It is commonplace to note that in the United States many people identify as “middle class” even though our society is marked by deep, persistent, and increasing class inequality. Such self-identification, however, can obscure the complex and often contradictory ways in which we experience social class in our everyday lives. This course explores the cultural dimensions of social class in the U.S. from an ethnographic perspective, focusing on the everyday lives and cultures of ordinary Americans. We will consider questions such as the following. What is it like to be a working class person in a society heavily invested in ideas of individual advancement and meritocracy? How do professionals (the “upper-middle” class) define themselves and how do they view those above and below them in the class structure? What role does elite education play in the creation and reproduction of class inequality? How does social class shape people’s values, political views, and tastes?

An equally important goal of the course is to develop your ability to write clear, engaging, and coherent analytical essays of the sort you will be asked to produce frequently at Harvard. With this in mind the class is structured to give you the opportunity to work in a sustained and systematic way on improving your writing. During the semester you will write three essays, each of which tackles a different aspects of the experience of class and is designed to highlight different writing skills. The thematic units and their associated writing assignments are described below.
**Class and Culture**

**Description of Units**

**ESSAY I: WORKING CLASS LIFE UNDER NEOLIBERALISM**
(comparative essay, 5-6 pages)

In our first unit we will compare two important ethnographic studies of working class Americans — Michèle Lamont’s classic *The Dignity of Working Men* and Jennifer Silva’s more recent *Coming Up Short* — in order to gain some understanding of how working class people have responded to the relative decline in their living standards over the past 20 years.

*Focal Writing Skills*: Devising questions and arguable theses; using evidence; integrating sources.

**ESSAY II: CLASS AND EDUCATION**
(analyze or critique an argument, 6-7 pages)

In the second unit we will read selections from Armstrong and Hamilton’s *Paying for the Party* in order to analyze the role of higher education in shaping the class trajectories of students from working-, middle-, and upper-class backgrounds.

*Focal Writing Skills*: Problematizing arguments; presentation of evidence and analysis; argument structure; counterargument; devising research questions.

**ESSAY III: RESEARCH ESSAY: ELITES**
(multi-source research essay, 8-10 pages)

For the third unit students will devise their own research project concerning the roles and self-conceptions of elites. For inspiration, we’ll read selections of Shamus Khan’s *Privilege*, which examines life at an elite New England boarding school, and Karen Ho’s *Liquidated*, which analyzes the ideologies and identities of Wall Street financiers.

*Focal Writing Skills*: Research; handling of multiple sources and different kinds of evidence; structure.

**Course Readings**

All of the course readings will be posted on the course website, here:

https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/63689/pages/readings-and-schedule-of-course-topics
How the Course Works

The main goal for the course is for you to produce an original, compelling, and analytically sound essay for each of the three units of the course. Such essays are not written on the fly; they take time, continual re-working, and critical reflection. The writing requirements outlined below are designed to provide you with the techniques for constructing good essays.

Class time will be split between grappling with the course readings and in-class work directed at improving some aspect of your writing. You should come to class with the relevant readings completed and ready to participate actively in discussion.

Writing and Revising

• *Response Papers*: Before you compose an initial draft of each essay, you’ll complete one or more response papers that focus on particular writing skills that are important for the relevant essay type. Check the unit assignment packet for specific instructions and due dates, etc.

• *Drafts*: You will submit a draft of each of the three essays. On each draft you’ll receive detailed comments from the instructor (in writing and in conferences).

• *Draft Cover Letters*: Every time you hand in a draft, you’ll include a cover letter in which you provide guidance to your reader about the aspects of the essay you are struggling with in addition to whatever other comments or questions you might have. I’ll give you more specific instructions about writing draft cover letters over the course of the semester.

• *Draft Workshops*: Immediately after each draft is due we’ll have an in-class draft workshop in which we work through two student papers (chosen by the instructor) and offer the writers constructive criticisms and suggestions for improvement. I will email you the essays I have chosen before each workshop. You will be expected to provide written comments (in the form of a letter) on each draft that we workshop together. I’ll hand out more guidelines on draft workshops later in the semester.

• *Conferences*: After I’ve carefully read your draft, we’ll meet for a 15-20 minute conference in which we’ll work together on strategies for revising the essay. You should also plan on taking notes during the conference. Missed conferences may not be rescheduled.

• *Essay Revisions*: You should expect to extensively revise each of your drafts before submitting it for a grade. I will provide written comments on essay revisions. Essay revisions must be submitted over email (not as hard copies), and I will also provide my comments in electronic form.
Other Policies

• **Grading:** I will grade only the revisions (that is, the last version) of your essays, not the drafts or response papers (although I may suggest, as an aid to interpreting my evaluations, what sort of grade a draft *would* receive if I were to grade it). Course grades will be determined as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revision of Essay 1</th>
<th>25%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revision of Essay 2</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revision of Essay 3</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation and exercises</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grading will become more stringent as the semester progresses since I expect you develop as a thinker and writer. Please be advised that final grades (that is, grades on revised essays) are indeed final. I will not read or grade a further revision of a revision.

• **Attendance:** The policy of the Harvard College Writing Program is as follows: If you miss more than one class without the excuse of a religious holiday or illness, you will receive a formal warning letter, copied to your Freshman Dean. If you then miss another class without a legitimate excuse, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and failed. Please note that absences to participate in athletic or other extracurricular activities are not excusable. If you have to be absent for a religious holiday or other important event, please speak to me before the date you will be away.

• **Deadlines:** We are on a very tight schedule, so it is imperative that you submit work on time. I will only accept late work if the student contacts me to request an extension *in advance* of the deadline and has a compelling reason. Otherwise late work will receive a significant grade penalty.

• **Completion of Work:** The policy of the Harvard College Writing Program is as follows: You must complete all three of the required courses essays (including drafts) in order to pass the course. All work must be completed by the relevant deadline unless you have made *prior* arrangements with me for an extension. If you then miss the extended deadline, you may be excluded from the course.

• **Collaboration Among Students:** The following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students, and through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). If you would like to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay, it is customary to do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the Student Handbook, “You do not need to acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading.” However,
all work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts, or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden

• Academic Honesty: All work submitted for this course must be your own work. Any outside sources you use must be cited properly. Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and will be referred to the college’s Administrative Board for further disciplinary action, including expulsion from the university. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, consult the relevant sections of *Harvard Guide to Using Sources* and/or speak with the instructor.
## Schedule of Topics and Assignments

### UNIT I: The Working Class in the Neoliberal Era

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Writing focus</th>
<th>Read</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Due in class:** student questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>September 12th</th>
<th>What is social class?</th>
<th>Questions and problems</th>
<th>Read:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>September 19th</th>
<th>Contemporary working class identity</th>
<th>Evidence and analysis</th>
<th>Read:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
**September 24th**

**Writing focus**: Fundamentals of using sources; using textual evidence; plagiarism

**Read**:  
- The following sections on the *Harvard Univ. Guide to Using Sources* website (usingsources.fas.harvard.edu):  
  - “Introduction”  
  - “Why Use Sources?”  
  - “Integrating Sources”

**September 25th**

**Due by 11 PM**: response paper 1

**September 26th**

**Writing focus**: Introductions

**Read**:  
- Sample introductions (to be emailed)

**September 29th**

**Due by 11 PM**: draft of paper 1

**October 1st**

**Writing focus**: Draft workshop

**Due in class**: 2 copies of your reader letters
UNIT 2: Class and Higher Education

October 3rd

**Topic:** Education and class reproduction  
**Writing focus:** Reading critically

**Read:**

October 8th

**Topic:** Mobility, credentials, and social closure  
**Writing focus:** Problematizing

**Read:**

October 10th

**Topic:** Education and class trajectories  
**Writing focus:** Summarizing

**Read:**

October 13th

**Due at 11 PM:** revision of paper 1
### October 15th
**Topic:** Education and social mobility  
**Writing focus:** Structure

**Read:**

### October 16th
**Due by 11 PM:** response paper 2 (draft introduction and summary)

### October 17th
**Writing focus:** Workshop draft introductions and summaries

### October 22th
**Writing focus:** Counterargument

### October 23rd
**Due by 11 PM:** draft of paper 2 due

### October 24th
**Writing focus:** Locating and evaluating secondary sources

**Read:**
- The following sections on the *Harvard Univ. Guide to Using Sources* website:
  - “Locating Sources”
  - “Evaluating Sources”

### October 29th
**Writing focus:** Draft workshop
# UNIT 3: Elite Class Formation

## October 31st

**Topic:** Elites and inequality  
**Writing focus:** Developing research questions

**Read:**  

## November 5th

**Topic:** Elites and meritocracy  
**Writing focus:** Developing research questions continued

**Read:**  

## November 7th

**Topic:** Elite habitus  
**Writing focus:** Research methods

**Read:**  

## November 10th

**Due by 11 PM:** revision of paper 2
Class and Culture

November 12th
Topic: Elite recruitment
Writing focus: Analyzing interview data

Read:

November 14th
Topic: Professional socialization on Wall Street
Writing focus: Analyzing interview data

Read:

November 19th
Topic: What bankers do and why
Writing focus: Locating and evaluating secondary sources

Read:
  https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/10/finance-capital-shareholders-profit-market

November 21st
Topic TBD: Catch up day

November 26st
Writing focus: Research check-ins

Course evaluation day – no homework.
### December 1st
**Due by 11 PM:** draft of paper 3

### December 3rd
**Writing focus:** Final draft workshop