Course Description
Learn the methods and theories that sociologists use to understand our mass society that emerged out of 19th-century industrial and political revolutions. This young science’s insights will help us understand contemporary controversies around inequality, social change, gender, race and power. This course will familiarize you with the relationship between sociology and other disciplines, techniques for reading original research articles, basic sociological writing skills, and mostly importantly, the social origin of individual thought and action.

This course is Writing Intensive and a prerequisite for topical sociology classes.

Contact info
greggor.mattson@oberlin.edu
Mailbox on my door in King 305c
Office hours: M 2:30pm-4; W 10am-11:30; or by appointment

Writing Associates: Amanda Wysk (awysk@oberlin.edu)
Julia Chauvin (julia.chauvin@oberlin.edu)
OFFICE HOURS TBA

Goals
1) read and write like a social scientist
2) learn how sociologists think and work
3) analyze specific research pieces—book-length and articles
4) locate sociology in relation to other sciences and humanities

Assessment
Participation 10%
Office hours 10% (2.5% per visit, at least 4 required)
Writes 30% (in-class writes, homework, pop quizzes)
4 assignments 40% (10% each)
Final Exam 10%

Participation
1. come to class on time
2. without distracting others (including with phones or laptops)
3. having done the readings and brought them to class
4. bring your reading notes
5. share your thoughts and questions in class
6. volunteer answers to others’ questions

Office hours
I require that you consult me or the writing associates a total of 4 times during the semester. This is a good habit: it helps you cement your learning, get tips from the instructor, and builds relationships useful to future campus opportunities and letters of recommendation. And it shows you the usefulness of using the writing associates
**Reading notes**
It’s better to skim each text than get stuck on a difficult page. Try skimming the whole selection in 5 minutes. Notice section headings, bold words, or highlighted quotations to get a sense of the story the author is telling. Then when you read the entire piece, you’ll already know where the argument is going. To ensure your comprehension, answer the following questions:

- what are the main concepts this author is using?
- what is the point of this article—what is the author trying to explain?
- how convincing is the argument?
- how does it relate to the others we have covered?

**Attendance & low-stakes writing**
Low-stakes writing is not accepted late. The first two low-stakes writing assignments you miss are freebees. If you will be missing class events for approved College events, please provide documentation two weeks before your absence. If you miss, it is your responsibility to get notes from a colleague and come to office hours to discuss what you missed.

**Grading rubric**

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<th>Component</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<td>Thesis sentence</td>
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<td>Follows directions</td>
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<td>Organization</td>
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<td>Sources</td>
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<td>Conventions</td>
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**Final Exam**
I will distribute a list of essay questions on the last day of class. From those I will choose the ones that will appear on the exam. They will be broad questions that will require you to draw on the breadth of the course and reflect on what you know about sociology.

**Honor Code**: [http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/honorcode.html](http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/honorcode.html)
Remember to sign the code on each assignment—it is your reminder to know the boundaries of cheating (not doing your own work) plagiarism (taking credit for someone else’s work) and fabrication (making up sources or observations). All quotations must be cited properly.

**Sources & Citations (APA format)**
You need not make a works cited for course readings but you must cite them properly in the text in APA format. *Wikipedia is not an academic source, but may lead you to primary sources.*

Paraphrasing primary sources (preferred):
Media in the 1950s catered to the rising middle class, giving a misleading impression of America’s families (Coontz 1990, p. 31).

Direct quotations (use sparingly) must be introduced:
Stephanie Coontz cites the enduring power of the media for creating a new American tradition during the baby boom: “The happy, homogenous families that we ‘remember’ from the 1950s were... a result of the media’s denial of diversity” (1990, p. 31).
Disability Accommodations
If you are a student with a disability, register with the Office of Disability Services (Peters G-27/28 x55588) at least two weeks before any due date or exam.

Assignments: 5 pages max.
This is a writing intensive class. The assignments are evidence of your comprehension of the course materials and your ability to synthesize them with our discussions. Do not mistake the length of these assignments for their importance. Each is worth 15% of your grade and deserves attention over several days, not a last-minute dash the night before. Together with the writing tutors, we will practice strategies for prewriting, composing, rewriting, and editing.

Assignment #1: The sociological story of a name DUE ______
Using your name or the name of a close friend, find out the story of the name (ask parents/grandparents). Use the texts and internet data sources we have used in class to construct a sociological story of your name—what does this name say about the person? Into what trends does it fit? If it defies trends, speculate upon sociological reasons why.

Assignment #2: Peer interview DUE ______
Use Lareau to analyze class position and trajectory. Interview someone who is NOT a friend about their upbringing and high school extracurricular experiences. Use Lareau to interpret your interviewee’s experiences.

Assignment #3: Hypothesis testing DUE ______
Reproduce one of the trends in Fischer and Hout using the General Social Survey. Specify your hypothesis, the recoding necessary to create your crosstabulation, and its results. What do your results suggest about the sociological trajectory of American society?

Assignment #4: Observations in public DUE ______
Using Grazian as a model, make observations of a group of Oberlin students to make a sociological argument about the interactions you witness. How do social roles influence the “personal” decisions made by your colleagues?
UNIT ONE: YOU’RE NOT THE BOSS OF YOU (key concepts in bold)
By analyzing baby names and other tastes, this unit explores how social forces—shared cultural and institutional “structures of meaning” guide our (seemingly) individual choices and feelings. Key figures include W.I. Thomas’ theorem, C. Wright Mills’ sociological imagination, and Robert Bellah’s insights on American individualism and modernity.

Aug 31: Course outline and guidelines


HOMEWORK:

Sept. 2: What’s in a name? Culture, creativity, and constraint
New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

Baby names are a surprisingly good place to look at how culture shapes action. We often think about what your name says about you; sometimes we think about what it says about your parents’ tastes and creativity. But what does your name say about what Bellah calls the paradox of individualism? What evidence does he give that individuals are made by society and not the other way ’round?

WRITE (homework) DUE TODAY: Review the file “Most Popular Baby Names 2008; NYC Bureau of Vital Statistics.” On a typed piece of paper with your name on it, identify at least three trends. Here are a couple of hints: what is special about the names Jennifer and Joshua? How do names reflect racial assimilation or segregation? Print two copies; turn one in at the beginning of class.

Sept. 4: A rose is a rose is a rose? The importance of gender in names

Now you’re ready for a journal article from one of the top two sociology journals. First skim through the article—it’s not meant to be read like a novel. Pay special attention to the abstract and the conclusion. One of the most important things a name communicates is gender: despite feminism, androgynous names are no more popular now than 50 or 100 years ago. Rarely do girls’ names become boys’ names; it’s almost always vice versa. What does this fact, and importance of unique names, tell us about the paradox of individualism in American culture?
WRITE: Using the Name Voyager and the Social Security Administration (SSA) websites, explore the gender differences in the % of children given the top 5 most popular names.

Sept 7: * * * Labor Day – No Classes * * *

Sept. 9: Individual names, group identity

Names always also convey group identity, whether subtly or overtly. But even overtly different names reveal themselves to follow broader cultural trends that make them “make sense” to outsiders. How would Lieberson respond to the author of the Time piece about the popular view that our names contain our destiny?


Sept. 11: Names over the last century
Lee, Jennifer 8. 2007. “Most Popular Baby Name Starts With M (or Is It J?)” City Room Blog - NYT October 12.

HOMEWORK: Use the Name Voyager and the SSA website to examine how naming practices have differed since 1880. What historical trends can you decipher? How does Bellah et al help us to understand these trends?

Sept. 14: Names up North: Formal and informal systems of social control in Scandinavia

In what ways are American naming practices illuminated by comparing them with Scandinavian practices? What are the similarities and differences between them? What do they say about these different cultures? A discussion of the film and how it relates to the tastes for Baby names we’ve been discussing and how it relates to the book we’re going to read.

Sept 15: * * * FILM NIGHT * * * People Like Us DVD-5295
UNIT TWO: STRATIFICATION AND INEQUALITY

Method: In-depth interviews (qualitative)

Purely materialist approaches to inequality look only at money and property. Cultural accounts like Pierre Bourdieu’s look at the role of education on socio-economic status (SES). Annette Lareau’s book provides an account of social class reproduction and class mobility by revealing the benefits that parents bestow on children via childrearing practices.

Sept. 16: Concerted Cultivation and the Accomplishment of Natural Growth
Lareau, Chapters 1+2, appendix A, notes, acknowledgements

Repeat the exercises from Feb. 9th that we used with Grazian, read the Weiss article with an eye to Assignment #2.

WRITE: Bring a list of key terms or unfamiliar words for discussion.

Sept. 18: Theory and Methods with Pierre Bourdieu
Lareau, Appendix B
Weiss, Robert S. “In Their Own Words: Making the Most of Qualitative Interviews.” Contexts 3, no. 4 (2004): 44-51.

Appendix B provides a mini theory lesson, illustrating how social theory underpins both the methods by which sociologists do their research, the way they interpret their data, and how they tie their conclusions into broader sociological questions. Weiss gives you information useful in completing assignment #2.

Sept. 21: The Organization of Daily Life (how to read for content)
Lareau, Chapters 3-5

What strategies are you going to use to get the content out of these chapters without spending too much of your weekend memorizing these kids’ names?

WRITE: Turn in your interview schedule for assignment #2

Sept 23: Language Use: Middle Class, Working Class
Lareau, Chapters 6 and 7

In addition to reading the content of the Lareau chapter. What would Lareau add to the debate in the New York Times article? How might middle class and working class students differ in their response to rewards?

Sept. 25: Families and Institutions: Concerted Cultivation
Lareau, Chapters 8-9

What have colleges and universities learned that Lareau’s work helps us understand?
Sept. 28: Educational Institutions and Middle Class Culture
Lareau, Chapter 10-11 (198-232)

Since Lareau is NOT saying that middle class childraising is BETTER than working class practices, how is it that one produces “better” results than the other?

Oct. 2: Institutional authority and bureaucracy

What is a bureaucracy? Why do we hate them? Why couldn’t we do without them?

Sept. 30: The Power and Limits of Social Class
Lareau, Chapter 12: conclusion

Oct. 5: TBA

OCT 6: *** FILM NIGHT *** Devil’s Playground (2003) DVD 1022

Oct. 7: Language cultural capital in Devil’s Playground
How can we see the Thomas Theorem illustrated in consequences of the Amish tradition of rumspringa?

Oct. 9: No class (because we held it on Tuesday night)

UNIT THREE: SOCIOLOGY AND MODERNITY: THE DEMOGRAPHIC HISTORY OF AMERICA
Method: Statistics (quantitative); comparative-historical
The possibilities of individualism were transformed by the modernity, social responses to the wrenching changes of the late 19th century. This unit looks at the way those changes played out in American lives by looking at how demographers group populations into cohorts to understand how meanings, resources and life chances are distributed in society.

Oct. 12: Century of Difference
Fischer and Hout, Preface, Introduction, Appendices and Notes
Use your well-honed skills to dissect the introduction and back matter of this statistical and historical sociological monograph. What is their research project? Their data source? Their thesis?

HOMEWORK: Bring a list of unfamiliar terms to lecture
Oct. 14: Reading tables + How America Expanded Education
Mattson, Telling Stories With Graphs and Charts
Fischer & Hout, Chapter 2

What are the major trends in US Educational history? Why is this interesting sociologically? What is the relationship between this data and the argument in Lareau’s book?

Oct. 16: Guest Speaker: Gretchen Purser

* * * Fall Break * * *

Oct. 26: Using the General Social Survey
Mattson
Bonus discussion: what is sociological about Halloween?

WRITE: Complete the exercises in the

Oct. 28: Where Americans Came From
Fischer & Hout, Chapter 3

Oct. 30: How Americans Lived
Fischer & Hout, Chapter 4

Nov. 2: How Americans Worked
Fischer & Hout, Chapter 5

Nov. 4: What Americans Had
Fischer & Hout, Chapter 6

Nov. 6: Where Americans Lived
Fischer & Hout, Chapter 7

Nov. 9: How Americans Prayed
Fischer & Hout, Chapter 8

Nov. 11: Is America Fragmenting?
What is different about the historical sociology deployed by Fischer and Mattson and the kind of history you got in high school? What is their argument, and why is it surprising to most folks? Is their evidence persuasive? Why or why not?

Nov. 13: Modernity in the American Present
Fischer & Hout, Chapter 10

UNIT ONE: RECREATION: CREATING AND RECREATING THE AUTHENTIC SELF
Method: ethnography (AKA participant-observation)
This unit has three goals. We will analyze Grazian's Blue Chicago as an example of a sociological research monograph; we will learn concepts useful to interpreting his empirical research topic, urban nightlife; but most importantly we will see how his data support one of the foundations of sociology: the social origins of the self.

Nov. 16:
Observing and interpreting social life: the Chicago Blues
Grazian, Prologue + Chapter 1

Nov. 18: Inventing Authenticity in the nocturnal city
Grazian, Chapter 2

Nov. 20: America’s therapeutic culture
Grazian, Chapter 3

Nov. 23: Blues musicians and the search for authenticity
Grazian, Chapter 4

Dec 2: The rise of the Blues Club as a tourist attraction
Grazian, Chapter 5

Nov. 25:
*** Give thanks ***

Nov. 30: Selling authenticity in the urban metropolis
Grazian, Chapter 6

Dec 4: The search for authenticity
Grazian, Chapter 7

Dec 7: You’re Not the Boss of You Recap: Class, classy, classless
What is Bryson’s argument, and why is it sociologically interesting?

Dec 9: Tastes and Hidden Inequality in American Society
Peterson R.A. “Roll over Beethoven, there’s a new way to be cool.” Contexts 1 (July 1, 2002): 34-39.
We’ll review for the final exam

Dec 11: Review for final exam

Dec 15 * * * FINAL EXAM 2-4pm in same room * * *