

Sociology 789b final exam questions (2011)

Four questions from the list A and one question from list B will be chosen by random numbers on the day of the final. Your job is to answer each as completely as possible based on the readings and the material we have discussed in class.

List A

1. Select two possible *causes* of homelessness that might plausibly be causes at both the macro and micro levels. What evidence is there for or against the causal impact at each level?
2. What is the macro level evidence for the relationship between homelessness and the supply of housing or shelters?
3. Describe the difference between studying individual spells of poverty or homelessness and studying the characteristics of those who are currently poor or homeless? What are the gains of studying spells as compared to comparing individuals? What are the gains of comparing individuals?
4. Explain how it is true that most people who have been poor/homeless/on welfare do so for short spells but that most people who are currently poor/homeless/on welfare have been long term.
5. What explains the changes in poverty rates? Explain and evaluate two economic and two demographic reasons.
6. What is the theoretical argument about how increases in welfare might inadvertently contribute to increased poverty? What is the empirical evidence about how welfare levels and programs affect poverty?
7. Describe three strategies in which poor single mothers on welfare supplement their welfare checks. What helps explain when some of these strategies are more used than others?
8. Describe three advantages of welfare over low-wage work for single mothers. What circumstances increase the feasibility of work for single mothers?
9. What is the evidence about three macro-level *causes* of national welfare levels and programs?
10. Describe the evidence for and against a decline in the relationship between class position and voting.
11. Compare the micro-level and macro-level (across space and time) evidence of the relationship between income and voting.
12. What is the evidence about the relationship between macro-level incomes and individual happiness?
13. Describe what is meant by *cultural capital* and at least two different ways it has been used in the stratification literature.
14. Summarize the four principles that Milner uses to describe status hierarchies and provide a concrete example of how each of these manifests itself in high school status systems.

15. How do pluralistic status systems differ from hierarchical ones? What kinds of circumstances lead to more pluralism?
16. Compare and contrast path models and mobility tables as methods for studying intergenerational mobility? Citing specific examples where possible, discuss the relative advantages and disadvantages of each method.
17. How do social psychological variables (i.e., support/ encouragement/ aspirations) help account for the transmission of the status of families of origin to their children?
18. (revised) How do class outcomes differ between children who grew up in large families and children who grew up in smaller families? What prior characteristics of large families might help explain at least part of the reason why large families differ? How do we know that family size has an impact even beyond the impacts of other family characteristics that are associated with larger families?
19. What characteristics of schools have shown to be clear determinants of how much children learn? What characteristics seem to be important but don't have as much impact as most people think?
20. What are two important differences between working class and middle class families in the effects of family origins on children's outcomes? That is, how does the status attainment process differ for working-class and middle-class families?
21. What is the evidence that contextual effects of neighborhoods and schools influence the outcomes for children?

List B

22. For several topics (e.g., homelessness, poverty/welfare, educational attainment) we have had examples of both qualitative and quantitative studies of similar issues. Obviously, these are complementary approaches, but are there consistent ways in which they complement each other? Choosing one of these issues, make an argument about the relative strengths and weaknesses of these approaches and how they have been able to shed light on different aspects of the issue.
23. Sorting out causality has become a dominant concern of empirical stratification research. We have had several examples of how researchers have tried to get better and "cleaner" solutions to the problem that "correlation is not causation". Using specific examples of empirical stratification studies, illustrate at least three such methods that attempt to address the causality question with more carefully designed studies. Describe how these methods improve on simple correlational studies and what kinds of alternative causal interpretations are eliminated (or at least less plausible) with these designs. What are the weaknesses of each design?
24. A theme that has appeared often among our topics is the change over time in the stratification system and in its relationships with other outcomes. Choose three such changes that you feel are especially important for understanding contemporary inequality and review the evidence and disputes about a) what the changes actually are and b) what has caused the changes.