

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (Guangzhou)

UCUG3801- Social Inequality and Social Mobility

23 January 2026 - 11 May 2026

Updated on 19 January 2026

[Course Title] Social Inequality and Social Mobility

[Course Code] UCUG3801

[No. of Credits] 3

[Any pre-/co-requisites] No

Instructors: Muzhi ZHOU (MZ);

Venue and Time: Rm 201, E1, Wed 06:00 PM – 08:50 PM

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Office Hours: MZ: 10-12 Tuesday

Course Description

Social stratification concerns the unequal distribution of resources/rewards/opportunities which are scarce but widely desired, and the process of status attainment or social mobility whereby some persons or groups come to receive more of these scarce things than are received by others. This course will introduce the basic concepts and theories in analyzing social and economic inequalities in the contemporary world.

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

1	Describe the similarities and differences in key concepts, measures and theories that are used in analyzing social and economic inequality
2	Explain the key factors and processes of how inequality is created, and social mobility is achieved, especially in the context of Hong Kong and mainland China.
3	Describe the consequences of inequality and propose public policies to tackle the issues

Weekly schedule & Weekly ILOs

Lecture #	Topics	Weekly ILOs
1	Introduction and overview	ILO-3
2	Theories, Trends, Patterns	ILO-1, ILO-2
3	Three Capitals and Educational Achievement	ILO-1, ILO-2
4	Social Class and Social Mobility	ILO-1, ILO-2, ILO-3
5	Education, Migration and Hukou	ILO-1, ILO-2, ILO-3
6	Economic and Occupational Mobility	ILO-1, ILO-2
7	Race, Ethnicity, and Inequality	ILO-1, ILO-2
8	Globalization and Migration	ILO-1, ILO-2, ILO-3
9	Gender, Sexuality, and Inequality	ILO-2, ILO-3
10	Technology and Social Orders	ILO-1, ILO-2
11	Consequences and Policy Implications	ILO-1, ILO-2, ILO-3
12	Round table (Date TBD)	ILO-1, ILO-2, ILO-3
13	Group Project Presentation	ILO-1, ILO-2, ILO-3

Assessment and Grading

This course will be assessed using criterion-referencing, and grades will not be assigned using a curve. Detailed rubrics for each assignment, outlining the criteria used for evaluation, are provided below.

Assessments:

Assessment Task	Contribution to Overall Course grade (%)	Due date
[1] Course participation	20	Progress with the course
[2] Discussion leadership	15	Progress with the course
[3] Written Assignment	20	Midterm-paper due date
[4] Learning portfolio	20	Progress with the course.
[5] Group project	25	In-class group presentation (week 13)

* Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be released within two weeks of the due date.

Mapping of Course ILOs to Assessment Tasks

Assessed Task	Mapped ILOs	Explanation
[1] Course participation	[ILO1, ILO2]	Frequent in-class interactive activities and field trips , such as Q&A and quizzes, will examine students' understanding of the topics introduced in class. [ILO-1 and ILO-2]
[2] Discussion leadership	[ILO1, ILO2, ILO3]	Students act as discussion leaders to guide their peers in their group or the class in debates and discussions. [ILO1, ILO2, ILO3]
[3] Written assignment	[ILO1, ILO2, ILO3]	One individual midterm report following the field trip will help students develop their ability to explain the reasons behind the social inequality and mobility terms introduced in class and experienced firsthand. [ILO1, ILO2, ILO3]
[4] Learning portfolio	[ILO1, ILO2, ILO3]	Weekly discussion leader report and two individual essays will enhance the students' ability to use the concepts learnt and to reflect deeper about this course. [[ILO1, ILO-2, ILO-3]
[5] Group Project	[ILO1, ILO2, ILO3]	A final term group research project will enhance their ability to work in a team, improve their presentation skills, and develop their ability to apply concepts to real-life cases. [ILO1, ILO2, ILO3]

Grading Rubrics

Assessment Task	A high grade means
[1] Course participation	A good attendance record; Active participation in proposing questions or answering questions; Participation in our field trips, data collection, and engage with local residents.
[2] Discussion leadership	Actively voice out their own viewpoints and engage with other peers or the teacher to guide the discussion either for the entire class or each individual group; Engage with others in a polite, honest, and critical way; A clear statement of one's viewpoint; with sufficient, logical reasons to justify the arguments.

	On-time submission of the group's weekly summary of in-class discussion activity
[3] Written assignment	Individual mid-term report after the field trip(s). -Writing should demonstrate the ability to apply concepts and theories to daily observations, with proper citations, insights from the readings, and personal reflections. -Presenting logical, specific writing with a sharp viewpoint and solid evidence , showcasing extensive reading and critical thinking abilities with sufficient and highly relevant data support -showcasing reasonable data collection efforts
[4] Learning portfolio	A good summary of group's discussion process and outcomes. Two short essays based on selected topics with own insights. Timely submission; showing efforts in weekly readings and the ability to develop an argument. Writing that is not driven by Large Language Models (LLMs) A creative and critical writing style
[5] Group Project	A group project with a suggested number of members. Presentation component: A clear and confident presentation involving all team members, with solid content (evidence-based) and proper citations; a professional presentation that engages with the audience and does not focus on reading the words on the PPT slides. Written component: The presentation slides that contain the question, the data, the results, and the conclusion; and a short written self-reflection of their group project (before and after, what they have learnt by doing this project)

*More details will be given in class after the announcement of the detailed assignment requirements.

Final Grade Descriptors:

Grades	Short Description	Elaboration on subject grading description
A	Excellent Performance	Demonstrates a comprehensive grasp of subject matter, expertise in concept-explanation, and significant critical and creative thinking on pressing social issues. Exhibits a high capacity for scholarship and collaboration, going beyond core requirements to achieve learning goals.
B	Good Performance	Shows good knowledge and understanding of the main subject matter, competence in problem construction, and the ability to analyze and evaluate issues. Displays high motivation to learn and the ability to work effectively with others.
C	Satisfactory Performance	Possesses adequate knowledge of core subject matter, competence in dealing with familiar problems, and some capacity for analysis and critical thinking. Shows persistence and effort to achieve broadly defined learning goals.

D	Marginal Pass	Has threshold knowledge of core subject matter, potential to achieve key professional skills, and the ability to make basic judgments. Benefits from the course and has the potential to develop in the discipline.
F	Fail	Demonstrates insufficient understanding of the subject matter and lacks the necessary problem-solving skills. Shows limited ability to think critically or analytically and exhibits minimal effort towards achieving learning goals.

Course AI Policy

This course allows the usage of AI to facilitate language editing. Notably, writing should **never** be dominated or led by AI language agents. Content without substantive content, specific details, correct citations, or sharp arguments will be penalized.

Communication and Feedback

Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be communicated via Canvas within two weeks of submission. Feedback on assignments will include [specific details, e.g., strengths, areas for improvement]. Students who have further questions about the feedback, including marks, should consult the instructor within five working days after the feedback is received.

Resubmission Policy

Make-up submissions are granted only under exceptional circumstances for which the student provides a documented and acceptable excuse (i.e., unforeseen illness, family emergency, etc.).

Required Texts and Materials

Details (title, author, publisher, publication year, web address etc.)		Library Availability
1	David Grusky. (2018) The Inequality Reader Contemporary and Foundational Readings in Race, Class, and Gender	Available – short loan (TBD) / Separate chapters will be available via Canvas
2	李强. (2019). 当代中国社会分层 (第 1 版.). 生活 · 讀書 · 新知三联书店.	HN740.Z9 S6352

[Optional] Additional Resources

Details (title, author, publisher, publication year, web address etc.)		Library Availability
1	Coleman, J.S. (1990) Foundations of Social Theory, Harvard University Press.	HM24 .C65 1994

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the university's academic integrity policy. Students are expected to uphold HKUST(GZ)'s Academic Honor Code and to maintain the highest standards for academic integrity. The

University has zero tolerance of academic misconduct. Please refer to the Regulations for Academic Integrity and Student Conduct for the University's definition of plagiarism and ways to avoid cheating and plagiarism.

Additional readings will be posted on CANVAS

** This is a tentative outline of the course. As such, we reserve the right to make changes.*