Course description

Why study urban sociology? One of the most relevant reasons to study metropolitan areas is that most people in the United States and other countries around the world live in them. Second, urban areas have long been the center of trade, economic activity, and the arts.

This course introduces you to historical, theoretical, and empirical perspectives on urban development and urban life. More specifically, we will examine (a) sociological theories of “urbanization” and “urbanism”, (b) the history of urbanization and the place of the city in the modernizing process, (c) the nature of urban and suburban life, (c) urban structures and populations, and (d) the politics and policies that attempt to cope with contemporary trends and conflicts.

Course goals & objectives

1 - To increase your understanding of the process of urbanization, the major theoretical explanations for its development, the historical circumstances that led to it, and empirical facts about the contemporary urban world.

2 - To develop an understanding about contemporary urban issues.

3 - To increase both your critical thinking and writing skills.

Course requirements

Participation/attendance. Class participation and attendance is integral to your success in this course. Your presence in discussions is important. You will “participate” in three ways. You will turn in discussion questions to me – due dates listed below. You’ll use these same discussion questions to participate in small groups in class. Participation in groups will be monitored via the assessment of your group members. This will occur periodically throughout the course as both a measure of your participation and as a diagnostic tool to change anything that may need it, to ensure a high quality learning environment. We will be watching several films in the course. I will distribute a set of short essay questions related to each film that you are required to respond to. These are due one week after completing the film. The combination of the film questions, individual discussion questions, and your small group participation makes up 20% of your overall grade.

Environmental justice simulation paper. You will participate in a group simulation (in class) that requires you to write a short reaction essay evaluating your role in the simulation and connecting the process course readings. More information on this to be posted to Blackboard; the paper is worth 15% of your overall grade.

City and suburb in film paper. One interesting way to examine urban society is to apply what we have discussed in class to movies. You will be required to write a 5 page analysis of these films. More specific instructions on
this assignment are posted to Blackboard. This is an out of class assignment. There is no "due date" per se, but I expect each of you to turn this in by December 19th to receive full credit. This paper is worth 15% of your overall grade.

*Midterm exam.* Midway through the semester is the midterm examination. It is worth 25% of your overall grade.

*Final exam.* During finals week you will take the final exam. It will be a similar format to the midterm examination – essay based. It is worth 25% of your overall grade.

*Late papers.* The last day to turn in written work is December 16th. One letter grade per week turned in late will be deducted from late papers.

**Required course materials**


**Reading list**

9/6  
(a) Syllabus overview  
(b) Course introduction

9/8  
*Early urbanization and the development of cities*  
(a) “The Preindustrial City” by Gideon Sjoberg  
(b) “European Cities in the Middle Ages” by Leonardo Benevelo  
(c) “Urbanism as a Way of Life” by Louis Wirth

9/13  
**Discussion questions due to me by 9 AM**  
(d) “The Growth of the City: An Introduction to a Research Project” by Ernest Burgess  
(e) “The City as a Growth Machine” by John Logan and Harvey Molotch  
(f) “Los Angeles School and the Chicago School: Invitation to a Debate” by Michael Dear

9/15  
Film #1 – The Urban Explosion

9/20  
**Discussion questions due to me by 9 AM**

*Globalization and the city*  
(a) Sassen – chapter 2 “The Urban Impact of Economic Globalization”
9/22  Film analysis #1 due
(b) Sassen – chapter 3 “National and Transnational Urban Systems”

9/27  Discussion questions due to me by 9 AM
(c) Sassen – chapter 4 “The New Urban Economy: The Intersection of Global Processes and Place”

9/29  (d) Sassen – chapter 6 “The New Inequalities within Cities”

10/4  Film #2 - Life and Debt

10/6  Discussion questions due to me by 9 AM

Power, politics, and place.

(a) “Men without Property: The Tramp’s Classification and Use of Urban Space”
   by James S. Duncan

(b) “Race, Space, and Power: The Survival Strategies of Working Poor Women”
   by Melissa R. Gilbert

(c) “Dying Alone: The Social Production of Urban Isolation” by Eric Klinenberg

10/11  Film analysis #2 due
(d) “Leaving New Orleans: Social Stratification, Networks, and Hurricane Evacuation”
   by Elizabeth Fussell (5)

(e) “Fortified Enclaves” by Teresa P. R. Caldeira

(f) “Gender and Space: Lesbians and Gay Men in the City” by Sy Adler and Johanna Brenner

10/13  Film #3 – “Flag Wars”

10/18  Environmental justice group simulation

10/20  Film analysis #3 due

Environmental justice group simulation

10/25  No class

10/27  No class

11/1  Environmental justice essay due

Midterm review

11/3  Midterm
11/8  Discussion questions due to me by 9 AM

Race and class in the city – the construction and maintenance of urban ghettos.

(a) Wilson – chapter 1 “From Institutional to Jobless Ghettos”
(b) Massey and Denton - chapter 1 “The Missing Link”

11/10 (c) Wilson – chapter 2 “Societal Changes and Vulnerable Neighborhoods”
(d) Massey and Denton – chapter 2 “The Construction of the Ghetto”

11/15  Discussion questions due to me by 9 AM

(e) Wilson – chapter 3 “Ghetto related Behavior and the Structure of Opportunity”
(f) Massey and Denton – chapter 4 “The Continuing Causes of Segregation”

11/17 (g) Massey and Denton – chapter 5 “The Creation of Underclass Communities”
(h) Massey and Denton – chapter 6 “The Perpetuation of the Underclass”

11/22  Discussion questions due to me by 9 AM

(i) Wilson – chapter 5 “The Meaning and Significance of Race: Employers and Inner City Workers”
(j) Massey and Denton – chapter 7 “The Failure of Public Policy”

11/24  No class – Thanksgiving

11/29  Film #4 – “Claiming Open Spaces”

12/1  Discussion questions due to me by 9 AM

Culture and the Urban Economy

(a) “Bohemia” by Richard Lloyd
(b) “Cities and the Creative Class” by Richard Florida

12/6  Film analysis #4 due

(c) “Looking at Themed Environments” by Mark Gottdiener
(d) Globalization, Culture, and Neighborhood Change” by Christopher Mele

12/8  Film #5 – “Malls R Us” – analysis due by 12/19

12/13  Final exam review

12/19  Final exam – 9 AM
Other relevant course information

1 – I am generally easier to reach by email than by phone. Do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns, I am happy to help and want you to succeed in this course. I’m also typically in my office from 9 to 5, so you can set up appointments with me on most days of the week.

2 – I’ll be checking email frequently Monday through Friday from 9 to 5, but will not check as often at night or on weekends.

3 – Laptops are permitted in class for note taking or reading the assigned articles, but I ask that you turn off your wireless connection while in class. Anyone found to be surfing the web will be asked to leave class.

Grading scale

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<th>Score</th>
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Course behavior expectations

Who speaks, sows. Who listens, reaps.

- Argentine proverb

I do want you to speak in class (in fact I will implore you to almost every day), but keep in mind that the most effective way for you to be an effective speaker is to also be an effective listener. This allows for actual discussion and not just people talking past each other. Learning in my classroom is a collective endeavor therefore the success of the whole depends on the ability of individuals to participate with this goal in mind.

Please turn off cell phones during class. If there is a specific reason you need your phone on (i.e. emergency) let me know. Please stay off of the internet (especially Facebook!). I have no problem with you using your laptop in class, but it must be used for class. Do not talk or whisper conversations with your neighbors (unless otherwise directed) during class, it is distracting to the rest of the class and to me. We only meet for 2.5 hours per week. Be present (not just in the physical sense)! If I see you using your laptop inappropriately I will ask you to leave. When interacting in class be respectful of other opinions and listen intently. Intelligent and thoughtful discussion about social issues can be intense, so be certain you frame your comments in a respectful manner.

Honor code

This course is covered by the Oberlin College honor code which means that you are to produce your own work unless otherwise instructed. Consulting with librarians, tutors, and me is okay, but the work you submit must be yours. Any case of suspected plagiarism will be reported to the Honors Committee. For every assignment you must write/type at the top of the first page, “I affirm that I have adhered to the honor code in this assignment.” For more information see:

Special needs

I encourage students with documented disabilities, including non-visible disabilities such as chronic diseases, learning disabilities, head injury, attention deficit/hyperactive disorder, or psychiatric disabilities, to discuss appropriate accommodations with me. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to the Office of Disability Services in Peters G-27/G-28.

This syllabus is tentative and may be subject to change.