COURSE DESCRIPTION

This graduate-level seminar introduces students to a set of core writings in the field of urban sociology. Topics include the changing nature of community, social inequality, political power, socio-spatial change, use and impacts of technology and technological change, and the relationship between the built environment and human behavior (and how changes in each interact). We examine the key theoretical paradigms that have constituted the field since its founding, assess how and why they have changed over time, and discuss the implications of these shifts for urban research, policy 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 more advanced students to pursue the urban sociology doctoral exam.

LEARNING APPROACH AND EVALUATION

The seminar is centered on intensive discussion, rather than lectures, on assigned readings. Students will be encouraged to discuss how the theoretical and practical concerns that have preoccupied urban sociologists can be applied to their individual interests.

Requirements and grading are as follows (additional guidance on assignments to come):

- Six brief reaction papers, in the form of blog postings of 1-2 single-spaced pages 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 before the start of class.
- In-class participation (20%).
- Book review of an ethnography (20%).
- Term paper or research proposal, 15-20 double-spaced pages, on a topic of individual interest (40%).

DUSP PhD 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 student should meet regularly with their exam committee. Please pay close
attention to due dates, and contact the teaching team asap in case of genuine emergency; in fairness to your colleagues, unexcused late submissions will be penalized.

Recitation. There will be a weekly recitation section, open to all students, to further engage with urban sociology core readings at the doctoral level. This recitation 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, the recitation is especially important for the sociology-of-knowledge agenda of this course, outlined above. Because the primary focus of 11.469 is to introduce a wide range of ideas in urban sociology, across more than a century of publication, we often read more recent summaries of major theories in the field. However, there are many important reasons to go back to original texts, not least because every writer has biases about what is important and why, and these biases are heavily influenced by the era in which that writer is working. This recitation section, therefore, will help students examine both ideas and ideas about ideas. In addition, the recitation will address how practicing research is different from practicing planning or policy. Practicing research means placing yourself in (or against!) an epistemological tradition. 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. Finally, while doctoral exams are designed to test your knowledge of your field, they are also intended to encourage you to identify areas for future inquiry in the subjects you care about. In this recitation, we will approach the class readings with all of these goals in mind, going further than the main class discussion can typically go: 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

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 (February 8)  Introduction: The Sociological Eye
Week 2 (February 15)  Classical Foundations
Week 3 (February 22)  Early Urban Sociology in the United States and the Rise of The Chicago School
Week 4 (February 29)  Community and How to Study it
Week 5 (March 7)  The Ethnographic Tradition
                   Book review due
Week 6 (March 14)  The Ecological View: From Culture to Nature
Week 7 (March 21)  Urban Political Economy I: Cities, Industrialization, and Socio-Spatial Change
Week 8 (March 28)  NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK
Week 9 (April 4)  Urban Political Economy II: Capitalism and Urban Dynamics
Week 10 (April 11)  Urban Political Economy III: Elites, Political Power, and Urban Dynamics
Week 11 (April 18)  Class, Race, Ethnicity, and Culture
Week 12 (April 25)  Social Networks, Social Capital, and Information and Communications Technology
Week 13 (May 2)  Postmodernism
Week 14 (May 9)  Globalization and Comparative Urban Development
Week 15 (May 16)  Review and Synthesis

Term paper due 9AM, Monday, May 21st
WEEKLY READINGS

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. PhD students studying for their general exam in Urban Sociology should 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 United States and the Rise of The Chicago School
Look at the Contents, pp. xvii-xx; then read: Chapters I and II (The Scope of This Study


Additional Core Readings:


Other Suggested Readings


Week 4 – Community and How to Study it


Other Suggested Readings

Week 5 - The Urban Ethnographic Tradition

ETHNOGRAPHIES to choose from for the book review

Additional Core Readings:

Other Suggested Readings:

**Week 6 – The Ecological View: From Culture to Nature**


*Additional Core Readings:*

*Brulle, Robert J. 2000. “The Social Dynamics of Environmental Degradation.” In Agency, Democracy, and Nature: The U.S. Environmental Movement from a Critical Theory Perspective (pp. 49-59, rest of chapter optional). Cambridge: MIT Press. (NOTE: Brulle is interested in how Habermas's *theory of communicative action* can be used to address environmental problems, which he discusses in greater length in the second part of the chapter. Feel free to read this if you want, but it's not required.)


*Other Suggested Readings:*


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


*Additional Core Readings:*


*Additional Recommended Readings:*


**Week 8 – SPRING BREAK/NO CLASS**

**Week 9 – Urban Political Economy II: Capitalism and Urban Dynamics**


Additional Core Readings:

Other Suggested Readings:

Week 10 – Urban Political Economy III: Elites, Political Power, and Urban Dynamics

Additional Core Readings:

Other Suggested Readings:

Week 11 – Class, Race, Ethnicity, and Culture
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:

Other Suggested Readings:
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


Mitchell, William J. 2003. ME++ The Cyborg Self and the Networked City. MIT Press. “Networks” (pp. 9-11); “Discontinuities”, "Habitats", and “Communities” (pp. 14-17);
“Sensorium” and “Gaze” (pp. 24-29); “Electronic Nomadicty” 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 – Course Review and Synthesis

Other Suggested Readings: