Power and Inequality

Description of the Area

This area of concentration undertakes the study of power and its relationship to inequalities. It brings together faculty and graduate students whose intellectual interests in a range of substantive topics are advanced through close engagement with the concept of power.

Structure of the Area Examination

The area examination on power and inequality addresses three broad domains: (1) How has the concept of power been defined, especially by sociologists? (2) How does power relate to puzzles of substantive importance to sociology today, especially those involving inequalities? and (3) How has power and the claims made about power, especially those bearing on particular substantive topics, been studied empirically?

The process and requirements of the examination are outline below:

1. Students must complete all of their core requirements as Ph.D. students before taking the examination (see doctoral program handbook).

2. In addition, they must also complete three additional courses falling within the power and inequality area of concentration. At least two of these courses must be from the list of “primary courses”. An allied course may also be an independent study, subject to approval by the faculty of the power and inequality area.

3. Students define the substantive area of focus for the examination. Possible areas of focus are topics in political sociology including, but not limited to, social movements, the welfare state, political participation, influence and domination, the regulation of markets, the media and globalization. Other pertinent topics include organizations, surveillance, social change, technology, mobilities, social policy, environmentalism, or the dynamics of social inequality, especially pertaining to class or status group.

4. Students will choose three faculty members from the power and inequality area to serve as their examination committee, one of whom will serve as chair. In special circumstances one member of this committee may be from outside of the list of faculty affiliated with the power and inequality area. It is recommended that students form this committee no later than six months prior to sitting for the examination to allow ample time to prepare and study the assembled reading list.
5. Students will collaborate with their examination committee to build their reading list.

6. The examination itself will include three questions based on materials covered on the reading list. The questions will tap into the three domains identified earlier. In short, one question will attend to theoretical and conceptual matters related to power, a second question will explore how power intersects with inequalities in the substantive area of focus selected by the student, and a third question will speak to the manner in which claims about power and inequalities have been studied empirically.

7. The chair of the examination committee will be responsible for organizing the dates and times of the written and oral portions of the examination, soliciting questions from faculty on the committee, and distributing the examination.

8. The examination will have a written portion that will be a take-home (distributed and submitted electronically) that the student will have five days to complete. A follow-up oral portion of the examination will then be held generally within three weeks. The committee may ask the student to make further revisions to the examination, which may also involve an additional oral session. At the conclusion of the examination process, the committee will award either a pass or fail. In the event of a failure on the examination, a student may take the entire examination one more time.

Courses within the Area

Students must take at least three courses in the area of power and inequality to qualify for the area examination. At least two of these courses must be from the list of “primary courses”.

Primary Courses

Contemporary Social Movements (Soc. 6030/Anthropology 5450)
Political Sociology (6050)
Theories of Social Change (6050)
Social Stratification (6560)
Surveillance, Mobilities, and Power (6640)

Allied Courses

Medicine, Culture and Society (6050)
Sociology of Gender (6050)
Seminars on the Frankfurt School (6050)
Feminist Theory (6050)
Comparative Criminology (6630)
Formal Organization (6730)
Corporate and Governmental Crime (5600)
Race, Ethnicity and Justice (5680)
Sociology of Law (5780)
Independent Study (7100) - Approval Needed

Affiliated Faculty

**Paul Ciccantell** – Areas of expertise in power and inequality include organizational sociology, comparative organizational strategies, the causes and consequences of international inequalities, and theories of long-term socioeconomic and environmental change. His current research focuses on the strategies of global mining and steel firms to acquire and utilize coal from western Canada and on the efforts of firms and states to shape global commodity chains in a wide range of industries, including mining, steel, shipping, textiles, tourism, and property development.

**Douglas Davidson** – Areas of interests include race and ethnic relations; race, class, and education; the sociology of the black community; and critical sociological theory. He is currently conducting research on the diversity experiences of first year students at Western Michigan University with several graduate student associates. He is active in efforts to introduce anti-bias, antiracist curriculum processes and strategies in the Kalamazoo Public School System, and he is working with local anti-racist organizations to increase racial consciousness and awareness as a first step in the process of reducing and eliminating the destructive consequences of racism.

**Elena Gapova** – Investigating the formation of a new system of inequality in the post-socialist (post-Soviet) region; more specifically, she is focused on the intersection of class formation, nation-building, and gender. Her research on gender includes the issues of citizenship and welfare. Her most recent research interest is on intellectuals and hegemony.

**Barry Goetz** – Defines his work as analyzing the structures and processes of public safety agencies within a political sociological frame, in particular, theories of the state and organizations. His publications examine organizational crime control through a lens that draws on theories of the state and institutions, as well as work on community policing as a welfare state intervention, especially in relation to alternative drug control policies and other social outreach measures.
**Chien-Juh Gu** - Power is central in her work. She adopts an intersectional approach to study power relations and social inequality, which analyzes how various structural factors (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, social class, religion, disability, and nationality) intersect to shape unequal social statuses and power imbalance among social groups. Gu also specializes in social psychology. Her research in social psychology focuses on examining how micro-level social interactions reflect the macro-level intersectional social inequalities as well as how individuals use available resources to resist structural constraints and exert agency.

**Greg Howard** – Investigating how states as well as corporations regulate the movement of people, goods, and information and how this regulation differentially affects individuals along class, race, ethnic, gender, and citizenship dimensions. One ongoing project in this line of inquiry is concerned with "Mobilities and Drones." Another is called *Mounted Lives: Equine Mobility, Power, and Surveillance.*

**Ronald Kramer** – Research interests in climate change and environmental crime, corporate and state crime, crime prevention and control strategies, and sociological history of the sport of baseball. He is a long time peace and justice activist and a founding member of Kalamazoo Nonviolent Opponents of War (KNOW). He has been on the executive board of the WMU Center for the Study of Ethics in Society since 1985 and he founded the annual Peace and Justice Education Week at the university in 1983. He is co-chair of the Interdisciplinary Humanities Study Group on Climate Change at the WMU Center for the Humanities.

**Vin Lyon-Callo** – Research, Teaching, and Service focus on utilizing post-structuralism, Marxism, and critical theory for understanding both the production of inequalities and the possibilities for transformative interventions and social movements against authoritarianism, class exploitation, systemic racism, and environmental challenges. A long term member of the editorial collective for the journal Rethinking Marxism, his research on homelessness, contemporary social movements, and the quest for equity in public education has appeared in a wide range of journals and books. His most recent work explores the possibilities of solidarity economies as a possible path for producing economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

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