

Ph.D. in “Life Course Research” – Socio-demographic curriculum

Academic Year 2025-2026

Education and Social Inequalities

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Objectives

This course provides an overview of core theories, methods, and empirical findings on social stratification and intergenerational mobility. It introduces how socioeconomic status (SES) inequalities emerge and persist across generations in postindustrial societies, with a focus on educational inequality by parental SES. Particular attention is given to life-course mechanisms shaping unequal educational opportunity and choice, both at the micro- (parental resources and school actors) and meso-levels (educational institutions and school systems). Finally, the course presents recent (causal) evidence on policies and interventions to reduce educational disadvantage.

Program

Monday 20/04/2026 (C. Gil):

- Theoretical frameworks of (in)equality of opportunity, with education as the main channel for (in)mobility. Overview of key conceptual and analytical tools to study social stratification (social class; economic inequality) and intergenerational mobility (absolute/relative; log-linear models; rank-rank correlations; sibling/twin models), and their trends (historical; cross-national).

Core Readings

- Björklund, A., Jäntti, M. (2020). Intergenerational mobility, intergenerational effects, sibling correlations, and equality of opportunity: A comparison of four approaches. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 70, 100455. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2019.100455>
- Breen, R. (2019). Education and intergenerational social mobility in the US and four European countries, *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 35(3), 445–466, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/grz013>
- Fishkin, J. (2014). Equal Opportunity and Its Problems. In *Bottlenecks: A New Theory of Equal Opportunity* (pp. 24–82). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199812141.003.0001>,
- Hertel, F. R., Barone, C., Smullenbroek, O. (2025). The multiverse of social class: a large-scale assessment of macro-level, meso-level and micro-level approaches to class analysis. *European Societies*, 27(5), 840–888. doi: https://doi.org/10.1162/euso_a_00044
- Lambert, P. (2024). Sociological measures of inequality, *Oxford Open Economics*, 3(1), i167–i175. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ooec/odad077>

Tuesday 21/04/2026 (C. Gil):

- Micro-level mechanisms of educational inequality reproduction: Skill formation (parental investments), socio-genomics (gene-environment interplay), rational action (primary and secondary effects), and reproduction theories (cultural capital; teacher bias). Compensatory and multiplicative advantage in skill formation and educational transitions.

Core Readings

- Erola, J., Kilpi-Jakonen, E. (2017). Compensation and other forms of accumulation in intergenerational social inequality. In Erola, J., Kilpi-Jakonen, E. (Ed.), *Social Inequality Across the Generations*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781786432568.00006>
- Heckman, J. J. (2007). The economics, technology, and neuroscience of human capability formation. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 104(33):13250-13255. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0701362104>
- Jackson, M. (2013). How is inequality of educational opportunity generated? The case of primary and secondary effects. In M. Jackson (Ed.), *Determined to succeed? Performance versus choice in educational attainment* (pp. 1–33). Stanford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.11126/stanford/9780804783026.003.0001>
- Jæger, M. M. (2022). Cultural Capital and Educational Inequality: An Assessment of the State of the Art. In K. Gërkhani, N. D. de Graaf, and W. Raub (Ed.), *Handbook of Sociological Science* (pp. 121–134). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781789909432.00015>

Wednesday 22/04/2026 (D. Contini):

Institutional differences in school systems across countries and their role in shaping educational inequality. The role of early tracking in shaping inequality in achievement and choices. Cross-country variation in primary and secondary effects.

Core Readings

- Hanushek, E. A., Woessmann, L. (2006). Does Educational Tracking Affect Performance and Inequality? Differences-In-Differences Evidence across Countries. *The Economic Journal*, 116, C63-C76. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0297.2006.01076.x>
- Jackson, M., Jonsson, J.O. (2013). Why Does Inequality of Educational Opportunity Vary across Countries? Primary and Secondary Effects in Comparative Context. In M. Jackson (Ed.), *Determined to succeed? Performance versus choice in educational attainment* (pp. 1–33). Stanford University Press <https://doi.org/10.11126/stanford/9780804783026.003.0001>

Thursday 23/04/2026 (D. Contini):

Educational policies and interventions aimed at reducing educational inequality: evidence from experimental and policy-based research. Early childhood education and inequality in skills and achievement (primary effects). Informational interventions and inequality in educational choices (secondary/tertiary effects).

Core Readings

Early Childhood Education

- Cornelissen, T., Dustmann, C, Raute, A., Schonberg U. (2018). Who Benefits from Universal Child Care? Estimating Marginal Returns to Early Child Care Attendance, *Journal of Political Economy*, 126(6). <https://doi.org/10.1086/699979>
- Felfe, C, Nollenberger, N., Rodriguez-Planas, N. (2015). Can't Buy Mommy's Love? Universal Childcare and Children's Long-Term Cognitive Development, *Journal of Population Economics*, 28, 393-422. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00148-014-0532-x>

Informational Interventions

- Barone, C., Schizzerotto, A., Abbiati, G., Argentin, G. (2017). Information Barriers, Social Inequality, and Plans for Higher Education: Evidence from a Field Experiment, *European Sociological Review*, 33(1). <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcw050>
- Ballarino, G., Filippin, A., Abbiati, G., Argentin, G., Barone, C., Schizzerotto, A. (2022). The effects of an information campaign beyond university enrolment: A large-scale field experiment on the choices of high school students, *Economics of Education Review* (91). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2022.102308>

Requirements

The course includes readings for each lecture.

Given the number of assigned papers, students are not expected to read all materials in detail. Instead, they are encouraged to focus on 1–2 papers per session, either individually or in small groups. Lectures will include short discussions based on the selected readings.

Students are expected to engage actively with the material and contribute to in-class discussions. The aim is not only to understand individual papers, but to compare analytical strategies and findings across studies and reflect on their implications for theory and policy.

Other Useful Readings

- Bernardi, F., & Valdés, M. T. (2021). Sticky educational expectations: A cross-country comparison. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 75, 100624.
- Belsky, D. W., et al. (2018). Genetic analysis of social-class mobility in five longitudinal studies. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115(31), E7275–E7284. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1801238115>
- Bloome, D., & Opacic, A. (2024). Absolute income mobility obscures marginalized children's disadvantages. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 121(25). <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2321418121>
- Bol, T., & Werfhorst, H. G. Van De. (2013). Educational Systems and the Trade-Off between Labor Market Allocation and Equality of Educational Opportunity. *Comparative Education Review*, 57(2): 285–308.
- Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (2002). Schooling in capitalist America revisited. *Sociology of Education*, 75, 1–18.
- Brand, J., Park, H., & Jackson, M. (2025). What we have (recently) learned: RC28's contributions over the last two decades. Association of Population Centers Working Paper Series. <https://osf.io/download/cg4h2>
- Breen, R., & Müller, W. (Eds.). (2020). *Education and intergenerational social mobility in Europe and the United States* (1st ed.). Stanford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvr0qrr0>
- Brunori, P., Hufe, P., & Mahler, D. (2023). The roots of inequality: Estimating inequality of opportunity from regression trees and forests. *Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, 125(4), 900–932.
- Cheesman, R., et al. (2025). The genetic lottery goes to school: Better schools compensate for the effects of students' genetic differences. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 122(43), e2511715122. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2511715122>
- Conti, G., & Gupta, S. (2024). "Chapter 26: Early childhood interventions to reduce intergenerational inequality". In *Research Handbook on Intergenerational Inequality*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800888265.00035>
- DiPrete, T. A., & Eirich, G. M. (2006). Cumulative advantage as a mechanism for inequality: A review of theoretical and empirical developments. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 32, 271–297. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.32.061604.123127>
- Downey, D. B., & Condrón, D. J. (2016). Fifty years since the Coleman Report: Rethinking the relationship between schools and inequality. *Sociology of Education*, 89(3), 207–220.
- Farkas, G. (2003). Cognitive skills and noncognitive traits and behaviors in stratification processes. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 29, 541–562. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.29.010202.100023>
- Ferreira, F. H. G., et al. (2026). Global estimates of opportunity and mobility: A database (III Working Paper 158). International Inequalities Institute, London School of Economics and Political Science.
- Francesconi, M., & Heckman, J. J. (2016). Child development and parental investment: Introduction. *The Economic Journal*, 126(596), F1–F27.
- Gangl, M., Platt, L., Polavieja, J. G., van de Werfhorst, H. G. (2025). *The Oxford handbook of social stratification*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197539484.013.12>
- Goldthorpe, J. H. (2012). Back to class and status: Or why a sociological view of social inequality should be reasserted. *Reis*, 137, 43–58.

- Goldthorpe, J. H. (2014). The role of education in intergenerational social mobility: Problems from empirical research in sociology and some theoretical pointers from economics. *Rationality and Society*, 26(3), 265–289.
- Grätz, M. (2024). Empirical approaches to measuring equality of opportunity. In M. Sardoč (Ed.), *Handbook of equality of opportunity*. Springer.
- Grätz, M., et al. (2021). Sibling similarity in education across and within societies. *Demography*, 58(3), 1011–1037. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00703370-9164021>
- Hackman, D. A., Farah, M. J., & Meaney, M. J. (2010). Socioeconomic status and the brain: Mechanistic insights from human and animal research. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 11, 651–659.
- Hanushek, E.A., & Woessmann, L. (2011). The economics of international differences in educational achievement, in: E. A. Hanushek, S. Machin, and L. Woessmann (eds.): *Handbooks in economics*, Vol. 3, The Netherlands: North Holland, pp. 89-200.
- Hart, S. A., Little, C., & van Bergen, E. (2021). Nurture might be nature: Cautionary tales and proposed solutions. *npj Science of Learning*, 6, 2. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41539-020-00079-z>
- Hällsten, M., & Thaning, M. (2022). Wealth as one of the “big four” SES dimensions in intergenerational transmissions. *Social Forces*, 100(4), 1533–1560. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soab080>
- Hansen, M. N., & Toft, M. (2021). Wealth accumulation and opportunity hoarding: Class-origin wealth gaps over a quarter of a century in a Scandinavian country. *American Sociological Review*, 86(4), 603–638.
- Hertel, F. R., & Groh-Samberg, O. (2019). The Relation between Inequality and Intergenerational Class Mobility in 39 Countries. *American Sociological Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419885094>
- McEwen, C. A., & McEwen, B. S. (2017). Social structure, adversity, toxic stress, and intergenerational poverty: An early childhood model. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 43, 445–472. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-060116-053252>
- Oesch, D. (2023). Contemporary Class Analysis, Lucinda Platt, and others (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Social Stratification*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197539484.013.12> [Open access](#)
- Parolin, Z., et al. (2025). Intergenerational persistence of poverty in five high-income countries. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 9(2), 254–267. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-024-02029-w>
- Passaretta, G., & Skopek, J. (2021). Does schooling decrease socioeconomic inequality in early achievement? A differential exposure approach. *American Sociological Review*, 86(6), 1017–1042.
- Radl, J., et al. (2026). The social origins of effort: How incentives reduce socioeconomic disparities among children. *American Sociological Review*, 91(1), 89–122.
- Reardon, S. (2011). “The Widening Academic Achievement Gap between the Rich and the Poor: New Evidence and Possible Explanations.” Pp. 91–116 in *Whither Opportunity: Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children’s Life Chances*, edited by Murnane, R., Duncan, G. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Roemer, J. E., & Trannoy, A. (2015). Equality of opportunity. In A. B. Atkinson & F. Bourguignon (Eds.), *Handbook of income distribution* (Vol. 2, pp. 217–300). Elsevier.
- Schneider, D., Hastings, O., & LaBriola, J. (2018). Income inequality and class divides in parental investments. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83(3), 475–507.
- Skopek, J., & Passaretta, G. (2021). Socioeconomic inequality in children’s achievement from infancy to adolescence: The case of Germany. *Social Forces*, 100(1), 86–112.
- Swift, A. (2004). Would Perfect Mobility be Perfect? *European Sociological Review*, 20(1):1-11.
- Triventi, M., J. Skopek, N. Kulic, S. Buchholz, & H.-P. Blossfeld (2016). Varieties of secondary education models and social inequality – Conclusions from a large-scale international comparison. In: H.-P. Blossfeld, S. Buchholz, J. Skopek and M. Triventi (eds.): *Models of secondary education and social inequality. An international comparison*, Vol. 3 *eduLIFE Lifelong Learning Series*, Edward Elgar (377-400).
- Waitkus, N., Savage, M., & Toft, M. (2025). Wealth and class analysis: Exploitation, closure and exclusion. *Sociology*, 59(1), 126–143.
- Weeden, K. A., & Grusky, D. B. (2012). The three worlds of inequality. *American Journal of Sociology*, 117(6), 1723–1785. <https://doi.org/10.1086/665035>
- Zhou, X., & Wodtke, G. T. (2019). Income Stratification among Occupational Classes in the United States. *Social Forces*, 97(3), 945-972. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soy074>