URBAN SOCIOLOGY IN THEORY + PRACTICE
Course 11.469
Department of Urban Studies + Planning
Fall 2013

Class meetings: Wednesdays, 5:30-8:30 PM, Room 10-401
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Office hours: sign up online at my webpage or make appointment through staff assistant
Staff assistant: Harriette Crawford, Room 9-519, hcrawfor@mit.edu, voice 253-7736

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This graduate-level seminar introduces students to a set of core writings in the field of urban sociology and explores the creative dialectic—and sometimes conflict—between sociology and planning (with planning defined as including both the policy and design traditions). Topics include the changing nature of community, social inequality, political power, social and spatial change, the use and impacts of technology and technological change, and the relationship between the built environment and human behavior. We examine the key theoretical paradigms that have constituted sociology since its founding, assess how and why they have changed over time, and discuss the implications of these shifts for urban research and planning practice. As such, the course has two goals: (1) To give students a more critical appreciation of the contemporary, comparative, and historical contexts in which planning skills and sensibilities have been developed and could be applied; and (2) To offer a “sociology of knowledge” approach to the field of urban sociology, so as to prepare doctoral students to pursue the sociology general (“first field”) exam.

LEARNING APPROACH AND EVALUATION

The seminar is centered on intensive and often Socratic discussion, plus some brief lectures, about the assigned readings and study questions. Students will be encouraged to discuss how the theoretical and practical concerns that have preoccupied sociologists can be applied to their individual interests and the future of planning.

Requirements and grading are as follows (see additional guidance in Stellar/Homework):

- Six brief response papers, in the form of blog postings of about 700-900 words each (20%). These will offer a critical assessment of assigned material—outlining and assessing the central problem or question, unit of analysis, research approach, and solutions proposed, for example—and not mere restatement of content. You will choose which 6 of the 14 weeks to submit for; postings are due at 9pm the night before class, on our Stellar website, Forum section. See additional guidance on Stellar/Materials.
- In-class participation (20%). Be prepared, ask questions, make arguments.
- Book review of an ethnography of your choice (20%). I will supply a suggested list, but you may look and choose beyond it, of course.
- Term paper or research proposal, about 15-20 double-spaced pages, on a topic of individual interest (40%). I will post some strong samples of student work in prior years.
Please pay close attention to due dates, and contact Xav by email ASAP in case of genuine emergency; in fairness to your colleagues, unexcused late submissions will be penalized.

Guidelines for doctoral students. DUSP Ph.D. students who plan to take the general exam in Urban Sociology may complete their exam proposal in place of the final paper, with permission of the instructor. To meet this requirement, the student should carefully coordinate with their exam committee.

A portion of each weekly class meeting, open to all students, is designed to further engage with urban sociology core readings at the doctoral level. This has two main purposes: first, to engage more deeply with the foundational texts of the field; and, second, to discuss how these theoretical frameworks are used, contested, and reinterpreted through research. In other words, this Ph.D.-oriented portion of the work is especially important for the sociology-of-knowledge agenda of this course, outlined above, i.e. to help students examine both ideas and ideas about ideas. Understanding why and how people are compelled to ask the research questions they do, and how they set about answering those questions, is as important as understanding the theories they eventually propose. So we will be asking: Why were these theorists writing about urban phenomena when they were? How are their theories still useful today? What’s the difference between how these theorists are usually summarized and the arguments they were actually making? How have these traditions evolved? What do they fail to address sufficiently?

**COURSE MATERIALS** will be made available through the Stellar course website.

**KEY TEXTS**

Though there are no required texts for the course, these are particularly important works, or collections of same, that we will draw on over the course of the semester:

**Anthologies**


**Selected primary sources**


Further reference:

Sign up for new-issue email alerts from City & Community, the American Sociological Association’s journal of urban and community sociology, and/or City, a multi-disciplinary journal of critical urban studies.

And see best-book-of-the-year award winners of the ASA’s Urban and Community Sociology section over the past two decades plus (we’ve included several in the list of key texts above).
COURSE OUTLINE (assignment due dates in italics)

Week 1 (September 4)  Introduction: The Sociological Eye
Week 2 (September 11) Classical Foundations
Week 3 (September 18) Early Urban Sociology in the United States and the Rise of The Chicago School
Week 4 (September 25) Community and How to Study it
Week 5 (October 2) The Ethnographic Tradition
* Book review due
Week 6 (October 9) The Ecological View: From Culture to Nature
Week 7 (October 16) Urban Political Economy I: Cities, Industrialization, and Socio-Spatial Change
Week 8 (October 23) Urban Political Economy II: Capitalism and Urban Dynamics
Week 9 (October 30) Urban Political Economy III: Elites, Political Power, and Urban Dynamics
Week 10 (November 6) Class, Race, Ethnicity, and Culture I
Week 11 (November 13) Class, Race, Ethnicity, and Culture II
Week 12 (November 20) Social Networks, Social Capital, and Information and Communications Technology
Week 13 (November 27) Postmodernism
Week 14 (December 4) Globalization and Comparative Urban Development
Week 15 (December 11) Review and Synthesis

* Term paper due 9AM, Monday, December 16th
WEEKLY READINGS

NOTE: This reading list is subject to change. Rely on the Stellar website to prep for class.

Each week's readings are listed in three categories: required readings, additional core readings, and recommended further readings. All students should read the required readings for each week. Ph.D. students studying for their general exam in Urban Sociology should also read the starred exam-list readings (*), whether shown as required or not.

Week 1 – Introduction: The Sociological Eye

Week 2 – Classical Foundations

Additional Core Readings:

Additional Suggested Readings:
Week 3 – Early Urban Sociology in the U.S. and the Rise of The Chicago School


Additional Core Readings:


Other Suggested Readings


Week 4 – Community and How to Study it


Other Suggested Readings


Week 5 - The Urban Ethnographic Tradition

Additional Core Readings:

Other Suggested Readings:

Week 6 – The Ecological View: From Culture to Nature

Additional Core Readings:


*Other Suggested Readings:


*Week 7 – Urban Political Economy I: Cities, Industrialization, and Socio-Spatial Change:


*Additional Core Readings:


**Additional Recommended Readings:**


**Week 8 – Urban Political Economy II: Capitalism and Urban Dynamics**


**Additional Core Readings:**


**Other Suggested Readings:**


**Week 9 – Urban Political Economy III: Elites, Political Power, and Urban Dynamics**


**Additional Core Readings:**

**Other Suggested Readings:**

**Week 10 – Class, Race, Ethnicity, and Culture I**
Davis, Diane. 2009 “Taking Place and Space Seriously: Reflections on `Disparity and Diversity in the Contemporary City’” by Robert Sampson “*British Journal of Sociology* Vol. 60 no.1 (March 2009).

**Additional Core Readings:**
Massey, Doreen. (1994). *Space, Place, and Gender* (Chapters 4, 8, 11). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.


*Other Suggested Readings:*

**Week 11 – Class, Race, Ethnicity, and Culture II**

**Week 12 – Social Networks, Social Capital and Information and Communications Technology (ICT)**

* Additional Core Readings:*


Other Suggested Readings:


Week 13 - New Technology, Postmodernism and the City

“Networks” (pp. 9-11); “Discontinuities”, "Habitats", and "Communities" (pp. 14-17); “Sensorium” and “Gaze” (pp. 24-29); “Electronic Nomadcity” and “Access Rules” (pp. 57-60); “Eyewitness Narratives” (pp. 105-109); “Hertzian Public Space” (154-158); "Epilogue” (pp. 203-211)


Additional Core Readings:


Other Suggested Readings:


**Week 14 - Globalization, Transnationalism and Comparative Urban Development**


**Additional Core Readings:**


**Other Suggested Readings:**


Week 15 – Review and Synthesis

Other Suggested Readings: