

**Description of Project for Sabbatical Leave Spring 2022**  
**Testing Theories of Increased Economic Inequality in the United States**  
**James M. Avery, Professor of Political Science**

**Statement of Aims and Objectives of Project:** Please consider my application for sabbatical leave for Spring 2022. If successful in my application, I plan to complete the fourth and final phase of a project

manuscript based on the project for publication.

In the Summer of 2020, I began working on a research project with Oliver Cooke (Economics, Stockton) and Daniel Mallinson (Political Science, Penn State) testing four theories seeking to explain the rise in economic inequality observed in the United States since the 1970s. The first three phases of the project include (1) developing the literature review, (2) data collection, and (3) the initial analyses the writing of a paper based on it. The first phase of the project is complete. The second phase is nearly complete. I expect we will complete the third phase in the Summer of 2021. If awarded this proposed sabbatical leave, I plan to use the Spring 2022 semester (and Summer 2022) to conduct the fourth phase of this project. This phase will extend the initial analyses (the third phase) to examine two other questions important for understanding economic inequality in the United States during this four-decade period. First,

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application, I will use the 2022 Spring semester (and 2022 summer months) to conduct the fourth phase of the project.

**Statement of Procedures/Methodology:** To test the four theories seeking to explain the rise in economic inequality in the United States over the past four decades, we utilize the considerable variation in economic inequality and its hypothesized predictors observed across the fifty states

produced increases in inequality among other states in 2002. Toward this end, we will also conduct shift-to state-level factors as opposed to national trends. Thus, the fourth phase of the analysis will examine both potential differences in the predictors of inequality across the different time periods, as well as differences in the predictors of inequality across states.

**Importance or Value:** Along with climate change, the increase in economic inequality starting in the 1970s is among the most widely recognized global challenges today. Research on the causes of economic inequality shape public perceptions of inequality and influence public policy. As discussed above, much of the existing literature seeking to explain economic inequality in the United States tacitly assumes one of the four theories is correct and no single study has tested the four theories systematically. The third phase of our project seeks to do so. The fourth phase of the project, examining why states vary in the timing and extent of change in inequality, acknowledges that, while inequality has increased in all fifty states, it has done so at different times and to greater or lesser degrees across the states. Understanding this variation across time and states will provide needed additional information about what states can do to address the general increase in inequality that continues today.

**Further Research and Outcome:** This project will be concluded with the completion of the fourth phase. We expect this project will result in a book manuscript that we can send to potential publishers by September 2022.

#### **Works Cited**

Cooke, Oliver and Daniel Mallinson. 2020.