

## **ETH 8018: Economic Inequality and Social Mobility**

### **Course Description**

The U.S. and many other countries face a trio of inequalities: income, wealth, and opportunity. While income inequality is a well-accepted result of a capitalist economy, the degree of inequality has been steadily increasing since 1979. Many including Nobel Prize winning economists Robert Schiller and Joseph Stiglitz and successful business persons like Paul Tudor Jones and Elon Musk suggest that economic inequality is the defining challenge of our time. There is evidence that technological innovation will increase the level of economic inequality even more in the near future. Some believe this may threaten capitalism and democracy. This seminar will explore economic inequality and social mobility from different points of view.

### **Course Objectives**

- To understand what the meaning of economic inequality and social mobility is, how it is measured, how it has changed in the United States and in the rest of the world, and how it may change even more in the future.
- To explore what the causes of rising inequality are, and what the future may look like.
- To explore the effects of rising inequality.
- To explore what this means for business leaders and what they might do about it.

### **Course Materials**

The seminar will use readings from books and journal articles, popular press articles, and videos. Much of the path breaking work on the subject has appeared in the past four years, and new studies are coming out often. Two books are required reading for the course:

1. *Robert Putnam, Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*, Simon & Schuster, (2015). To be discussed in Class 2 on January 22<sup>nd</sup>.
2. *Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee, The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies*, W.W. Norton and Company, (2014). To be discussed in Class 9 on February 13<sup>th</sup>.

The course schedule which has links to the readings and videos is on Canvas.

### **Structure of the Course**

With a couple of exceptions each class will follow a discussion format facilitated by your instructors, Jim Freeland and Ed Freeman. It is expected that you will complete the readings prior to the class meeting and be ready to offer your perspective. Each class has some discussion questions to help guide you.

### **Grading**

Class discussion and Discussion Board contributions will count 50%, and the final assignment counts 50%. The final assignment is to be completed by each individual student and is a personalized document that addresses some issue related to the topics discussed in the seminar. The document should reflect knowledge and information gained by the seminar. It should be a maximum of 1,000 words and may include graphs, figures, and hyperlinks.