This seminar deals with a most fundamental question of political philosophy (and of day-to-day politics), *the meaning of equality*. However, it will concentrate on a particular context in which the concept of equality is central, namely the definition of right and left. It will be a working assumption of this seminar that *the right-left distinction is still operative in our politics and that it rotates around conflicting definitions of equality*.

**Of course, equality is an empty concept unless we specify equality of what.** For us the “what” consists of many things:

1. Equality with regard to the distribution of rights, income and assets
2. Equality of life chances,
3. Equality with regard to the requisites and resources for directing one’s life freely according to one’s own reason,
4. Equality of citizenship, especially with regard to “membership” in a polity and the freedom to participate in influencing political decisions vs inequality of membership and decision-making.
5. Equality of power and political resources to influence decisions.
6. Equality of treatment by the political order and by others.
7. Equality of respect and dignity.

We will be examining the whole range of these meanings as we go along.

**Equality and Political Commitments:** As for what equality means in understanding present-day political commitments, we will go back to a rather traditional way of defining the spectrum of political positions: Specifically, as we move right, politics aims at transferring *inequalities of circumstance or endowment* to the distribution of economic, political and social goods. Those on the right also seeks to *translate these inequalities into access to political influence, political resources, and the distribution of life chances*. As we move left, politics aims toward greater *equality in all these dimensions—economic, political, and social goods, and proponents on the left explicitly seek to translate these equalities into access to political influence, political resources, and the distribution of life chances*. Often, though not always, left and right take opposed positions on whether the market should be considered a mechanism for such distribution. Somewhere between these positions is the whole debate on *equal opportunity, merit, and desert* and whether it makes sense to distribute fundamental goods on this basis. **Hopefully, we will spend a good part of the seminar debating both the meaning of equality and what our embrace or rejection of these meanings means for our political commitments.**
Format of the Course: Equality as Political Equality/ Equality as Social Justice:

A. In the first part of the course we will examine the meaning of equality from two perspectives:
   1) political equality as the model for equality of distribution in other areas of social life.
   2) justice as the model for distributing all important goods including political liberty and socio-economic goods.

B. In the second part of the course, we will examine different problems of equality and inequality including income inequality, inequality and the American constitution, inequality of political influence.

Booklist:
Stuart White, Equality (Polity Press)
Robert Dahl, Democracy and its Critics (Yale)
John Rawls, Theory of Justice (Harvard)
Ganesh Sitaraman The Crisis of the Middle-Class Constitution: Why Income Inequality Threatens Our Republic (Knopf-Doubleday)
Albert Hirschman, The Rhetoric of Reaction (Harvard)

I. Egalitarianism as concept—what do we mean by equality? (Jan 24-29)
   a. Stuart White, Equality, ch. 1
   b. Bernard Williams, “The Idea of Equality” in Problems of Self (Blackboard)

A short exercise 4-5 pages (to be assigned) on how far you would want things equalized based on reading White and Williams due by 5 pm as an attached file on Tuesday Feb 6.

II. Political Equality Driven Distribution: Egalitarianism based on status, power, and citizenship.—Political Notions of Equality and Inequality. (Jan 31-March 10)

   A. Political equality defined: Rights, Membership, Political Influence.
      Stuart White, Equality, ch. 2.

   B. Political equality and Social Provision (the Welfare State) vs. the Market.


      c. T. J Reid, “Five Myths About Health Care” Washington Post (Blackboard).
      Atul Gewande, “Is Health Care a Right” New Yorker (Blackboard).


b. Danielle Allen, “Equality and American Democracy” Foreign Affairs (Jan/Feb 2016)
Recommended:
David Miller, “Equality and Justice,” ch. 11 of Principles of Social Justice. (Blackboard)

D. Political Equality and Effective Participation vs. Pluralism
a. Robert Dahl, Democracy and its Critics, chs. 1, 2, 6, 8,* 9,.*
b. Re-read Dahl ch. 9, and Michael Walzer, “Membership” (Blackboard).

Spring Break, March 12-18.

First paper on political equality, social citizenship, and social justice, approximately 8 pages due Tuesday, March 20th in HuB16 (political science contact office) by 3 pm. Note date.

III. Justice-driven notions of equality and inequality: Analytical approaches. (March 19-April 2)

A. Liberal Left Egalitarianism and Justice—the problem of desert vs equality of primary goods.
John Rawls, Theory of Justice
1. (The Principles of Justice) sections
   a) 1-3, 11, (market and liberal welfare vs. democratic equality) 10-14, 16-17, (dignity) 67;
   b) (The original position) 4, 20-26, 29;
   c) (Equality of liberty) 31-33 36-37 (Political Justice, Political Constitutions, and Equality of Political Participation and its limits).

2. (Justice, Equality and Political Economy) 41-43, (attack on merit as basis for economic distribution) 48*
   Stuart White Equality ch. 5 “Equality and Incentives”

B. Meritocracy, Equal Opportunity, and Inequality
Stuart White, Equality, ch. 3, “Meritocracy.”
Selection from Brian Barry, Why Social Justice Matters (Blackboard)
Recommended:
David Miller, ch 3, “Deserts” Social Justice (Blackboard).
Second paper on Rawls’s notion of equality vs Meritocracy due in Hu B16 by 3pm on Tuesday, April 10th. Please send the paper as an attached file as well.

IV. Adequacy of Marx and Rawls as defense of Equality: Equality as an Ethos. (April 6-9)
   G. A. Cohen, If You’re an Egalitarian, Why are you so Rich, chs 1-3 (pp. 1-57); chs. 6-10 (101-179)

V. The Response of the Right and its Problems: Inequality, Contracts and Markets: (April 11-18)
   A. Robert Nozick, Anarchy State and Utopia pp. 149-183 (on Blackboard)
      Recommended:
      Friedrich von Hayek, Law, Legislation, and Liberty v.2 “Social or Distributive Justice” (on Blackboard)
   B. The strategies of conservative arguments:
      Albert Hirschman, The Rhetoric of Reaction (entire)

VI. Problems of Inequality I: Inequality of Income and Wealth: (April 20-27)
   B. Branko Milanovic, Global Inequality, chapter 3 (“Inequalities Among Countries”) * (on Blackboard)

   *Read especially carefully. Crucial to arguments about income and wealth inequality! Hint: there is an important thread of argument running through chapters 2 and 3 that concerns citizenship. What is it? It has something to do with one’s place in income distribution and luck.

   C. What standards should we apply to judge growing inequalities of income and wealth? “World Income Inequality Report 2018” (Blackboard)

VII. Problems of Inequality II: Is the US Constitution Compatible with Massive Inequalities of Wealth and Income? (April 30-May 4)

   Ganesh Sitaraman The Crisis of the Middle-Class Constitution: Why Income Inequality Threatens Our Republic (entire)

   “The Tax Plan that Inequality Created” New York Times, Dec. 16, 2017 (Blackboard)

VIII. Do citizens rule in Democracies? (May 7)
   Martin Gilens, Benjamin Page “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens” in Perspectives in Politics Fall 2014 (Blackboard).
Recommended: For a European perspective on same problem.
Lawrence Ezrow, Timoth Helwig, “Responding to Voters or Responding to Markets: Political Parties and Public Opinion in an Era of Globalization” (Blackboard)

IX. Summing Up (May 9)
Stuart White, Equality, ch.7 “The Future of Equality”

The topics for the last paper—a take home final—will be handed out on the last day of class, December 1st.

Course Requirements
I. Presentations: Each member of the seminar will have to give at least one presentation on the readings on a question that I will pose. I will select volunteers from week to week. Your presentation should have at least three components: 1) it should lay out the core underlying assumptions of the argument you are discussing; 2) it should discuss how the argument fits in with the theme of the course as well as arguments we have already discussed—does it attack, refute, complement previous arguments; 3) and finally, it should critically assess the strengths and weakness of the argument both conceptually and empirically. This last requirement means that you should present your own argument on the strength or weakness of the one we are reading. On occasion we may have two presentations with each person taking opposite sides of an issue.

II. Papers: There will be a series of three papers and one short exercise at the beginning. I will assign the topics and the papers as we go along.
1. A short 4 page exercise on how far you would press equality due in class on Monday, September 12.
2. The first larger paper of approximately 8 pages on political equality and social justice will be due Wednesday, October 19 in HuB16 by 3 pm.
3. Second larger paper of approximately 8 pages on Rawls’s notion of equality vs Meritocracy will be due in Hu B16 by 3pm on Friday, November 11th.
5. The topics for the last paper—a take home final—on the rightwing defense of inequality, problems of income inequality, inequality and the constitution, and inequalities of political influence in democracies will be handed out on the last day of class, Wednesday, May 9th. In lieu of the assigned topics for the final, I will be happy to allow students to forge their own topic going more deeply into one of the questions of the course. But you must discuss this option with me in advance—at least three weeks before the end of the semester.

On occasion, I will bring in articles on concrete problems of inequality or on policies to overcome it. These articles will serve to provoke discussion and allow us to examine the meaning of the arguments we are reading for evaluating concrete social and political problems. On the day when I bring in these articles, I may ask you to write a one-page reaction paper for the following session. The purpose of these reaction papers will be to stimulate discussion. These papers will count in the participation category.
Grading will be as follows:
The first exercise will be 10% of the grade.
Each of the other papers will count 25% with 15% for participation, presentations, and possible reaction papers. Participation, I know, is a relative matter as some of you are very loquacious and others quiet and reflective. So I will judge this 15% liberally—each person can engage relative to their style and temperament. But ideally we all will find much to discuss and a high grade in this area could very well be a collective good in which all can share.

Each member of the seminar will have a chance to rewrite the first two papers as long as the rewrite is handed in by the end of the week in which the paper is returned. Grades for rewrites will be averaged in with the first version but there will be a bias in favor of the improved grade.

Blackboard
I will put the readings on Blackboard.

Office Hours
I shall have office hours uptown on MW in HU B16 1:30-2:30 but I could meet you after class at or before class if necessary. I also will be available in Milne 204 from 3:00-4 pm on Wednesdays or by appointment. I can be reached at 442-5277 or at pbreiner@albany.edu

Some Useful Overviews of Recent Debates on Equality:
Adam Swift, Political Philosophy, ch. 3 (“Equality”)
Richard Wilkinson, Kate Pickett, The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone
John Baker et. al. Equality From Theory to Action
Anne Phillips, Which Equalities Matter
Norberto Bobbio, Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction
Alain Noël Jean-Philippe Thérien Left and Right in Global Politics

Plagiarism
Plagiarism means to pass off someone else’s work as your own. Please be warned that should I find you have plagiarized, you will receive an immediate E in the course and further actions will be taken, including sending your case before a university committee.

Reasonable accommodation
Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented physical, sensory, systemic, cognitive, learning and psychiatric disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation in this class, please notify the Director of Disabled Student Services (Campus Center 137, 442-5490): http://www.albany.edu/studentlife/dss/Accommodation.html That office will provide the course instructor with verification of your disability, and will recommend appropriate accommodations. If you wish to discuss academic accommodations, for the above reasons or other cases including religious holidays, inform the instructor at the beginning of the term. Reasonable accommodations are generally established well in advance and rarely granted retroactively.