SOCIOLOGY 445 – SEMINAR IN URBAN SOCIOLOGY: HOUSING AMERICA
MONDAY 7 PM TO 9 PM – SPRING 2014 – KING 335

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Course description

This course explores housing in the United States. Where people live impacts their quality of life – for example, the well-being of children and adolescents, access to a quality education and to good jobs, housing values, personal safety, and the quality of social networks. Using historical and sociological perspectives we will examine residential location as an independent dimension of stratification and demonstrate how neighborhoods matter.

Course goals & objectives

1 – To increase your understanding of housing in the United States.

2 – Evaluate and assess neighborhoods and how they impact a variety of socioeconomic outcomes.

3 - To enhance your critical thinking, public speaking, and writing skills.

Course requirements

Participation/attendance. Class participation and attendance is integral to your success in this course. This is a seminar class so a large portion of your grade depends on attendance and participation. There are several ways that I grade your participation. To receive full credit for this portion of your grade you must attend class, attend the Cleveland field trip, complete weekly written assignments, and once during the semester help to lead/facilitate the course discussion.

For weeks 2 through 13 you are required to write a 1-2 page written memo that engages with the course material for that week. In total, you will write 11 of these memos. They must be posted to Blackboard no later than 10 PM Sunday (the earlier the better). Even if you have not completed all the reading by 10 PM Sunday please submit something as this will only help your fellow classmate (and me) facilitating the discussion.

During the last ten minutes of class each week (or via email if time is a serious constraint) you are required to complete a brief wrap up exercise. The intent is for you to reflect on what you have read and what we have discussed in class. You will answer the following prompts:

1) Identify one important concept, research finding, theory, or idea that you learned while covering today’s assigned readings.

2) Why do you believe that this concept, research finding, theory, or idea is important?

3) Apply what you have learned to some aspect of your life.

4) What question(s) does all of this raise for you? What are you still wondering about? [nothing is an unacceptable answer]
Each of you will facilitate the class discussion for 1 week of the course. You are not required to write a written memo for that week. As the facilitator, your role will be to briefly present some of the major arguments from the weeks readings as well as include questions and commentary from your classmates (that you will get from the written memos). These presentations need not be completely formal and the class can interject and discuss at any point throughout the presentation. The memos are meant to be both partial summaries of readings and a jump start to class discussions. I will serve as co-facilitator to keep things moving along. The combination of attendance, written memos, wrap up exercises, and class facilitation is worth 50% of your overall grade. Please post your memos to the Blackboard discussion board, there are discussion threads generated for each week so be sure to post to the correct week. I would also like you to send me an electronic copy of your memo.

Research paper. You will write a 15-20 page research paper that examines a topic of interest that is related to housing, neighborhood change, or some other “neighborhood effect”. There is an extensive literature out there on neighborhoods and I am confident you will find something of interest to you. By 2/24 you are required to turn in a 1-2 page synopsis of your research topic and a list of references you are considering in the paper. If you are having trouble moving forward with this, please see me before 2/24. The next important due date to keep in mind is 4/21. By this date you need to turn in a rough draft of your paper to me and your (assigned) peer reviewer. You each will read a colleague’s paper and provide some feedback. I’ll have more on this later in the course, including some “best practices” for peer review. You will have 1 week to review your classmates draft and return it to them. You will also turn in your review to me. The final due date of the paper is 5/18. The combination of research synopsis, rough draft, peer review, and final paper is worth 50% of your overall grade.

Late papers. The last day to turn in written work other than your final paper is 5/9. One letter grade per week turned in late will be deducted from late assignments.

Required course materials


Reading list

2/3 Course introduction.

**Historical perspectives on urban structure and planning**

2/10 Jacobs – parts one and two
2/17 Jacobs – parts three and four
2/24 **Research synopsis due.**

Jackson – chapter 1 through 8
3/3 Jackson – chapters 9 through 16

**Neighborhood change – the search for urban authenticity**
3/10 Zukin – introduction through chapter 3
3/17 Zukin – chapter 4 through conclusion

**Neighborhood change – the politics of race and class in the city**
3/31 Pattillo – chapters 1 through 4
4/7 Pattillo – chapters 5 through conclusion
4/12 Cleveland Field Trip with Professor Mattson’s urban sociology class– Leave Oberlin at approx. 9 AM, will be back by 6 PM

**Housing choice, racial attitudes, and discrimination**
4/14 Chapters 3-5 in de Souza Briggs edited volume

**Housing policy and political coalitions**
4/21 **First draft of paper due to myself and your peer reviewer.**

Chapters 6 through 9 in de Souza Briggs edited volume
4/28 **Return peer review to colleague.**

Pfeiffer – “Moving Out of Cabrini Green, Chicago”

Chapters 10 through 12 in de Souza Briggs edited volume

**Housing America - the future**
5/5 Wilson – “The Obama Administration’s Proposals to Address Concentrated Urban Poverty”

Chapter 14 in de Souza Briggs edited volume
5/18 Final examination period – **final paper due.**

**Other relevant course information**

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.
Grading scale

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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 week), 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 about 2 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.