Brief Description: This course will explore the role of American politics and public policy in abetting the hyper-concentration of income at the top of the economic ladder in the United States, and the ways in which this hyper-concentration has in turn transformed American politics. Topics will include changes in corporate governance and executive compensation, tax policy, campaign finance, the revolving door between government and the private sector, and the role of unions. Readings will range widely from recent political science contributions to sociological and economic analyses, and include some cross-national and historical works as well contemporary popular discussions.

Expanded Description: The purpose of this course is to encourage students to think critically and analytically about the ways in which growing economic inequality—particularly the hyper-concentration of income and wealth at the very top of the economic ladder—have intersected with the transformation of American politics over the past generation. A substantial number of scholarly and popular analyses of rising inequality have appeared in recent years, and the subject has occasioned increasing political debate. Yet we still now surprisingly little about the role of politics in shaping the transformation of the American economic distribution; what effects the shifting contours of American inequality have on political organization, participation, and influence; and what political and economic reforms might be desirable or possible in the face of these linked transformations of the polity and economy. These are the topics taken up in this course.

The course will begin with an historical and cross-national exploration of the changes in the division of the American economic "pie" since the 1970s. Following this, we will turn to sources in these developments. Then we will consider a number of recent works on the role of politics in propelling and reflecting these trends, as well take up the debate over whether economic inequality is a “problem” in need of addressing at all.

Besides an overview of recent economic and sociological work on the causes and consequences of rising economic inequality, the core readings of the course will be recent political science and popular books on inequality and American politics. The policy readings will range widely and include writings on the welfare state, tax policy, corporate governance, financial deregulation, and policies governing unions.

Requirements and Contribution to Grade: The course will be a traditional seminar. Students will be asked to write three discussion papers in the first six weeks. The papers are due in my email inbox by 5PM on Sunday, the day before the seminar. In the last seven weeks, three students will lead off the course discussion each session. Assessments of the
discussion papers (20%), session leadership (10%) and general participation (20%) will comprise half the grade. The other half will come from a final paper of 20-25 pages. For undergraduates, the final paper can take one of three forms: a senior essay related to the course, a long research paper, or a policy proposal that is highly analytic and grounded in the course readings. For graduate students, the final paper will be longer (30-35 pages) and can be a dissertation prospectus or advanced literature review for a dissertation.

Office Hours: Held in my office at 77 Prospect Street (A105), my office hours are Monday, 3:30-5:30. Appointments can be obtained by signing up on the sheet on my door (drop-ins are welcome, but appointments have first priority).

Overview:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction. America Unequal</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>U.S. Inequality in Historical Perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>U.S. Inequality in Comparative Perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part I. The Debate over Causes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Round Up the Usual Suspect: “Skill-Biased Technological Change”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The Decline of Unions: Economic or Political?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Policies Governing Executive Compensation and Financial Markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Tax Policy and the Welfare State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part II. Bringing Politics In</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Political Equality in Peril?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Polarization and Inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The Mass Politics of Inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part III. The Debate</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Inequality Matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>No, It Doesn’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion. Pulling the Strands Together</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Organizations, Policy, and the Transformation of the American Political Economy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Readings: The following *books* are required for the course. They are available at the Yale bookstore and on reserve at the Bass Library. Additional readings are available online.

1. Pontusson, *Inequality and Prosperity*
2. Freeman, *America Works*
3. Jacobs and Skocpol, eds., *Inequality and American Democracy*
4. McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal, *Polarized America*
5. Bartels, *Unequal Democracy*
6. Krugman, *Conscience of a Liberal*
7. Hacker and Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics*
Schedule of Readings:

Week 1 (1/10) Introduction
- Timothy Noah, “Introducing the Great Divergence,” Slate, 3 September 3 2010
- Noah, Post 2.
- Catherine Mulbrandon and Noah, “The Great Divergence in Pictures.”

Week 2 (1/14) U.S. Inequality in Historical Perspective
(This class meets on Friday instead of on Martin Luther King Day)
- Piketty and Saez response to Reynolds.

Week 3 (1/24) U.S. Inequality in Comparative Perspective
- Pontusson, Inequality and Prosperity, Chapter 1, 3.

Week 4 (1/31) Round Up the Usual Suspect: “Skill-Biased Technological Change”
- Hacker and Pierson, Winner-Take-All Politics, Chapter 1.
- Noah, posts 3, 4, 7, 9.

Week 5 (2/7) The Decline of Unions: Economic or Political?
- Freeman, America Works.
- Noah, Post 6

Week 6 (2/14) Policies Governing Executive Compensation and Financial Markets
Noah, *Post 6*.

**Week 7 (2/21) Tax Policy and the Welfare State**

**Week 8 (2/28) Political Equality in Peril?**
- Jacobs and Skocpol, *Inequality and American Democracy*, all but Chapter 5.

**SPRING BREAK**

**Week 9 (3/21) Polarization, Partisanship, and Inequality**
- Noah, *Post 5*.

**Week 10 (3/28) The Mass Politics of Inequality**

**Week 11 (4/4) Inequality Matters**
- Krugman, *Conscience of a Liberal*
- Noah, *Post 10*

**Week 12 (4/11) No, It Doesn’t**
- American Interest special issue on Inequality and Democracy. Read essays by Cowen and Fukuyama.

**Week 13 (4/18) Organizations, Policy, and the Transformation of the American Political Economy**
- Responses in *Politics and Society* (June 2010) by Fligstein, Campbell, and Kenworthy.

Reading period begins Monday, April 25. Papers are due in my inbox or mailbox (77 Prospect) at the end of reading period (May 2) by 4:30 PM.