

## Seminar “The Economics of Inequality”

Preliminary syllabus, up to change until September 13, 2026

### Instructors

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### Time and location

Monday 10:15-12:00, location tba. This seminar is limited to 12 participants.

### Description

Students summarize, interpret, and present academic research on topics related to inequality, including income, wealth, and wage inequality. The seminar combines the discussion of existing research with a hands-on empirical component. Students apply methods commonly used in the field to real data and present their findings. The course consists of two main tasks: (1) the presentation of an existing research paper selected from a provided list and (2) a short empirical assignment, also selected from a provided list, in which students apply standard methods to analyze real data. Students work in pairs on both tasks, and the same team is maintained throughout the seminar. There is no requirement to write a seminar paper.

### Prerequisites and materials

We strongly recommend that the seminar participants have successfully completed Microeconomics I and Econometrics I. Readings will be indicated on Ilias.

### Organizational details

**Language:** The seminar is held in English.

### **Broad schedule:**

- **Introductory classes:** Four sessions from **September 14 to October 5**
  - Sessions are designed to review key empirical concepts and methods used in the analysis of inequality, and to provide the tools needed for both the research paper presentation and the empirical assignment.
  - Students must form groups by **September 18** (midnight). Groups will be assigned randomly if needed.
  - Groups select both a research paper and an empirical assignment by **September 25** (midnight), on a first-come, first-served basis.
    - A Google Sheet will be shared by the instructors for this purpose.
    - Papers and background reading materials for the research paper as well as detailed instructions for each empirical assignment will be available in a designated Ilias folder.

- **Independent work and meetings: October 12 to November 9**
  - Activities include reading papers, working with data, and preparing presentations.
  - Each group meets the instructor four times in total
    - Two meetings for the research paper
    - Two meetings for the empirical assignment
  - Meetings last 30 minutes and take place during class time in the supervisor's office.
    - Meetings are an integral part of the learning process and of the grading
- **Presentation sessions: November 16 to November 30**
  - Each group gives:
    - one presentation of their assigned research paper (20 min + 10 min discussion)
    - one presentation of their empirical assignment (10 min + 5 min discussion)
  - The two presentations may take place on different dates.
  - Presentation slides must be emailed to the responsible instructor one week before the presentation. The instructor will upload the slides to the shared folder.
- **Final written examination: December 7 (in class)**

### **Expectations:**

- **Research paper presentation:**
  - Students are expected to have a solid understanding of the paper
  - The presentation should cover:
    - the research question and motivation
    - the main methodology
    - the key findings
    - a critical assessment of the paper's strengths and limitations
  - Presentations should connect to the topics discussed in the introductory sessions and may incorporate insights from additional readings
  - Technical details should be explained at an intuitive level
- **Empirical assignment:**
  - Using the provided data, students analyze an empirical pattern related to inequality, as outlined in the assignment instructions.
  - The presentation should:
    - describe the data
    - briefly explain the empirical approach
    - present and discuss the main findings and their interpretation
- **General expectations:**
  - Meetings are mandatory and part of the grading. Students are expected to come prepared and actively engage with feedback.
  - Each group meets the instructor twice per task:
    - First meeting: discussion of initial ideas, structure, and approach (students should bring a draft outline or preliminary work)
    - Second meeting: discussion of a near-final and well-polished version of their slides (students should bring a well-developed and largely polished set of slides, and, for the empirical assignment, preliminary results)
  - Both students must contribute actively to all presentations.
  - Attendance is mandatory.
  - Active participation in discussions is expected and will be graded.
  - Students are expected to familiarize themselves with all topics and to carefully prepare the papers discussed in class.

## Learning outcomes

By the end of the seminar, students are able to:

- summarize, explain, and critically assess an academic research paper in a structured presentation,
- explain the main economic mechanisms underlying different forms of inequality,
- discuss the advantages and limitations of policies aimed at reducing inequality,
- produce, interpret, and clearly communicate empirical results using real data and standard methods,
- work effectively in teams.

## Grading

The final grade will be based on the following components:

1. Research paper presentation (Task 1): 40%
2. Empirical assignment (Task 2): 30%
3. Participation: 5%
4. Final written exam: 25% **(there will be no re-take exam)**

**Attendance is mandatory. Students are required to attend all presentation sessions.**

**The evaluation of Tasks 1 and 2 includes both the final presentations and preparedness for meetings, as well as engagement with feedback.**

## Dates

<i>Intro course</i>	Sep. 14	10.15 – 12.00
<i>Intro course</i>	Sep. 21	10.15 – 12.00
<i>Intro course</i>	Sep. 28	10.15 – 12.00
<i>Intro course</i>	Oct. 5	10.15 – 12.00
<i>Meetings with supervisor</i>	Oct. 12	10.15 – 12.00
<i>Meetings with supervisor</i>	Oct. 19	10.15 – 12.00
<i>Meetings with supervisor</i>	Oct. 26	10.15 – 12.00
<i>Meetings with supervisor</i>	Nov. 2	10.15 – 12.00
<i>Meetings with supervisor</i>	Nov. 9	10.15 – 12.00
<i>Student presentations</i>	Nov. 16	10.15 – 12.00
<i>Student presentations</i>	Nov. 23	10.15 – 12.00
<i>Student presentations</i>	Nov. 30	10.15 – 12.00
<i>Final written exam</i>	Dec. 7	10.15 – 12.00

## Topics:

**PRELIMINARY, up to change until September 13, 2026.**

[1] C. Goldin and L. Katz. The Race between Education and Technology: The Evolution of U.S. Educational Wage Differentials, 1890 to 2004. NBER Working Paper 12984, March 2007.

[2] D. Autor and D. Dorn. The Growth of Low-Skill Service Jobs and the Polarization of the US Labor Market. *American Economic Review*, 103(5):1553–1597, 2013.

[3] Acemoglu, D. and P. Restrepo. A Task-based Approach to Inequality. *Oxford Open Economics*, 3, i906–i929, 2024. (mainly the empirical part of the paper)

[4] Brynjolfsson, E., Li, D., and L. R. Raymond. Generative AI at Work. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 140(2), 889–942, 2025.

[5] De Loecker, J. Obermeier, T. and J. Van Reenen. Firms and Inequality. *Oxford Open Economics*, 3, i962–i982, 2024; together with: J. Eeckhout. Market Power and Labour Market Inequality. *Oxford Open Economics*, 3, i1006–i1011, 2024.

[6] Dorn, D. and P. Levell. Trade and Inequality in Europe and the US. *Oxford Open Economics*, 3, i1042–i1068, 2024; together with: D. Rodrik. A Primer on Trade and Inequality. *Oxford Open Economics*, 3, i1076–i1082, 2024.

[7] Piketty T., E. Saez, and S. Stantcheva. Optimal Taxation of Top Labor Incomes: A Tale of Three Elasticities. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 6(1): 230–271, 2014. (only the empirical part of the paper)

[8] Marti, S., I. Martinez, and F. Scheuer. Does a progressive wealth tax reduce top wealth inequality? Evidence from Switzerland. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 39, 513–529, 2023.

[9] Epper, T., E. Fehr, A. Henkel, and J. Sen. Beliefs about Inequality and the Nature of Support of Redistribution. URPP Equality of Opportunity Discussion Paper Series No. 49, 2024.

[10] Almas, I, A. Cappelen, E. Sørensen, and B. Tungodden. Attitudes to inequality: preferences and beliefs, *Oxford Open Economics*, 3, i64–i79, 2024; together with: S. Stantcheva. Perceptions and preferences for redistribution. *Oxford Open Economics*, 3, i96–i100, 2024.

[11] Kleven, H., C. Landais, J. Posch, A. Steinauer, and J. Zweimüller. Do Family Policies Reduce Gender Inequality? Evidence from 60 Years of Policy Experimentation. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 16(2): 110–149, 2024.

[12] Dustmann, C., Y. Kastis, and I. Preston. Inequality and immigration. *Oxford Open Economics*, 2024, 3, i453–i473, 2024; together with: Hangartner, D. and J. Spiri. Immigration and inequality: the role of politics and policies, *Oxford Open Economics*, 3, i480–i486, 2024.