

SOCIOLOGY I

2025: TERM 2

INSTITUTIONS AND INEQUALITY



LECTURER
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INTRODUCTION TO THE MODULE ON 'INSTITUTIONS AND INEQUALITY'

The module on *Institutions and Inequality* illustrates and debates modern societies' key regulatory structures and systems. Institutions are not merely visible organisations but encompass the complex processes and relations through which dominant social systems are normalised. This module examines sociological definitions of inequality, focusing on class, race, and gender, and explores the institutional arrangements that shape social norms—such as those relating to the family, economy, religion, and education.

The module unpacks sociological definitions of 'institutions', contrasting these with everyday understandings of the term. Marxist, Functionalist, and Weberian theories are outlined as competing (but sometimes overlapping) explanations for how inequality is structured and reproduced. Contemporary debates, such as the poverty trap and the myth of meritocracy, are explored.

The institution of capitalism in South Africa is explored through the lens of 'racial capitalism'. We cannot think about institutions and inequality in South Africa outside of the construct of 'race'. Sociology takes a unique perspective on defining the meaning of race and racial inequality. Throughout the course, you will see that no institution or system of inequality is treated in isolation. Instead, we examine the interconnectedness of institutions such as the state, media, economy, and family and how they work together to maintain or challenge existing inequalities. Evolving conceptions of South Africa's institutions, including that of gender equality and family structure, provide a focus for the discussions of institutions and inequality this term.

LECTURE TIMES AND VENUE

Lectures will be held at the Barratt Lecture 2 Theatre from Monday to Thursday at 13h15pm to

14h00pm.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THIS COURSE

Both prescribed and recommended readings will be available on RUconnected. This course outline lists core, basic resources required for lecture preparation. Additional readings will be regularly uploaded to RUconnected. You can also access lecture slides on RUconnected. It is important to engage daily with the RUconnected 'Institutions and Inequality' page. Doing well requires dedicating time to thoroughly reading the prescribed material and developing an ability to synthesise concepts. Simply reading the slides will not be sufficient to excel.

TUTORIALS

Tutorials will take place in weeks 1 (10th April) and week 3 (24th April) of the course. Tutorial questions will be uploaded to RUconnected. You will be in the same tutorial groups, time slots and venues as term one. Before each tutorial, you will be expected to upload an assignment to RUconnected (via Turnitin). Tutorial answers must be referenced using the Harvard referencing system (see the Departmental Handbook). You will be expected to bring a copy of the assignment to the tutorial to facilitate your contribution to class discussions. Together your two online submissions for these tutorials will count for 5%.

CLASS TEST AND EXAMINATION

One test will be written on **Friday, 9 May 2025**. The duration of the test will be **90 minutes**. The test will be written in Barratt 1 and Barratt 2 Lecture theatres. The starting time is **6.00pm sharp**. You must be seated at least 5 minutes before the start of the test. It is advised that you give yourself plenty of time to be seated and ready to start. You may not sit next to anyone and must leave a space between yourself and the next person. Tests are written under exam rules, meaning no cell phones are allowed, you may not have any notes with you, and you must have your student

card available to be checked by invigilators.

The test counts 25% of your module grade, the tutorials count for 5%.

The examination in June carries the remainder (70%) of the overall course mark.

LECTURER FIRST YEAR CONSULTATION TIMES

15h00pm-16h00pm, Mondays. Office 11, Department of Sociology.

Please email me (t.alexander@ru.ac.za) to make an appointment.

MODULE EVALUATIONS

As a department, we are committed to reflecting on our teaching practices and content to strengthen our modules and courses. Towards the end of term, you may be asked to participate in a course evaluation process. Please take this seriously and evaluate the module honestly. Your input will be highly appreciated.

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND INEQUALITY

In the introductory section of the course, you will explore various sociological perspectives on social institutions and inequalities. By the end of this section, you should be able to identify and discuss the defining characteristics of social institutions, understand their unique societal functions, distinguish between institutions and organisations, and analyse the role of institutions in shaping inequalities and vice versa.

- Baral, R. (2023). Exploring the Prominent Role of Social Institutions in Society. *International Research Journal of MMC*. Vol. 4(2), pp. 68–74.
- Gelderblom, D. (2004). *Introduction to Sociology*. Social institutions. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, pp. 2-9.
- Mlaba, K. (2020). *5 Shocking Facts That Show Why South Africa Is the 'Most Unequal Country in the World'* [Online]. Available at: <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/facts-why-south-africa-most-unequal-country-oxfam/>

- Khan Academy. (2013). *Social Institutions* [YouTube video]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KR1bad76qg>

CLASS, CAPITALISM AND RACIAL CAPITALISM

What is class?

We start by defining what class is, and discussing measures for poverty and wealth, as well as phenomena pertaining to social mobility.

How is “class” theorised?

Functionalism and conflict theory give us different ways of looking at social institutions. One leads to the idea of a meritocracy where social status depends on individual ability and effort; the other to the emphasis on power and social hierarchy that only changes through collective action.

How do we understand class relations and inequalities in South Africa?

The historical development of race and class inequalities is explored in the context of the colonial system of wage labour and taxes that drove the process of ‘proletarianisation’ in South Africa.

The following readings are compulsory:

- Al Jazeera. (2022). *South Africa ‘most unequal country in the world’: Report*. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/10/south-africa-most-unequal-country-in-the-world-report>, 10 March.
- Callinicos, L. (1985). *Gold and workers*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Chronic Poverty Advisory Network. (2013). *Chronic Poverty and Education: A guide to what works in policy and practice. Policy Brief*, No. 3, July. Available at: www.chronicpovertynetwork.org
- Stewart, P. & Greenstein, R. (2015). Class. In: P. Stewart & J. Zaaiman (eds.) *Sociology: A concise South African introduction*. Cape Town: Juta, pp. 197-208.
- South African Human Rights Commission (2014). *Poverty traps and social exclusion among children in South Africa*. Pretoria: SAHRC.

RACE AND RACISM

This section introduces various sociological approaches to understanding a critical inequality in modern society: racism. By the end of this section, you should be able to define race as a sociological construct, discuss perspectives on the connection between race and capitalism, and explain the legacy of racism in South Africa. This includes an examination of how racism operated through government repression in family and educational settings during Apartheid, including anti-miscegenation laws and educational laws that institutionalised racial inequality during both colonialism and Apartheid.

Introduction to Race and Racism

- Greenstein, R. (2014). Race. In: P. Stewart & J. Zaaïman (eds.) *Sociology: A South African introduction*. Cape Town: Juta, pp. 173-180.
- *Race: The power of an illusion* (2003). Documentary [DVD]. San Francisco: California Newsreel.

Racism and Colonialism

- Greenstein, R. (2014). Race. In: P. Stewart & J. Zaaïman (eds.) *Sociology: A South African introduction*. Cape Town: Juta , pp. 180-183

Race, Class and Education in Post-Apartheid South Africa

- Rugunanan, P. (2014). Education. In: P. Stewart & J. Zaaïman (eds.) *Sociology: A South African introduction*. Cape Town: Juta , pp. 249-250; 253-265.
- Soudien, C. (2008). The intersection of race and class in the South African university: Student experiences. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 22 (3), pp. 662–678.

THE FAMILY, CLASS AND GENDER

This section introduces students to sociological perspectives on the family, as the oldest and most enduring social institution in society. The main goals of this section are to demonstrate the social functions of the family but also the ways in which the household, as a social institution, is deeply imbricated in the reproduction of historical inequalities in society. We

focus on South Africa and the way in which the family institution is entangled with inequalities which not only pertain to gender but also race and poverty. Distinctive and shifting forms of the family structure that are unique to South Africa will be explored. This may include, amongst others, single parent and extended family structures.

The Family/Household as a Social Institution

- Anastasiu, I. (2012). The social functions of the family. *Euromentor Journal*, Vol. 3(2), pp. 1–8.
- Gelderblom, D. (2004). *Introduction to Sociology*. Town: Oxford University Press., pp. 11-32.
- Rabe, M. (2014). Family and households. In: P. Stewart & J. Zaaïman (eds.) *Sociology: A South African introduction*. Cape Town: Juta, pp. 227-231.
- Smit, R. (2001). The impact of labor migration on African families in South Africa: Yesterday and today. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, Vol. 32 (4), pp.533-548.

Gender Inequality: Overview of Theoretical Contributions

- Rabe, M. (2015). Gender. In: P. Stewart & J. Zaaïman (eds.) *Sociology: A concise South African introduction*. Cape Town: Juta, pp. 158-163

DEPARTMENTAL REGULATIONS

Plagiarism

Please consult the *Sociology Handbook* for the University's policy on plagiarism, guidelines on the formatting and writing of assignments, the departmental rules regarding citations and references, and the criteria for assessing written work. A copy of the Assignment Cover Sheet, which must accompany all assignments submitted to the Department, is also available in the Handbook.

The Use of AI

When answering tutorial questions that require interpretations of specific source material, it is important to note that responses should reflect your own understanding and analysis. Any use of external sources, including ChatGPT or similar tools, in a way that mimics original work without

proper citation can be flagged as plagiarism. Such actions may lead to disciplinary measures. It is crucial to maintain academic integrity by relying on your own knowledge and insights.

Leave of Absence

If you fail to submit an assignment without a valid reason that would necessitate a Leave of Absence (LOA) certificate, you will put your Duly Performed (DP) certificate in jeopardy. LOA forms are available in the Department – please consult with the departmental secretary Mrs Sakata (noluvuyo.sakata@ru.ac.za) in this regard. An application for an LOA must be accompanied by relevant supporting documentation (doctor's note, letter from a warden, letter from a psychologist, etc.). You must find out if your application has been approved, as the granting of an LOA by the Head of Department is not automatic (see the *Sociology Handbook* on RUConnected for details).

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