PPHA 33240: Intergenerational Mobility: Theory, Methods and Evidence (Draft)

The gap between top income percentiles and bottom income percentiles has increased in many countries, including the US, over the last decades. Income distribution is placed back at the center of economics and has become a prominent part of media and policy discussions. Empirical findings suggest that there exists a positive correlation between inequality and immobility. To provide deeper insight in mechanisms underlying the latter phenomenon, the course covers theories of persistent inequality and intergenerational mobility. Students in this course will learn about the fundamental theories of distributive justice, theory of measures of mobility and persistence, empirical evidence on intergenerational mobility, theories of intergenerational mobility.

This course is designed to provide a theoretical and empirical overview of issues involved in the study of intergenerational mobility. The course will have four themes: 1) distributive justice and inequality, 2) theory of measures of mobility and persistence, 3) evidence on mobility, 4) theories of mobility.

Grading

Home assignments: 33.3%
Midterm (the 5th week): 33.3%
Final (the 10th week): 33.3%

All the points students get in the course will be curved according to the Harris grading policy. The first summary of students results (median, min and max) will be published on Canvas after a midterm exam that will be held on the 5th week and will be updated regularly.

Home Assignments

There will be 2 home assignments in the form of problems and practical questions (dates they are due on depend on the speed of our moving through the course).

Also, each student is asked to choose 1 paper to master and to write an essay on it. The choice of a paper is up to a student (this paper must be an original research paper in the area of intergenerational mobility). You are very welcome to use references from the papers that are on the reading list. Please do NOT choose the papers from the reading list itself. Your essay is
supposed to be a 3-5 page summary and critical evaluation of the paper chosen (the latter is important, please do not submit simple retelling). If several students accidentally (not likely though) choose the same paper to discuss, there will be nothing wrong about it once students’ essays are crucially different. Therefore, you do not need to check what papers other students choose.

There will be 2 graded discussions on Canvas which are assumed to be the virtual analogue of the “reading group” format. Students will be asked to read a specific paper (the same one for everybody), and then discussion of this paper will be opened on Canvas website for 10 days. It is supposed to be “fight in comments”. You can start with pointing out advantages and disadvantages of the paper discussed and then reply to each other’s comments etc. I will take part in this discussion too. Please start participating in each discussion within first several days it is open, so that you have enough time to interact with each other. Leaving your own comments without interaction with the others will not be enough for getting the maximal credit.

**Students are also expected to do the assigned readings.** Other readings mentioned in the syllabus or in my presentations are optional (I would be happy if you take a look at them, but this is completely up to you). I do not expect students to remember every word and every fact from the assigned readings and to understand all technical details (many of the readings are technically hard, please skip a technical part). **The aim is to form an overall impression and to get the main narrative.**

All assignments should be submitted in the form of a pdf file (it does not matter how it is created: the point is to avoid all the disadvantages associated with handwriting) via Canvas or email. **The answers to homework and exam questions have to be thoroughly justified.** Exceptions for missed assignments will not be granted beyond those granted by university policy, e.g., health issues, and in this case all appropriate procedures must be followed.

**Course Policies**

**Academic Integrity:** Cheating and plagiarism are serious forms of academic misconduct and may result in a failing grade. All written submissions must be your own original work. As described in the student manual, “Proper acknowledgment of another's ideas, whether by direct quotation or paraphrase, is expected. In particular, if any written or electronic source is consulted and material is used from that source, directly or indirectly, the source should be identified by author, title, and page number, or by website and date accessed. Any doubts about what constitutes ‘use’ should be addressed to the instructor.” Be aware, plagiarism goes beyond copying text word-for-word and can include paraphrasing. Please see https://provost.uchicago.edu/handbook/clause/academic-honesty-and-plagiarism.
Course Materials

All course materials will be in a shared Box folder.

Assigned Readings

**Weeks 1 and 2 (Income inequality: short overview of possible explanations):**

**Week 3 (Theories of distributive justice):**


**Week 4 (For discussion on Canvas):**

**Week 5 (Measuring intergenerational mobility):**


**Week 7 (Family human capital formation):**


**Week 8:**
Students may use this time for working on essays.
Week 9:
All Readings (priority readings are denoted by *)

Income inequality: short overview of possible explanations


Theories of Distributive Justice


Measuring Intergenerational Mobility


**Intergenerational Mobility: Evidence**


**Intergenerational Mobility, International Comparison**


**Theories of Intergenerational Mobility**


- **Family human capital formation/education**


- **The Inheritance of Inequality**


- **Neighborhood Effects and Other Types of Segregation**


**The Gatsby Curve**


**Political Economy**


**Race**


