not the professor or the test, but the classmate.” Peer relations determine how students engage with a controversial topic, whether students become defensive, are open to examining assumptions behind a topic, or simply shut down. Indeed Lusk and Weinberg (1994) find that difficult peer relations will lead students to opt out of a discussion altogether rather than risk jeopardizing relationships outside of class.

A second challenge is the power relations between student and teacher. Students typically arrive to college with “years of training in listening passively and answering brief questions from the teachers with correct answers” (Innes 2007, 13). Yet, in order for productive exchanges of controversial topics to occur, students must believe that they will not be corrected or penalized because they disagree with the instructor or another classmate. Faculty must therefore develop techniques to overcome opposition and fear among students caused by perceived power differences

Finally, a third challenge in teaching about controversial topics is developing techniques that overcome common perceptions of “the other.” Students experience aspects of our culture that encourage them to reduce information into “norm” versus “other” dichotomies (Hedley & Markowitz, 2001). Burkstrand-Reid *et al.* (2011, 4) note that “norm” is what our culture emphasizes as the standard against which alternatives are measured. Terms like “Welfare-mother,” “thug” or “ghetto” are concepts loaded with meaning that signify an alternative to normal or what’s expected. Similarly, modifying professions with the race or ethnicity of person – African-American judge or Hispanic teacher – reinforces their otherness. One would not typically refer, for example, to the white teacher or white judge. Equally important, norm also defines what knowledge is relevant, essential and legitimate. The experiences of victims of police abuse or domestic violence are often discounted as “anecdotal” when compared with official statistics even when the statistics are incomplete or imprecise. When social realities are reduced to norm v. other dichotomies, students’ understanding is reduced to us vs. them distinctions, which further undermines the learning process. The challenge is, therefore, to help students appreciate and understand the historical, political and social processes that help create, maintain, and replicate what is the “norm” and what is the “other.”

This article suggests that, while not a panacea, incorporating a Wikipedia assignment into a lesson plan can be a useful active learning tool to overcome some of the challenges associated with teaching a controversial topic. The article draws on a recent experience teaching an upper-division writing intensive seminar in political science titled, “The Politics of Inequality.” A major assignment of the course (worth nearly half the grade) was the publication of a Wikipedia article on a topic related to inequality (see syllabus in Appendix 1).

My initial rationale for building a Wikipedia article into the lesson plan was simply to try an active learning technique that I had read about. It was only as the semester progressed that I realized that, although there were the predictable bumps in the road that occur with any new assignment, the Wikipedia exercise made it easier for students to talk about a number of the controversial issues. Quantitative and qualitative assessment of the students’ experience support my impressions.

The remainder of the paper is divided the following sections. The next section presents background into the course and how the Wikipedia assignment was integrated into the lesson plan. Particular attention is also devoted to describing a web-based dashboard created by the Wikipedia Education Foundation. I found the dashboard to be indispensable in managing the assignment and accompanying exercises. Drawing on several sources of data, the third section evaluates the course. Particular attention is devoted to how the course mediated challenges associated with teaching a controversial topic like inequality. A concluding section summarizes several lessons from the experience.

**The Politics of Inequality in the United States and Wikipedia**

Before turning to the Wikipedia assignment, the following presents some background on the course and the students. A brief survey was conducted at the start of the course to measure students’ familiarity with the topic, their reason for taking the course, and their fluency with Wikipedia. Links to students’ Wikipedia contributions are listed in Appendix 3.

**What was the course about?**

“What Happened to All Men Are Created Equal?: The Politics of Inequality in the United States” is an upper-division political science course built around five broad topics. The class began by exploring the concept of inequality. Different theoretical positions on whether inequality is a public problem were explored. Public opinion research on the topic was also discussed. Next, the course turned to the current state of inequality for the overall population, and by gender and race. In addition to exploring different measures of inequality, we also examined inequality in Ohio (where my university is located) and cross-nationally.

A third section of the course was devoted to the major causes cited for growing levels inequality including globalization, declines in organized labor, technological changes, and public policies. A fourth section of the course discussed the effects of inequality on health and well being of citizens and on their participation in the political process. A final fifth section of the course examined several common policy solutions for address inequality.

Students were required to complete a mix of writing assignments including: 1) four short reaction papers in which they responded to question about the readings; 2) a medium-length (8-10 page) research paper on any topic of their choosing related to inequality; and 3) a Wikipedia article on a topic related to their research paper.

The course’ learning objectives were part substantive and part process and skills-based. Substantively I expected students to complete the class with:

* A theoretical understanding of inequality;
* An empirical understanding of the current state of inequality across different societal groups;
* An understanding of the major causes cited for inequality;
* An understanding of the effects of inequality on health and political participation; and, finally
* An understanding of common policy solutions to address inequality.

In addition to the substantive goals, the course was also built around a set of skills-based learning objectives including:

* Write and communicate more effectively;
* Think critically;
* Listen more effectively;
* Time-management skills; and
* Digital and media literacy

Of the 27 who registered for the class most (23) were seniors who took the course because it fulfilled a major requirement. A small minority said they took the course because they were interested in the topic. The majority of students (90 percent) were very familiar with Wikipedia. The majority (80 percent) use Wikipedia at least occasionally for their research papers and most believe Wikipedia to be at least somewhat reliable. A small number (7 percent) acknowledged that Wikipedia is where they do the bulk of their research. In terms of experience with social media, about a third of the class indicated that they had edited a blog, a website or Wikipedia.

The classes’ views on inequality at the start of the course reflected the views of most Americans (Fingerhut, 2016). About two-thirds of the class indicated that inequality was a public problem that warranted some type of public solution. A third of the class stated that inequality was a private problem.

**How was the Wikipedia assignment organized?**

Based on the experience of others (Kennedy *et al.* 2015), the Wikipedia assignment was organized into a series of short tasks and quick “how to” lectures integrated throughout the course. Class time was set aside on a regular basis to introduce students to Wikipedia’s content, rules and norms, and, most importantly, the technical knowledge needed to complete the assignment.

The first two weeks of class were dedicated to introducing Wikipedia editing techniques, Talk Pages[[2]](#footnote-2), and criteria used to assess what makes a good or bad article. At the start of the semester students registered an account with Wikipedia, practiced using the Talk Pages, and completed an online training course for students on how to use Wikipedia. In addition to providing technical knowledge, the training course also addressed the norms and rules that govern the editing process.

Once students were somewhat familiar with Wikipedia, attention focused on how to select a topic. The Wikipedia Foundation provides handouts on the how to pick an article (Wikipedia Media 2014). In addition to requiring students to see me during my office hours to discuss a topic, I found it helpful to spend about a half an hour of class time brainstorming possible ideas and demonstrate what a “stub[[3]](#footnote-3)” is how one might search for a topic or build on an existing article. In order to practice their editing techniques, students were required in the third week to add one or two sentences of new information back up with a citation to an appropriate source.

By the sixth week of class, students were required to post the first draft of their Wikipedia article in their “Sandbox,” a space to experiment with different versions of an edit. Drafts consisted of three to four paragraphs and followed the format of a Wikipedia article (Wikipedia Media 2014). Once posted, each student was required to provide feedback on two other students’ drafts in the Talk Pages linked to the Sandbox pages. Students then incorporated peer reviews (and my comments) into rewrites of their draft articles. By the eighth week of class, drafts were moved from the sandbox to Wikipedia’s main website.

Once on the main website, students did another round of peer reviews. As with earlier drafts, students commented on two other students’ Wikipedia sites. In addition, Wikipedia editors and automatic editing systems also flagged articles and in some cases removed the article from Wikipedia because the student failed to comply with one of Wikipedia’s policies.[[4]](#footnote-4) Over the course of the final weeks of the semester students revised their Wikipedia contributions in response to new information they collected, comments from editors, and from reading other Wikipedia articles. During the course of revising their Wikipedia edits, students also completed an 8-10 page research paper which often provided additional information and perspective to the Wikipedia contribution.

In the final weeks of the course, each student gave a brief 15-minute class presentation in which they discussed their Wikipedia contribution and the challenges in doing the assignment. The range of Wikipedia articles included: ….In addition, I asked each student to draft a brief 2-page essay in which they were asked to reflect on what they learned from the Wikipedia assignment, what they felt worked and what they felt didn’t work.

In addition to the handouts and a plethora teaching aids, the Wikipedia Education Foundation provided two resources that proved invaluable in helping me help the students complete the assignment. The first resource is an online Dashboard (see Appendix 2). Once they registered with Wikipedia, students also signed on to a course Dashboard. The Dashboard included the syllabus, schedule of assignments, and handouts. The Dashboard enabled me to see 1) whether students had completed the online training; 2) whether students had completed the various tasks; and; 3) easily see the progress students were making on their assignment. The Dashboard also facilitated the peer review system by enabling students to easily click to another student’s edits. And then I was also able to easily see a student’s peer review. With 27 students, the Dashboard proved an enormous help in keeping track of the progress of each student as they moved through the different tasks.

A second resource offered by the Wikipedia Foundation was the assistance of a Wikipedian, an experienced editor who works with the Wikipedia Foundation. The assistant was helpful in three ways. He supported me by answering my many technical questions. Second he monitored each students’ Wikipedia contribution and could quickly explain to students why they received particular comments on their contribution from outside editors, why their article was flagged, and how they could improve their article. And finally, knowing someone was there with technical expertise that they could quickly turn to, increased students’ confidence and my own.

In short, the Wikipedia assignment was structured around a number of small tasks and incremental steps. Moreover, peer reviews and continuous rewrites were a central part of the assignment. Rather than turn in a polished research paper after several several drafts, the Wikipedia assignment sought to get students to complete an acceptable foundation for an article that met Wikipedia’s formatting and policy criteria. Once online, the students’ contribution would develop organically with the input from peers, the instructor, and external editors. Whether this lesson worked or not is addressed in the next section.

**Evaluation of the Wikipedia Assignment**

An important question for any new learning tool is whether it actually succeeds in achieving its learning objectives. Ideally, one would want to use an experimental design to test the impact of the tool. While not ideal, the evaluation in this case offers some useful insights. I rely on three sources of data. First, two quantitative surveys of students were conducted toward at the end of the course: one survey given to all classes by the university asks general questions about the course and the instructor; and another survey given by me asks specific questions about the Wikipedia assignment. A second qualitative data source is the reflective essays written by each student. The essays provide the best account of what the students believed they learned, as well as the strengths and the weaknesses of the assignment. The essays were coded using the qualitative software program, NVivo. A final source of data is notes that I took throughout the semester following classes or one-on-one meetings with students, on challenges, strengths and impact of the Wikipedia. The notes provide a check on my memory. Drawing on the three sources of data, the evaluation of the assignment is broken down into three parts: 1) a discussion of how the assignment mediated challenges associated with teaching a controversial topic; 2) assessments of the assignment from the perspective of the students; and 3) an assessment of the assignment from my vantage point, as the instructor.

**How did the assignment ease the challenges of teaching a controversial topic?**

Given the topics covered in this class – racial and gender inequality, organized labor, minimum wage – it’s not surprising that class meetings often generated heated and intense discussions. However, the Wikipedia assignment mediated several challenges that typically occur when teaching about controversial topics.

Peer pressure or peer influence can often stifle discussion and learning in the classroom (Lusk & Weinberg, 1994). Being required to comment on the draft edits of others in a semi-private way appears to have reduced some of the anxiety that comes from talking about a controversial issue publicly in class. By semi-private I mean that although anyone could view a peer’s feedback, comments written in the Talk Pages linked to the Sandbox and were likely viewed primarily by the commenter and the author. There were two rounds of peer reviews – once in the draft phase and once after the document had been moved to Wikipedia’s main site. Several students wished there were more opportunities for peer reviews. Students cited peer reviews most often as the part of the assignment that worked best. One student commented, “Knowing that by creating an article I would be inviting others to add to and criticize my work, I was more mindful about the quality and organization of my article.”

The peer reviews created a class space where students felt comfortable expressing their views. Comments were made electronically without seeing the classes’ reaction or even how the other student reacted. Wikipedia is built on peer reviews and the edits and additions of others. The fact that students observed this process first hand and were ***required*** to conduct at least four peer reviews not only raised the class comfort level, it helped foster a peer review culture in class. Peer reviews also enabled students to see the progress (or lack of progress) of others that also helped breakdown barriers. One student acknowledged that she was pleasantly surprised to see how much another student was struggling with the same technical issues she was. Finally, an interesting dynamic occurred at least twice during the course of the class when a Wikipedia editor criticized a students’ edit. In response to the editor’s comment, other students in class came to their colleague’s defense, expressed sympathy, and offered solutions to the editors’ concerns.

The power relationship between student and instructor can also hamper learning; students (and some faculty) are reluctant to challenge the “teacher as disseminator of knowledge” – metaphor. The Wikipedia assignment helped disrupt that metaphor in several ways. First off, it was clear at the outset that I, the instructor, was not going to be the disseminator of knowledge when it came to editing Wikipedia. Students understood early on that not only was I not an expert in things Wikipedia but I had far less experience editing websites than they did. Working with students one-on-one fostered a sense of mutual learning and teaching. Second, in a typical research paper students understand that the primary audience is the instructor. This can easily reinforce the power relationship between student and faculty that hampers learning. In the case of the Wikipedia assignment, the audience is the instructor, the class, and the world. Students very much understood they were writing for others – their parents, their friends, the world. Nearly three-quarters of the class stated that they shared their contribution with others outside of class including friends, family and, in one case, “as many people as a could.” Moreover, three-quarters of the class also wrote “Yes” to the question: “Does the fact that your Wiki article lives on after the class ends change the way you approached the assignment?” One student’s comment is typical: “Yes. I always take pride in the work I do but since this project will live beyond the class with my name on it I made sure that it was well cited and made my name look good.” Feedback and edits of others (not the instructor) coupled with a requirement to search for other Wikipedia articles on the same topic, helped erode the impression that the instructor was the only legitimate source of knowledge. In fact, by seeing their work published, expanded, and cited by other authors enforced a view that they - the students – could be the legitimate source of knowledge and information.

A final challenge with teaching controversial topics is helping students understand stereotypes and how the concept of an “other” is constructed to legitimize the “norm.” These can be difficult conversations particularly in discussions of gender- and racial inequality. While it not did not solve this problem, the Wikipedia assignment included features that mediated the problem. The most important element was Wikipedia’s insistence that all contributions: 1) be written from a neutral point of view; 2) not be original but rely on the work of others; and 3) be verifiable with peer-reviewed citations. Although most students felt strongly about inequality – whether it was a public or private problem, for example – Wikipedia’s policies prohibited students from simply expressing their opinions. And Wikipedia’s policies (and notably not the instructor’s) forced students to take into account the views and perspectives of others. This was one of the most difficult challenges for students. Indeed, “writing in a neutral way” was listed by students as the second most often mentioned challenge of the course. One student’s comments are typical: “What was difficult was learning how to write in a neutral style. I’m used to writing either persuasive or news articles so writing for an encyclopedia was something new and challenging.”

Wikipedia’s rigid structure and format created a space to explore the assumptions and social context upon which “norms” and “others” are built. Wikipedia’s automatic editors, classroom peers and external editors were quick to edit students who simply wrote their opinions, used stereotypes or made unsubstantiated claims. Students would often complain about the editing and comments to me and to the Wikipedia Foundation assistant helping with the class. However, in responding to editors’ concerns students were forced to confront their assumptions that often led to healthy discussions in class and on the Talk Pages linked to drafts or the article.

In short, the Wikipedia assignment helped mediate some of the challenges associated with teaching a controversial subject. But to be clear: the assignment was by no means a perfect remedy to the challenges. From the perspective of the students there were a number of elements that worked well and other elements that didn’t work at all (see Tables 1 & 2).

**Table 1: What aspects of the assignment did you think worked?[[5]](#footnote-5)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Topic** | **Times mentioned** | **Examples in quotes** |
| Peer reviews and feedback from Wikipedia community | 8 | “Knowing that by creating an article I would be inviting others to add to and criticize my work, I was more mindful about the quality and organization of my article.” |
| Long-term nature of assignment and sense of ownership | 6 | “Knowing that my work is now exposed and will continue to be improved upon to stay relevant is an indescribably feeling.” |
| Training and Wikiedu staff support | 5 | “The training was of great help to me. It was broken down into easy-to-follow steps and helped me through the very basics of forming a Wikipedia page…The training made me ware that there could be no opinions in the entry and to keep a neutral point of view.” |
| Flexibility in choosing a topic | 2 | “What worked really well…was that we were able to choose a topic that we are interested in researching…made it easier to research because it is something I genuinely want to learn about.” |
| User-interface/Dashboard | 2 | “I learned immediately about Wikipedia that it is very user friendly. I never realized how far Wikipedia had come from a fairly difficult to use format into the user-friendly, easy-to-edit resource it is today. The citation tool was easy to use…the content creation was easy.” |

**Table 2: What was the most challenging aspect of the assignment?**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Topic** | **Times mentioned** | **Examples in quotes** |
| Formatting and technical issues | 9 | “The most frustrating component of the assignment was the Wikepedia interface. I found navigating the inner workings of sandboxes and user pages to be outdated and overly complicated.” |
| Writing in a neutral style | 7 | “What was difficult was learning how to write in a neutral style. I’m used to writing either persuasive or news articles so writing for an encyclopedia was something new and challenging.” |
| Difficulty selecting a topic | 5 | “The main struggle I faced while completing this assignment was finding a subject that hadn’t already had a page created for it, but also was relevant to my topic.” |
| Applying the training | 2 | “I took notes on the training in order to prepare myself as much as possible, but in the end, that did not really help me at all.” |

When asked to identify the greatest challenge with the assignment, students most often mentioned formatting and technical issues. Despite the training and the Dashboard, it was still difficult to navigate Wikipedia’s clumsy interface and formatting. One student noted, “The most frustrating component of the assignment was the Wikipedia interface. I found navigating the inner workings of sandboxes and user pages to be outdated and overly complicated.” The Wikipedia Foundation assistant was helpful but often what seemed straightforward in the training video turned out to be more complicated. I experienced similar technical problems attempting to adhere to the Wikipedia format styles. I found myself wishing for a template where one could paste in text. In addition to the challenge of writing in a neutral style, students also found it difficult to identify a topic. I found it necessary to devote significant class time to brainstorming topics and showing where students could search for ideas.

At the same time, the majority of the students (85 percent) found the Wikipedia assignment extremely useful. One student noted: “Yes, the assignment really made you focus on details and relevancy, rather than trying to fill 10 pages with 'filler info.'” Another stated, “I did find the assignment useful. It helped me learn the ins and outs of Wikipedia and how to use the site which continues to become where more and more people go to find quick facts and info or as a starting point for research.” Two students felt the Wikipedia assignment was not useful, stating in one case, “ It feels like just another project that I won't use when I'm older.”

In addition to praising the peer-review system and the online training, students identified the long-term nature of the project as an important feature of the assignment that worked well. The fact that the students’ contributions continued to live on beyond the scope of the class enhanced students’ feeling of ownership over the project. One student wrote, “Knowing that my work is now exposed and will continue to be improved upon to stay relevant is an indescribable feeling.”

**Conclusion**

Incorporating a Wikipedia assignment into a lesson plan is not for the faint of heart. It is an active learning exercise that requires a significant investment in time and planning on the part of the faculty member. It also requires students to learn a new technology and a way of writing that is unusual in an upper-division political science course. And, for the most part, the students were more than willing to go along for the ride. Indeed, although they were somewhat surprised by the assignment, their feedback and performance suggests that the learning objectives set out for the course were met in most cases.

The Wikipedia Foundation’s resources including the Dashboard were an enormous help. But, as with any new assignment, there’s a significant learning curve in figuring out the technology, time management challenges, and an ideal teaching process that meets the demands of students. Of course, I expected a learning curve. What I did not anticipate, however, is how the Wikipedia assignment indirectly made discussions and learning about inequality easier. The assignment helped reduce some of the anxieties often caused by class peer relations. The assignment also provided a vehicle for challenging the traditional student-instructor power relationship that can often get in the way of learning. And finally, Wikipedia’s rigid structure and format often forced students to confront the assumptions that create our perceptions of what is normal and what is the other.

**Works Cited**

Black, E. (2010, April 19). Wikipedia-The Dumbing Down of World Knowledge. Retrieved March 7, 2016, from http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/125437

Burkstrand-Reid, B., Carbone, J., & Hendricks, J. S. (2011). Teaching Controversial Topics. *Family Court Review,* *49*(4), 678-684. doi:10.1111/j.1744-1617.2011.01404.x

Carrington, V., & Robinson, M. (2009). *Digital literacies: Social learning and classroom practices*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Chandler, C. J., & Gregory, A. S. (2010). Sleeping with the Enemy: Wikipedia in the College Classroom. *The History Teacher,* *43*(2), 247-257.

Cowan, P., & Maitles, H. (2012). *Teaching Controversial Issues in the Classroom: Key Issues and Debates*. Continuum International Publishing.

Devore, J., Cecala, K., & Maerz, J. (2010). Wikis in the classroom: Properties and potential uses of this collaborative learning tool. *Nature Precedings*. doi:10.1038/npre.2010.5244.1

Fingerhut, H. (2016, February 10). Most Americans say U.S. economic system is unfair, but high-income Republicans disagree. Retrieved March 16, 2016, from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/02/10/most-americans-say-u-s-economic-system-is-unfair-but-high-income-republicans-disagree/>

Hedley, M., & Markowitz, L. (2001). Avoiding Moral Dichotomies: Teaching Controversial Topics to Resistant Students. *Teaching Sociology,* *29*(2), 195-208. doi:10.2307/1318717

Innes, R. B. (2007). Dialogic Communication in Collaborative Problem Solving Groups. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Ij-sotl,* *1*(1), 1-18. doi:10.20429/ijsotl.2007.010104

Kamm, O. (2007, August 16). Wisdom? More like dumbness of the crowds. *Http://web.archive.org/web/20110814104256/http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest\_contributors/article2267665.ece*. Retrieved March 7, 2016.

Karen, M. A., & Briggs, L. T. (2011). Myths and Moral Panics: An Active Learning Approach to Controversial Topics. *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching & Learning Journal,* *5*(1), 1-14. Retrieved March 3, 2016.

Kennedy, R., Forbush, E., Keegan, B., & Lazer, D. (2015). Turning Introductory Comparative Politics and Elections Courses into Social Science Research Communities Using Wikipedia: Improving Both Teaching and Research. *PS: Political Science & Politics APSA,* *48*(02), 378-384. doi:10.1017/s1049096514002157

Konieczny, P. (2014). Rethinking Wikipedia for the Classroom. *Contexts,* *13*(1), 80-83.

Kristian, K. E. (2015). A Wiki-Based Group Project in an Inorganic Chemistry Foundation Course. *J. Chem. Educ. Journal of Chemical Education,* *92*(12), 2074-2079. doi:10.1021/acs.jchemed.5b00507

Notari, M. (2006). How to use a Wiki in education. *Proceedings of the 2006 International Symposium on Wikis - WikiSym '06*. doi:10.1145/1149453.1149479

Page, K. L., & Reynolds, N. (2014). Learning from a wiki way of learning. *Studies in Higher Education,* *40*(6), 988-1013. doi:10.1080/03075079.2013.865158

Paling, E. (2015, October 21). How Wikipedia Is Hostile to Women. *The Atlantic*.

Wikimedia Foundation. (2014). *Case studies on how to use Wikipedia as a teaching tool in higher education classrooms as part of the Wiki Education Foundation's Classroom Program.* https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Case\_Studies,\_How\_instructors\_are\_teaching\_with\_Wikipedia\_%28Wiki\_Education\_Foundation%29.pdf

Wikipedia:Statistics. (n.d.). Retrieved March 14, 2016, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Statistics>

Witzleb, N. (2009). Engaging with the World: Students in Comparative Law Write for Wikipedia. *Legal Education Review,* *19*(1), 83-97

Appendix 1

**What happened to “All Men are Created Equal”?**

**The Politics of Inequality in the United States.**

**POL 40191/40391 Fall 2015**

**T/Th 12:30 -1:45 in Bowman 301**

Dr. Mark Cassell

Office: Bowman 302, Room 35

Office Phone: 330-672-8945

E‑mail: mcassell@kent.edu

Office Hours: T-Thu 9am-noon, Fridays 9-noon, and by appointment

At America’s founding in 1776 Thomas Jefferson crafted the phrase that made it into the Declaration of Independence and America’s DNA: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.” Jefferson, a slave owner, was not referring to economic equality per se. With an eye on Europe’s rigid class system that divided the very rich and privileged from the masses, Jefferson believed in a new world committed to promoting the equal value and worth of all citizens.

This course takes up Jefferson’s creed to examine three broad topics:

**1. Where is inequality today in the United States and what does it mean?** The United States is more unequal today than at any time since the 1920s. The United States is also more unequal than nearly every other developed country in the world (except Chile). But what does inequality actually mean? How does it affect opportunities in the labor market, housing, health, or education? What does inequality look like for different socio-economic groups? The course moves beyond the statistics to look at what inequality actually means in practice.

**2. What are the political and policy decisions that cause inequality?** Throughout U.S. history, local, state and federal governments have passed policies that have had an impact on inequality. The 14th Amendment, the New Deal, the Great Society – all sought to reduce inequality in the United States. However, starting in the 1970s local, state and federal policy makers passed policies that increased inequality. The course examines what these policies did to increase inequality in the United States and Ohio.

**3. How has inequality in the United States today affected political participation and power?** A central question for any political science course is how power is distributed and exercised. Based on our history and the experience of other countries, we know that high levels of inequality can affect participation and power in a country. But how does inequality affect power and participation? And, more importantly, how does it matter? To address the topic, the course will explore the US political system today through the lens of inequality with particular attention paid to political participation by citizens and corporations.

The course relies on a mix of media to explore the topics covered, including videos, books, articles, television news reports, interviews, and speakers. We will also incorporate comparisons with other countries. Please note: this will be an interesting and engaging course but it will also be a demanding course. There will be a series of extensive writing assignments and a significant amount of reading. The pay-off, however, will be better understanding of one of the greatest economic challenges our time.

We will often use the classroom for small group discussions. Thoughtful, prepared participation is expected from everyone. Please remember that the utmost respect for fellow class members is in order when you listen to them and when you speak. We will be talking about politics and public policy. There are tough issues here. People’s political views are often related to strongly held values – which may be in conflict with other people’s strongly held values, so please be respectful of one another and open-minded.

**Class attendance.** Class attendance is required and mandatory. I will excuse an absence from class with a legitimate reason and supporting documentation. Legitimate reasons to miss class include, but are not limited to, illness and injury, disability-related concerns, military service, death in the immediate family, religious observance, academic field trips, and participation in an approved concert or athletic event, and direct participation in university disciplinary hearings.

You are permitted three unexcused absences – after that your grade will suffer (note: attendance and participation constitute 10 percent of your final grade). If you have an emergency that precludes coming to class, please let me know by email before or shortly after the class absence.

**Ground rules for the classroom:**

1) Please turn off your cell phones and do not text during class.

2) If you have a laptop on during class, please use it only for the classwork of the moment, like taking notes or looking up something up on the web that we need to know. Please don’t do things like checking email or surfing the web.

3) The style of discussion will be deliberative and respectful. This is not a courtroom in which we are adversaries trying to win a zero-sum game. It is a forum in which we are scholars pursuing understanding together with the potential for win-win outcomes.

4) When the professor or a guest speaker is speaking, do not chat. It is distracting to the speaker and to students around you.

5) I understand that it is convenient to ask me questions of individual concern at a class meeting rather than come to office hours. Accordingly, I will stay after class as long as it takes for everyone with a question to ask. Before class, I like to focus on setting up the technology and starting on time, so please hold your individual questions for me until after class. Thanks very much!

**Readings:** All readings listed in the syllabus are **required** and should be read before the class session in which they are covered. Class discussions will build on readings but will not be duplicative. You are responsible for all material, whether from class or the readings.

**Reading memos (4):** These should be short, two-­page responses to the week’s readings, submitted in class on the day they are due. Please do not simply summarize the readings. I will send out a set of questions to help inspire you, but don’t be bound by them. You could for example focus on one reading and assess its research design and use of evidence, or discuss its theoretical framework and contrast it with other readings, or use it to analyze a current policy debate. Another model is that you identify and discuss one theme or one empirical puzzle that runs across several readings. Or you could raise a series of questions that the readings do not answer well enough, or fail to address at all. The memos don’t have to be masterpieces, but do take the time to think them through and write them cleanly. Each reading memo is worth 5 percent of your class grade.

**NB:**  **Reading memos will not be accepted late**. If you are unable to make it to class on the day a reading memo is due, I will accept an e-mailed copy if it arrives in my box before class begins.

**Research Project/Wikipedia Project:**

See handout

**Grading: There are essentially four different types of assignments that you’ll be graded on in this writing-intensive class: 1) attendance and participation; 2) a set of two-page reading memos; 3) a Wikipedia Project/article that includes a set of smaller steps; and 4) an 8-10 page research paper that is an expanded version of the Wikipedia Project including a draft and final version.**

* Attendance and participation 10%
* Reading Memos (5 percent each) 20%
* 9/24, 10/1, 10/22, 11/3
* Research paper (Expanded Wiki article) 25%
* First draft (20%), due October 29th
* Final draft (80%), due December 17th
* Wikipedia Project 45%
* Training (5%), due September 10th.
* Add one or two sentences to Wiki article, due Sept 22nd (5%)
* First draft of article in sandbox (10%), Oct. 6th
* Peer reviews (Sandbox and Wiki article) (15%)
* Quality of your main Wikipedia contribution (40%)
* Presentation (10%), TBA last weeks of class.
* Reflective Essay (15%), due on December 10th (last day of class)

I will use Blackboard to post grades. You will therefore be able to keep track of how you are doing throughout the semester

I use the following grading scale:

A 93-100 C 73-76

A- 90-92 C- 70-72

B+ 87-89 D+ 67-69

B 83-86 D 60-66

B- 80-82 F Below 60

C+ 77-79

Finally students who never attend class or stop attending class will receive grades “NF” and “SF”, respectively.

**Learn Course Management:** The class makes extensive use of the Blackboard Learn Course Management System. We will take the first class period to review how to access the system and locate course materials. All grades will be posted to the system. The syllabus, readings, and all supporting materials are made available through the system. I will also post outlines what will be discussed in class before class. We will also use Vista’s discussion feature to discuss issues raised in the class. It is therefore important that all students become familiar with Vista.

**Disability Policy**: University policy **3342-3-01.3** requires that students with disabilities be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations, please contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to make arrangements for necessary classroom adjustments. Please note, you must first verify your eligibility for these through Student Accessibility Services (contact 330-672-3391 or visit <http://www.kent.edu/sas> for more information on registration procedures).

**Academic Honesty:** Cheating means to misrepresent the source, nature, or other conditions of your academic work (e.g., tests, papers, projects, assignments) so as to get undeserved credit. The use of the intellectual property of others without giving them appropriate credit is a serious academic offense. As per Kent State University’s policy (**3342-3-01.8)**, if I find that a student has cheated or plagiarized, he or she will automatically receive a failing mark for the course. Repeat offenses result in dismissal from the University. See **Kent State’s Policy Register at** <http://www.kent.edu/policyreg/policydetails.cfm?customel_datapageid_1976529=2037779> **for a complete statement on the university’s policy toward plagiarism.** If you have any questions, please read the policy and/or ask.

**Registration.** September 13 is the last day to [withdraw from any or all courses](http://www.kent.edu/registrar/how-withdraw) that meet the full semester before a grade of "W" is assigned. Access the Detailed Class Search from the [Schedule of Classes](https://keys.kent.edu:44220/ePROD/bwlkffcs.p_adv_unsecure_sel_crse_search) or your student printable schedule for deadlines for flexibly scheduled courses. University policy requires all students to be officially registered in each class they are attending. Students who are not officially registered for a course by published deadlines should not be attending classes and will not receive credit or a grade for the course. Each student must confirm enrollment by checking his/her class schedule (using Student Tools in FlashLine) prior to the deadline indicated. Registration errors must be corrected prior to the deadline.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Topics** | **Readings and Assignments** |
| **I. Ideas and Concepts around Inequality** | | |
| 9/1 | Introduction   * Overview of the course * Assignments and expectations * Introduction to how Wikipedia will be used in the course * Understanding Wikipedia as a community, we'll discuss its expectations and etiquette. | **Readings:**  Héctor Tobar, 2015. How Los Angeles is Becoming a “Third-World” City *Los Angeles Times.* July 6. (Blackboard)  We’ll watch:  Video. “9 out of 10 Americans Are Completely Wrong About this Mind-­‐Blowing Fact”.  Handout: [Editing Wikipedia](http://wikiedu.org/editingwikipedia) |
| 9/3 | Ideas about inequality   * Discuss different ideas behind inequality * How has our understanding of inequality changed over time? * Is inequality a bad thing? * What do we mean by inequality? | **Readings:**  Michael J. Thompson, 2007, *The Politics of Inequality: A Political History of the Idea of Economic Inequality in America*, New York: Columbia University Press, Conclusion (Blackboard).  [Greg Mankiw. 2014. “Yes, the Wealthy Can Be Deserving” New York Times (Feb. 14).](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/business/yes-the-wealthy-can-be-deserving.html?partner=rss&emc=rss&_r=1)  We’ll watch and discuss Bill O’Reilly’s take on Income Inequality in America.  Social Inequality <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_inequality> (Only the section on Inequality and Ideology. |
| 9/8 | Views and opinion about inequality   * What do Americans think about inequality? * What factors influence our views about inequality? * What do we mean by "social equality"? | **Readings:**  Benjamin I. Page and Lawrence R. Jacobs, 2009, *Class War? What Americans Really Think About Economic Inequality*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, chapter 2 (Blackboard).  Social Equality https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\_equality  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  **Wikipedia Assignment**   * Basics of editing * Anatomy of Wikipedia articles, what makes a good article, how to distinguish between good and bad articles * Collaborating and engaging with the Wiki editing community * Tips on finding the best articles to work on for class assignments   Handouts: [Using Talk Pages](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Using_talk_pages.pdf), [Evaluating Wikipedia](http://wikiedu.org/evaluatingwikipedia) |
| 9/10 | Inequality as a public problem.   * Why do we care about inequality? * Should government do anything to alleviate inequality? * What is the Samaritan's Dilemma and how is it relevant to how we think about inequality? | **Readings:**  Deborah Stone, 2008, *The Samaritan’s Dilemma: Should Government Help Your Neighbor?* New York: Nation Books, Chapter 1. (Blackboard)  Parable of the Good Samaritan  <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parable_of_the_Good_Samaritan>  **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**  **Wikipedia Assignment** Due by September 10.   * Create an account and then complete the online training for students. During this training, you will make edits in a sandbox and learn the basic rules of Wikipedia. * Create a User page. * To practice editing and communicating on Wikipedia, introduce yourself on the user talk page of one of your classmates, who should also be enrolled in the table at the bottom of the page. * Explore topics related to your topic area to get a feel for how Wikipedia is organized. What areas seem to be missing? As you explore, make a mental note of articles that seem like good candidates for improvement.   Resources: [Online Training for Students](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Training/For_students) |
| **II. Trends in Inequality** | | |
| 9/15 & 9/17 | Changes in inequality   * How has inequality changed over time in the United States? * How has inequality changed for different groups? * How do we measure inequality? | **Readings:**  [Lawrence Mishel, et. al. 2012. The State of Working America, Pp. 183-­‐228 and 139-­‐168. (focus on reading the text and understanding the graphs; skim the more detailed tables).](http://www.stateofworkingamerica.org/subjects/overview/?reader)  Income equality in the United States  <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Income_inequality_in_the_United_States>  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  **Wikipedia Assignment**  Handouts: [Choosing an article](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Choosing_an_article.pdf) |
| 9/22 | Trends in inequality – Ohio   * How has inequality changed in Ohio over time? * How have working people in Ohio done over time? * What parts of the state are the most unequal? * What do you think explains the changes in inequality? | **Readings:**  [State of Working Ohio](http://www.policymattersohio.org/sowo-2014)  Discussion of Plagiarism and Adding New information.  **Wikipedia Assignment**  \* Add 1–2 sentences of new information, backed up with a citation to an appropriate source, to a Wikipedia article related to the class. Due by September 22.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  **Paper Assignment**  A one-page proposal discussing the topic you plan to research for your final is due September 22 in class.  Handouts: [Citing Sources](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Citing_your_sources.pdf) and [Avoid Plagiarism](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Avoiding_plagiarism.pdf) |
| 9/24 | Gender disparities   * Gender disparities are in decline, why? * In addition to pay, are there other ways in which inequality between genders occurs? * Is gender inequality a function of choice or discrimination? | **Readings:**  Francine D. Blau and Lawrence M. Kahn, 2000, “Gender Differences in Pay,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 14(4): 75-99. (Blackboard)  Gender Inequality  <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_inequality>  “Destabilizing the American Racial Order,” *Daedalus: the Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences* 140(2): 151-165. (10.1162/DAED\_a\_00084)  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  **Reading Memo Assignment 1 Due September 24.** See topics but possible topics include:  \* How significant is gender inequality and why?  \* What factors do you think contribute to inequality in the United States and Ohio?  \* Are gender differences in pay justified? |
| 9/29 | Racial disparities   * How does inequality breakdown by race, gender and ethnicity? * What do we mean by race? * With the election of Barack Obama, do we now live in a post-racial society? | **Readings:**  Jennifer L. Hochschild, Vesla M. Weaver, and Traci Burch, 2011, “Destabilizing the American Racial Order,” *Daedalus: the Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences* 140(2): 151-165  Racial Inequality in the United States  <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racial_inequality_in_the_United_States>  **Wikipedia Assignment.**  We will also discuss the topics students will be working on, and determine strategies for researching and writing about them. |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 10/1 | Global Comparisons of Inequality   * How does inequality in the US compare with other countries? * What are the different ways one might measure cross-national inequality?   What do international comparisons show? | **Readings**:  Richard Freeman and Lawrence Katz. 1998. “Rising Wage Inequality: The United States vs. Other Countries,” Ch. 18 in Amy S. Wharton (ed.), *Working in America: Continuity, Conflict and Change*. (Blackboard)  Alejandro Portes and Saskia Sassen. 1987. “Making it Underground: Comparative Material on the Informal Sector in Western Market Economies.” *American Journal of Sociology* 93(1): 30-­‐61.  International Inequality  <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_inequality>  **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**  **Reading Memo 2 due at the start of class October 1.**  Possible topics include:  How does inequality break down by race, gender and ethnicity?  How does America compare with the rest of the world?  What OECD countries are the most equitable? Why? |
| **III. Causes of Inequality** | | |
| 10/6 | Causes of Inequality – Decline in Unions   * What is a union? * What does a union do? * What role do unions play in reducing inequality? | **Readings:**  Bruce Western and Jake Rosenfeld. 2011. “Unions, Norms and The Rise in U.S. Wage Inequality.” *American Sociological Review* 76: 513-57  Ken-­‐Hou Lin and Donald Tomaskovic-­‐Devey. 2013. “Financialization and U.S. Income Inequality.”  *American Journal of Sociology* 118(5): 1284-­‐1329.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Handout: [Moving out of your Sandbox](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Moving_out_of_your_sandbox.pdf) |
| 10/8 | Causes of Inequality – Decline in Unions and the Power of Corporations   * What contributes to a decline in unionization? * Why are unionization rates in Canada and the US different? * Why are labor unions important in protecting labor rights? | **Readings**:  Kris Warner, 2012, “Protecting Fundamental Labor Rights: Lessons from Canada for the United States,” Center for Economic and Policy Research. (Blackboard)  Neil Fligstein and Taekjin Shin. 2007. “Shareholder Value and the Transformation of the U.S. Economy, 1984-­‐2000.” *Sociological Forum* 22(4): 399-­‐424.  [Harold Meyerson. 2013. “The Forty-Year Slump.” *American Prospect.*  Sept/Oct.](http://prospect.org/article/40-year-slump)  **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**  **Wikipedia Assignment due October 8.**   * Write a 3–4 paragraph summary version of your article—with citations—in your Wikipedia sandbox. * Continue research in preparation for expanding your article. |
| 10/13 | Causes of Inequality | **Film: Inequality for All (Part 1)**  **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**  **Wikipedia assignment**   * Select two classmates’ articles that you will peer review in their sandbox and copyedit. On the table at the bottom of this course page, add your username next to the articles you will peer review. |
| 10/15 | Causes of Inequality | **Film: Inequality for All (Part 2)** |
| 10/20 | Causes of Inequality - Technological Changes   * What have been some of the major technological changes in the past 20 years? * How have computers changed the ways in which work is organized? * Are we more innovative today than a hundred years ago? * How does technology affect inequality? | **Readings:**  Tal Kristal. 2013. “The Capitalist Machine: Computerization, Workers’ Power and the Decline in Labor’s Share within U.S. Industries.” *American Sociological Review* 78: 361-­‐89. (Blackboard)  We’ll watch:  Tyler Cowen, May 9, 2011, “The Great Stagnation,” TEDx Talk: <http://www.youtube.com/> watch?v=\_93CXTt2K7c  **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**  **Wikipedia Assignment**   * Move your sandbox articles into main space. * Do NOT copy and paste your text, or there will be no record of your work history. Follow the instructions in the "Moving out of your sandbox" handout. * Begin expanding your article into a comprehensive treatment of the topic. |
| 10/22 | Causes of Inequality - Technological Changes   * What is job polarization? * How would changes in productions affect inequality? * What do Mishel et al. find? * Does your own experience confirm the conclusions of Mishel and his co-authors? | **Readings:**  [Larry Mishel, Heidi Shierholz and John Schmitt. 2013. Don’t Blame the Robots: Assessing the Job Polarization Explanation of Growing Wage Inequality.](http://www.epi.org/publication/technology-inequality-dont-blame-the-robots/)  Rachel Dwyer. 2013. “The Care Economy? Economic Restructuring, and Job Polarization in the U.S. Labor Market.” *American Sociological Review* 78(3): 390-­‐416.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  **Reading Memo 3 is due in class on October 22.**  Possible topics include:  Role of unionization in increasing inequality.  What are the main explanations for inequality?  How has technology changed a particular industry’s system of compensation? |
| 10/27 | Causes of Inequality - Policy and Politics   * How do elections matter? * What types of public policies reduce or increase inequality? * How to political and economic explanations for inequality differ? * What do Hacker and Pierson mean by "winner-take-all"? | **Reading:**  Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, 2010. Winner-Take-All Politics: Public Policy, Political Organization, and the Precipitous Rise of Top Incomes in the United States *Politics and Society* 38(2): 152-204. (Blackboard)  Plurality Voting System.  Nathan J. Kelly and Christopher Witko, 2012, “Federalism and American Inequality. *Journal of Politics* 74(2): 414-426  <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plurality_voting_system> |
| 10/29 | Causes of Inequality - Policy and Politics   * What are taxes? * How does tax policy shape inequality? * What does the Congressional Research Service report argue? * What concerns did Republicans in Congress have with the report? | **Reading:**  [Jonathan Weisman. 2012. “Nonpartisan Tax Report Withdrawn After G.O.P. Protest” *New York Times*. Nov. 1.](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/02/business/questions-raised-on-withdrawal-of-congressional-research-services-report-on-tax-rates.html)  [Thomas L. Hungerford, 2011, “Changes in Income Inequality Among U.S. Tax Filers between 1991 and 2006: The Role of Wages, Capital Income, and Taxes,” Congressional Research Service](file://localhost/(http/::papers.ssrn.com:sol3:papers.cfm%3F%20abstract_id=2207372))    **Draft of research paper due October 29th.**  Draft of 8-10 page research paper (not including citations) is due. See assignment sheet. |
| **IV. Effects of Inequality** | | |
| 11/ 3 | Effects of Inequality – Health   * What are the connections between health and inequality? * What's missing from Kawachi and Kennedy's measure of health? * Does health contribute to inequality or does inequality lead to health outcomes? | **Readings:**  [Ichiro Kawachi and Bruce P. Kennedy, 1999, “Income Inequality and Health: Pathways and Mechanisms,” *HSR: Health Services Research,* 34(1): 215-227.](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1088996/pdf/hsresearch00017-0022.pdf)  **Reading memo 4 is due in class on November 3rd.**  Possible topics include:  Discuss a public policy that shapes inequality?  Does local government policy shape inequality differently from state or federal policies?  If there was one public policy you could enact to reduce inequality what would it be? |
| 11/5 | Effects of Inequality –Health   * How is life expectancy tied to inequality? * Is it a public problem that health and inequality are linked? * Who is living longer and why? | Readings:  [Michael A. Fletcher, March 10, 2013, “Research Ties Economic Inequality to Gap in Life Expectancy,” Washington Post.](http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/research-ties-economic-inequality-to-gap-in-life-expectancy/2013/03/10/c7a323c4-7094-11e2-8b8d-e0b59a1b8e2a_story.html)  Morgan Kelly, 2000, “Inequality and Crime,” *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 82(4): 530-539 We’ll watch: UNNATURAL CAUSES: Is Inequality Making Us Sick? |
| 11/10 | Effects of Inequality – Political Participation   * Does inequality affect participation or does participation lead to inequality? * What are the ways in which inequality makes ones more or less likely to participate in democracy? * Is there a bias in representation in the US? | Readings:[Rhodes, Jesse H. and Schaffner, Brian F., 2014. Economic Biases in Representation: Using New Data to Shed Light on How Wealth Affects Access to Political Representation (February 23, 2014).](http://ssrn.com/abstract=2561423) **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**  **Wikipedia article**  Peer review and copy edit two of classmates’ articles on the talk pages of their article. Due November 10th. |
| 11/12 | Effects of Inequality – Political Participation   * After reading Gilens' essay, what do you see as the connection between policy and inequality? * Which of the responses to Gilens' essay do you disagree with? * Schiller links inequality to tax policy. Do you agree with his account? | Readings:  [“Forum: Under the Influence,” *Boston Review,* July/August 2012 (read lead essay by Martin Gilens and all responses)](http://www.bostonreview.net/BR37.4/%20ndf_money_politics_demoracy_representative_government.php))  Laura D’Andrea Tyson, September 21, 2012, “Income Inequality and Educational Opportunity,” *New York Times Economix* blog. (<http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/> 2012/09/21/income-inequality-and-educational-opportunity/)  [Zach Schiller. 2015. Kasich-era tax changes reward the wealthy](http://www.policymattersohio.org/itep-aug2015?utm_source=ITEP-Aug2015+&utm_campaign=Infant+mortality&utm_medium=email) |
| **V. Solutions to Inequality** | | |
| 11/17 | Solutions to Inequality   * What institutions does Hacker argue need reform? * What is a "Middle-Class Democracy"? * Why a minimum wage? * What are the arguments in favor and against? | Readings:  Jacob Hacker. 2011. “The Institutional Foundations of Middle-­‐Class Democracy.” Policy Network, May 6.  [Mike Konczal. 2013 Minimum Wage 101. American Prospect. February 13.](http://prospect.org/article/minimum-wage-101)  Minimum Wage <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minimum_wage>  **Wikipedia Assignment**  Address peer review suggestions by November 17th. Make edits to your article based on peers’ feedback. If you disagree with a suggestion, use talk pages to politely discuss and come to a consensus on your edit.  Do additional research and writing to make further improvements to your article, based on your classmates' suggestions and any additional areas for improvement you can identify. |
| 11/19 | Solutions to Inequality   * What is the submerged state? * What have been Obama's policies to combat inequality? * What policies have done the most to reduce inequality? \* * What are tax solutions to inequality? | Reading:  Suzanne Mettler, 2010, “Reconstituting the Submerged State: The Challenges of Social Policy Reform in the Obama Era,” *Perspectives on Politics* 8(3): 803-824. (Blackboard)  [Daniel Altman. 2012. To Reduce Inequality, Tax Wealth, Not Income. New York Times. (November 19).](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/19/opinion/to-reduce-inequality-tax-wealth-not-income.html?_r=0) |
| 11/24 | Solutions to Inequality | Open Day |
| 11/26 | Thanksgiving | |
| 12/1 | Student Presentations | |
| 12/ 3 | Student Presentations | |
| 12/8 | Student Presentations | |
| 12/10 | Student Presentations  **Reflective Essay (15%), due on December 10th** | |
| Dec. 17th **Final 8-10 page research paper due.** | | |

Appendix 2: Dashboard screenshot



Appendix 3 - Selected list of students’ Wikipedia contributions.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CEO_of_public_schools>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Week_%28Ohio%29>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ohio_National_Organization_for_Women>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Income_inequality_in_Ohio>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Housing_in_Fortaleza,_Brazil>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ohio_Organizing_Collaborative>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inequality_in_Hollywood>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuyahoga_County,_Ohio#Health>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personal_Responsibility_and_Work_Opportunity_Act#Immigrant_Welfare>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stock_market#Market_participant>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inequality_in_Germany>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Board_of_Education_v._Walters>

1. Wikipedia is the seventh most popular sites on the Internet and the most widely used reference website; see Alexa Top 500 Global Sites <http://www.alexa.com/topsites> at 3 March 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A talk page is a comment or discussion page linked to every Wikipedia article. Editors use talk pages to discuss improvements to an article or debate content. It’s the main way in which feedback is delivered. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A stub is a short article in Wikipedia in need of expansion. Stubs are often good places to start and there are lists of stubs in Wikipedia by topic. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Five policies are the cornerstone of Wikipedia: 1) Content must be free; 2) Sources must be reliable; 3) point of view must be neutral; 4) the concept or contribution must be of some note; and 5) everyone who edits should assume good faith when interacting with others (Wikipedia Foundation n.d., 3). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Students wrote essay in which they were asked to reflect on three topics: 1) what aspects of the assignment they felt were successful; 2) what challenges they confronted; and 3) what they had learned in the class. A total of 20 students completed the reflection essay. Each essay was “interviewed” by coding the responses using NVivo. The tables summarize the responses and the number of times the responses were mentioned by different students. In addition, I include a sample quote for each topic that best captures the students’ sentiment. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)