Cross-School Collaborative “Bring Your Own Idea” Proposal
“In/Equality in Theory and Practice”

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Description of the Topic

The collaborators intend to create a fertile, trans-disciplinary forum to discuss equality in theory and practice. To do so, we must discuss the interrelated topics of inequality and inequity. While our focus will be on the U.S. predominantly, lessons learned from our global partners will become important components of our discussions. Equality speaks to issues of parity, fairness and impartiality. On the other hand, inequality is defined as marked difference among individuals or groups of individuals in the distribution of social goods. Inequity, which considers bias, discrimination and injustice in distributive systems, pushes the discussion further. With a wealth and breadth of knowledge from so many disciplines, we intend to delve into the concepts of egalitarianism, equality of opportunity and equality of outcomes. Theoretically speaking, on an operational level, the various forms of social, political and economic inequalities are mutually reinforced and are made manifest by the following: resource allocation of low income, city and predominantly ethnic minority schools; residential segregation and housing quality; the location, structure and placement of transportation systems; managerial hiring and promotion practices; academic underachievement of minority youth; access to and provision of appropriate health care; curtailment of social welfare programs; the presentation of stereotypical images of persons of color in the media and school curricula; price gouging in inner city stores; morbidity, mortality, and longevity rates for lower status persons and persons of color; environmental hazards; the surge in incarceration, related to substance abuse and escalating criminal prosecution, as well as discriminatory behavior of police and judges; the lack of political clout; and, effective legislative representation. All of the foregoing is made worse by race and gender status variables. These and a myriad of other forms of inequalities concurrently interlock to determine the status, income and welfare of lower status persons in general, and persons of color, in particular. Such factors cannot be considered inconsequential to social immobility and equality in the larger society. They are not simply additive processes, rather they are mutually sustaining and reinforcing. Noneconomic factors neatly interlace with economic factors, becoming on a systems level, operationally inseparable. The collateral damage borne by the intergenerational transfer of social immobility and inequality to future generations are integral to our discussions.

Significance of the Topic

Despite analyses indicating that the Great Recession, began in 2007 and ended in 2009, we still see the residual impact of that recession made manifest on a global scale. Not only have major international corporations and banks gone bankrupt, but so too have cities, states and countries. As a consequence, the devastation of those living on “main street” has never been more critical. The social indices are sobering with massive increases in poverty, unemployment, hunger, homelessness, foreclosures, crime, and class divisions. Further, important for this discussion,
what recovery has taken place is quite uneven. The foregoing factors point toward growing inequality and marginality on a massive scale. Perhaps no movement more greatly exemplifies the growing divisions between the “haves” and “have nots” than the Occupy Movement, an international protest movement that is primarily directed against economic and social inequality and social immobility. “We are the 99%” was the slogan coined referring to the growing income and wealth disparities in the U.S. between the wealthiest 1% and the rest of the population. Not only are chronically unemployed workers impacted, but so too are low wage workers and the middle class. Long considered the engine, the heartbeat of the American economy, all leading economic indicators point to a decade of decline as median household income falls, median net worth plummets, and middle class lifestyle is harder to maintain. Data from OECD indicates that income inequality is at its highest peak in over fifty years. Research reveals that in 2012, the top 5 percent of earners were responsible for 38 percent of domestic consumption, up from 28 percent in 1995. More broadly, about 90 percent of the overall increase in inflation-adjusted consumption between 2009 and 2012 was generated by the top 20 percent of households in terms of income. As politicians continue to spar over whether economic inequality is in fact deepening, in practice, the phenomenon of growing inequality is visible in every sector of the American economy. Consider the following:

- According to the Economic Policy Institute, for the last 50 years, the African American unemployment rate has been twice that of Whites, above recession levels, and the gap in African American and White household incomes has not narrowed.
- Poverty rates among African Americans and Latinos is nearly three times that of White Americans.
- Sears and J.C. Penney retailers, whose wares are aimed at the middle class, announce store closings and layoffs, while Barneys New York and other upscale retailers plan to expand;
- Foot traffic at mid-tier, casual dining properties like Red Lobster and Olive Garden has dropped every quarter since 2005, where the average tab is $16.50 per person. On the other hand, foot traffic at the Capital Grille, an upscale restaurant, where the average check per person is about $71, is up by an average of 5 percent annually.

List of Faculty Affiliated Faculty

George-levi Gayle, Arts & Sciences (Economics); Bret Gustafson, Arts & Sciences (Anthropology); Robert Hansman, Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts; Lorena Estrada Martinez, George Warren Brown School of Social Work; Kimberly Jade Norwood, School of Law; Judi McLean Parks, Olin School of Business; Kathryn L. Pierce, School of Law; Jason Purnell, George Warren Brown School of Social Work; Will Ross, School of Medicine

Preferred Style of Gathering

The In/Equality in Theory and Practice Cross-School Collaborative prefers a breakfast meeting.