Alcohol and culture: Social control under the influence
Alcohol lubricates memorable celebrations yet also causes disease, tragedy and the loss of self-control. This course explores how the meanings of alcohol are as powerful as its chemistry. We examine communities where alcoholism is rare to those where is rampant and the social movements that have shifted norms and legislation. At bottom, the sociology of alcohol highlights our assumptions about free will, social control, and rewarding social relations. Participants will produce original empirical research.

This course also counts as a core seminar in Law and Society (LAWS), satisfies the College cultural diversity requirement (CD), and is writing intensive (WR).

Required texts:

Keeping in touch
greggor.mattson@oberlin.edu
Mailbox on my door, King 305c
Office hours: Mon 2:30-3:30pm; Wed 10am-11am; Friday 10am by appointment

Assessment
Participation in seminar discussions 10%
Research memos 60
Final research paper 25
Presentation of findings 5

Course Goals
• learn primary findings by social scientists on alcohol and alcoholism
• synthesize the work of your Oberlin sociology career
• produce a piece of solid sociological research to serve as a key
• apply insights of social theorists Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu
• assist your peers in the crafting and writing of their research project
Grading rubric

Thesis: 20 (clearly stated research question, defended with evidence, and assessed in the conclusion)
Data 30 (original data are presented and analyzed)
Organization 10 (ideas grouped in paragraphs, evidence for main points)
Sources 20 (synthesizes a variety of course and outside texts, cited properly)
Insight 10 (creativity, connections between texts, use of language, sparkle)
Conventions 10 (stapled, grammar, 1” margins, spelling, punctuated, 12-pt. font)

Participation in seminar

A seminar class involves participating in discussions about challenging ideas. Doing the readings before class is essential to inform your opinions and give us a common foundation to critique ideas and apply them to our research projects. Come prepared to ask and answer questions.

Attendance

Your on-time attendance is essential to your ability to participate in seminar. It is your responsibility to get notes or handouts if you miss. Our time together is short—only 14 classes!

Honor Code: [http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/honorcode.html](http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/honorcode.html)
Sign the honor 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, quotations or observations). Refer to the honor code and/or talk to me if you have concerns or are feeling so pressed that cheating seems attractive.

Research Paper and Memos

You will produce a 15-20 page research paper in this class on a topic of your choosing. You will supplement the course readings with 4-8 sources specific to your topic. About every two weeks you will turn in a research memo at the beginning of class as indicated on the syllabus. These memos allow you to discuss your work with the class, get advice on interpreting your data, and build towards your final paper. Research memos need be only 3-4 double-spaced pages.

Note that you will choose a topic by the second class meeting, and that a first draft of your paper is due by APRIL 23. Research paper memos are marked on the syllabus by the ► symbol.

Late Assignments

Late assignments will lose one letter grade for each day late – this includes not turning in a hard copy at the beginning of class. Excused lateness must come from a Class Dean.

Disability Accommodations

If you are a student with a disability, make sure you’ve registered with the Office of Disability Services (Peters G-27/28 x55588) to develop a plan to meet your academic needs. Bring their recommendations to me at least two weeks before any due date or exam.
Legal notice
Your research must obey all College policies regarding alcohol consumption. But you already knew that. For more information visit:

http://new.oberlin.edu/students/policies/alcohol-drug-tabacco/
http://www.oberlin.edu/lifeskills/aod/laws/policy.html

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).

Examples of potential research paper topics:
What are the social meanings of attending wine tastings? Sake factory tours? Vodka tastings? Microbrewery tours?
What are the social meanings of tequila for Mexican culture? For Mexican-American culture? For athletes? For the experiences in chain restaurants like Chi-Chis or T.G.I.Fridays? Of rum for Puerto Ricans or Cubans? Vodka for Russians or Poles? Soju for Koreans? Whiskey for the Japanese or Swedes? Is there a difference between older and younger generations?

What are the gendered meanings of cocktails?
When is it okay to drink on the job? Taboo?
What are the social meanings of teetotalism amongst college students?
What are Bartender/Mixology guides selling, and why do people buy them?
To what identities do college anti drinking campaigns appeal? With whom are they successful?
How do police determine when public drunkenness necessitates an arrest?
How have American attitudes toward alcohol changed in the past 30 years?
What are the meanings of having distilled spirits available in the home? Wine? Beer? Of having a dry home?
How do bouncers manage conflict with inebriated patrons differently than with sober ones?
What are the differences between Black working- and middle-class drinking practices and meanings?
How do police decide when to enforce prohibitions against public alcohol consumption?
What are the social meanings of bars for gay men? For lesbians? For gays of color?
What have been the effects of the professionalization of sommeliers?

Articles as models for ethnographic research:
Syllabus:
Readings are due to be read by the date on which they are listed.

Feb 12 Week 1: Sober Thoughts
Ch. 12 from Drinking Cultures, “Drinking Politics: Alcohol, Drugs, and the Problem of US Civil Society”
Ch. 4 from Contested Meanings, “Passage to Play: Rituals of Drinking Time in American Society”

Feb 19 Week 2: Animal House: College Drinking
Dowdall, Chapters 1-5
http://blogs.oberlin.edu/about/ethos/alcohol.shtml
NCHA National College Health Assessment, American College Health Association Fall 2008 Reports (4 .pdf files)

Research Memo: Propose your topic, summarize what you know about it, and outline how you will go about learning more

Feb 26 Week 3: Drunk on culture (or: everything you know about alcohol is wrong)
Dowdall, Chapters 6, pp 139-149; Chapter 8

What is drunken comportment, and what can we say about it cross-culturally? How does culture shape drunkenness? How does the biology of alcohol affect the human organism? How is this different from the cultural effects of alcohol? How do these insights help us understand the policy solutions proposed by College health offices?

Mar 5 Week 4 Alcohol as a danger in the welfare state
Gusfield Chapters 5, 9, 13 in Contested Meanings “Benevolent Repression,” “Deviance in the Welfare State,” and “The Control of Drinking-Driving in the United States”

What are the cultural beliefs that underpin the dangerousness of alcohol? Is alcohol a food, and why does that matter? What is the paradox about the danger of drunken driving to Americans and their pattern of responses? What social identities are invoked in successful political movements, and what does this tell us about modern individuals and strategies to govern them?
Research Memo: Sharing first results (interview transcripts, ethnographic fieldnotes, statistical tables) What are your initial findings? What do you still need to learn? How do you know what you know?

Mar 12 Week 5: Spirit of the people
Chapters 3 and 4 of Drinking Cultures

Extras:

How does alcohol underpin national and ethnic identities? What is the significance of drinking rituals to everyday identity? How can this help us understand the success or failure of social movements to control alcohol consumption across countries or subcultures within one country?

Research Memo: Sharing more results. Do these support your initial findings? Are there any surprises or patterns emerging? What do you still need to learn?

Mar 19 Week 6: Can’t hold their liquor: gender and drinking cultures
Chapter 11 in Drinking Cultures

What are the various meanings that alcohol holds for individuals? What are the ways in which alcohol interacts with dominant gender norms to create social problems, self-destructive behaviors, self-esteem… or romance?

Research Memo: Annotated literature review and report on the progress of your research. Note that the readings are short this week to give you time to find something new and useful!

Mar 26 Week 7: Sociologists at the bar: politics of bar research
Gusfield’s Contested Meanings Chs. 6 & 7: “Competence and Incompetence in Drinking and driving” and “The Bar as a Context of Social Control”

What are the promises or pitfalls of doing alcohol research in bars? What can be seen and what cannot? What, do the authors suggest, is the danger of relying on visible alcohol consumption to make policy recommendations?

*** SPRING BREAK ***

**Apr 9 Week 8: The individual is the wine in the bottle of society**
Chapter 7 of Drinking Cultures
http://winefeeds.files.wordpress.com/2008/02/aroma_wheel1.jpg

What does social class have to do with identity? How do individuals reflect and enact themselves in their drinking practices? What is the significance of alcohol on wealth and inequality anyways?

► Research Report: Analyze two pieces of data using both inside and outside readings

**Apr 16 Week 9: Alcohol in everyday life**
Alasuutari’s Desire and Craving, chapters 1-4

Alasuutari discusses how everyday people use stories to explain their drinking behaviors. What is cultural about drinking for the Finns, and how does it differ by social class? How can their experiences help us understand what happens here in the US, or here at Oberlin?

**Apr 23 Week 10 Alcoholism in everyday life**
Alasuutari’s Desire and Craving, chapters 5-9

What does Alasuutari mean that alcoholism is culturally constructed? From what are people getting sick? What “cures” does he propose? What can we learn from alcoholism about the way that desire is constructed in other spheres of our lives?

► Research: First draft of paper due, complete data collection. Swap papers with a colleague.

**Apr 30 Week 11: Medicalizing social problems**
Valverde’s Diseases of the Will, Chapters 1-4
If the disease model of alcoholism has to be reproduced even at the interpersonal level, where did this model come from? What is the history of considering alcohol a disease? How did individuals come to accept this model, and how do they reproduce it in their everyday lives?

► Return your colleague’s paper and get yours back.

**May 7 Week 12: Citizenship and the state of the will**  
Valverde’s *Diseases of the Will*, Chapters 5-8

Why do governments bother with alcohol? How did theories of proper governance construct individuals as “rational” citizens? In what way is alcoholism a social movement? What are the paradoxes of “harm reduction” and social policy for individual heavy drinkers? What can we learn from alcoholism about the social meanings of individualism, self-control, and an orderly society?

► Swap papers again

**May 14 Week 13: Alcohol and industrialism**  
Schivelbusch’s *Tastes of Paradise*, chapters 2, 5, 6, 7, Afterward and one of 3, 4, or 8.

How did the material reality of alcohol change with industrialization? How did the social meanings change? How did those meanings affect the meanings early Europeans gave to other “intoxicants” they encountered, such as coffee, tobacco and chocolate? How can we fit this material history of alcoholism with what we know happens later?