

SOC U516 / SOC G235: Urban Sociology
Spring 2008
M, Th 11:45am – 1:25pm
Location: Snell Library #11

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Course Description

This seminar examines a number of key debates within the field of contemporary urban sociology. Each class will be devoted to a different question of interest to urban sociologists (and, typically, social scientists in general). Broad topics include: social organization, trust, and crime; racial residential segregation, gentrification, and neighborhood effects; poverty, homelessness, urban education, and urban health; spatial mismatch, urban labor markets, economic development, and regionalism.

The primary objective of the class is to develop a solid understanding of the main arguments that frame each of the debates on the syllabus. We will do this by reading and discussing a selected set of articles on each topic. In some cases, the articles will present opposing viewpoints on a given issue, with the chosen author(s) commenting directly on each other's work. In other cases, we will read authors whose respective studies merely highlight different theoretical, ideological, or methodological aspects of the debate in question. Given the complexity of the issues, we will not do justice to any of them in one short class. But the intent is to provide you with a starting point for future thinking, reading, or research of your own.

Course Requirements: UNDERGRADUATE

- 1. Class attendance and participation (20% of final grade):** The main emphasis in this seminar is on classroom discussion. Therefore, it is essential that you read all of the assigned materials each week and come to class prepared to discuss them with me and your fellow classmates. You will be responsible for submitting at least three substantive discussion questions for each set of readings. These should be emailed to me no later than 11pm the night before the class in question. I will take into account the timeliness and quality of these questions when calculating your participation grade. *Note: You may skip discussion questions twice during the semester without penalty.*
- 2. Essay #1 (30%):** For the first essay, you will select a public or social policy discussed in the mainstream media (e.g., newspapers, popular magazines, etc.), and write a 7-9 page (approx. 1750-2250 words) paper analyzing how a sociological perspective can help us to think about that policy. You are required to draw on a minimum of two readings from the syllabus in your analysis, although you are welcome to include additional outside reading if you choose. One way to approach this assignment is to select a debate from the syllabus that interests you and search for a current, former, or proposed policy at the local, state, or federal level that is related in some way to that debate. Your paper should (a) highlight the key arguments in the debate in question, and (b) discuss how these academic findings can help us think about the strengths and weaknesses of the policy you selected. **A brief description of your essay topic (worth 5% of your grade) will be due on 1/31, and the essay itself (worth 25%) will be due on 2/14.**

3. **Essay #2 (40%):** For the second essay, you will write a 10-12 page (approx. 2500-3000 words) survey paper on an issue in the field of urban sociology. Your primary objective will be to review, critique, and synthesize the literature on a topic of your choice. You may select a topic from the syllabus (although not the one written about for Essay #1), or you may select a different topic that interests you. I will provide additional instructions and guidance on this essay at a later date. **A brief description of your essay topic (worth 5% of your grade) will be due on 3/20, and the essay itself (worth 35%) will be due on 4/14.**
4. **Oral presentation (10%):** Each student will be responsible for a brief (approx. 15 minutes) oral presentation to the class. The objective of the presentation will be to describe the policy that you selected for Essay #1 and explain how the sociological literature speaks to that policy. **Presentations will occur in class on 2/14 and 2/21.**

Course Requirements: GRADUATE

1. **Class attendance and participation (20% of final grade):** The main emphasis in this seminar is on classroom discussion. Therefore, it is essential that you read all of the assigned materials each week and come to class prepared to discuss them with me and your fellow classmates.
2. **Response memos (20%):** You will be responsible for writing a total of ten responses to the assigned readings throughout the semester. Memos should be roughly 500-600 words each, and should address such issues as: (a) Was the choice of research design and/or methodology appropriate for these studies? (b) Are there any reasons to doubt the validity of the empirical claims made in these papers? (c) Do the readings have any important policy implications (either implicit or explicit)? How ought we think about those implications? You need not address all of these questions in every memo, nor do you need to restrict your response to only these questions. The goal is provide you with an opportunity to analyze and synthesize the readings in a critical manner. Memos should be emailed to me no later than 8pm the night before the class in question. Late memos will not receive full credit in the final grade calculation. *Note: You may spread the ten required responses throughout the semester however you see fit.*
3. **Research proposal (50%):** The main project for this semester will be to prepare a detailed research proposal on a topic in the field of urban sociology. In the proposal, you will identify the research problem, review the relevant literature, formulate key hypotheses, and craft a plausible research design (including likely data sources and methodologies to be applied). *Note: This is intended to be a proposal only. You do not need to conduct the research!* This should be a good opportunity to do some advance thinking for comps, or to test out ideas for a dissertation prospectus. The proposal should be roughly 20-30 pages (5000-7500 words) in length. I will provide additional instructions and guidance on this assignment at a later date. **A brief paragraph explaining your tentative project will be due on 2/14. The literature review (worth 15%) will be due on 3/20 and the final proposal (worth 35%) will be due on 4/22.**

4. **Oral presentation (10%):** Each student will be responsible for a brief (approx. 20-25 minutes) oral presentation to the class. The objective of the presentation will be to describe the research topic that you have selected for your proposal and explain how you might design a study to address that topic. **Presentations will occur in class on 4/3, 4/7, and 4/10.**

Grading Scale

The following scale will be used to calculate your final grade:

94-100 = A	80-83 = B-	67-69 = D+
90-93 = A-	77-79 = C+	64-66 = D
87-89 = B+	74-76 = C	60-63 = D-
84-86 = B	70-73 = C-	0-59 = F

Incompletes

In order to be eligible to receive an incomplete in the course, students must have completed at least 2/3 of the class requirements and maintained a minimum of a C- average overall.

Late / Missed Work

Grades will be reduced for any work that is turned in late, except in case of a documented emergency. Papers will be reduced by one half of a letter grade (e.g., from A to A-) for each day that the assignment is late.

Policies & Procedures

Blackboard: I will post all relevant course materials (including links to all of the reading material) on Blackboard. Please check the site regularly for announcements or other information pertaining to class.

Student Services & Special Needs: Northeastern provides a number of academic resources to support students. These include the Writing Center, the Disability Resource Center, and the College of Arts and Sciences Tutoring Program. For more information on any of these resources, visit the MyNEU Academic Guide at <http://www.advising.neu.edu/>. If you have a learning disability, illness, or other condition that may affect your performance, please come talk with me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we can determine how best to help you in this class.

Academic Honesty & Integrity Policy: All students should familiarize themselves with Northeastern's policies concerning cheating, plagiarism, and other academically dishonest practices. (See <http://www.northeastern.edu/osccr/academichonesty.html>.) Any work that is taken from another student, or copied from printed material or the internet without proper citation is expressly prohibited. Any student who is found to have been academically dishonest in his or her work risks failing this course. We will discuss the accepted

guidelines for citing references in sociological work in class. For additional information, see either of the following sites: <http://www.calstatela.edu/library/bi/rsalina/asa.styleguide.html>
<http://www.asanet.org/page.wv?section=Sociology+Depts&name=Quick+Style+Guide>

Ground Rules: To ensure a productive learning environment for all students, please adhere to the following ground rules. Repeated disruptions of any kind will be duly noted and will be reflected in your final grade:

- Arrive to class on time and stay for the entire class period.
- Turn off all electronic devices (cell phone, Blackberry, etc.) before entering the classroom.
- Do not engage in side conversations. This is disrespectful to the speaker (whether me or a classmate), and can affect the ability of others in the class to learn.
- Be respectful of your fellow classmates. Do not interrupt when someone is speaking, monopolize the conversation, or belittle the ideas or opinions of others.
- Complete the assigned reading for each class in advance, and come prepared to discuss it.

Schedule of Readings & Assignments

All of the assigned reading for this course can be found on Blackboard. Please note that readings are due on the date for which they are assigned.

Date	Topic	Reading	Other
1/7	Course Introduction	No reading due	
1/10	Do cities breed alienation and mistrust?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wirth (1938) • Fischer (1981) • Gans (1991) • Ross, Mirowsky & Pribesh (2002) 	
1/14	What influences “neighboring” behavior?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campbell & Lee (1990) • Lee, Campbell & Miller (1991) • Guest et al. (2006) 	
1/17	Do broken windows matter?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wilson & Kelling (1982) • Sampson & Raudenbush (1999) • Sampson & Raudenbush (2004) 	
1/21	NO CLASS	No reading due	
1/24	What role do police tactics play in reducing urban crime?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Halbfinger (1998) • Winship (2002) • Levitt (2004) 	

1/28	Is gentrification a dirty word?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kennedy & Leonard, 2001 (p.1-40) • Freeman (2005) • Sullivan (2007) • Newman & Wyly (2006) 	
1/31	Is “the underclass” a useful concept?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wilson (1987), Chapter 1 • Jencks (1992), Chapter 5 	UG: Essay #1 topic due
2/4	What was responsible for the rise of the urban ghetto?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wilson (1987), Chapter 2 • Massey & Denton (1992), Chap. 4 & 5 	
2/7	What causes racial/ethnic residential segregation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charles (2003) • Clark (2007) • Logan, Alba & Zhang (2002) • Emerson, Yancey & Chai (2001) 	
2/11	Do neighborhoods matter?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cutler & Glaeser (1997) • Harding (2003) • Kling, Liebman & Katz (2007) 	
2/14	Undergraduate presentations	No reading due	UG: Essay #1 due G: Proposal topic due
2/18	NO CLASS	No reading due	
2/21	Undergraduate presentations	No reading due	
2/25	Why did homelessness increase in the 1980s?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burt (2001) • Jencks (1997) 	
2/28	Whom does school choice benefit?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greene, Peterson & Du (1999) • Saporito (2003) • Renzulli & Evans (2005) • Andre-Bechely (2007) 	
3/3	SPRING BREAK	No reading due	
3/6	SPRING BREAK	No reading due	

3/10	Are cities hazardous to your health?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ross & Mirowsky (2001) • Mitchell & LaGory (2002) • Fitpatrick & LaGory (2003) • Lopez (2004) 	
3/13	Is there a spatial mismatch between urban workers and jobs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kain (1992) • Cohn & Fosset (1996) • Gobillon, Selod & Zenou (2007) 	
3/17	Does the use of social networks inhibit the job searches of urban workers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smith (2005) • Chapple (2002) • Kleit (2002) • Mouw (2002) 	
3/20	Do cities benefit from regionalism?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imbroscio (2006) • Wyly & Pearce (2006) • Swanstrom (2006) 	UG: Essay #2 topic due G: Literature review due
3/24	Can the private sector save the inner city?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Porter (1995) • Harrison & Glasmeier (1997) • Butler (1995) • Dymski (1995) 	
3/27	Is the creative class the key to economic development?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Florida (2002) • Glaeser (2004) • Florida (2004) • Peck (2005) 	
3/31	What's in a name?: Can places be branded?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deener (2007) • Mitchelson, Alderman & Popke (2007) 	
4/3	Grad Presentations	No reading due	
4/7	Grad Presentations	No reading due	
4/10	Grad Presentations	No reading due	
4/14	Conclusion	No reading due	UG: Essay #2 due
4/22	NO CLASS	No reading due	G: Final Proposal due