

Syllabus
Sociology 179 * Capstone Seminar
Instructor: Alison Alkon
Office hours: MW 3:30-5:15
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Course overview:

Our capstone seminar will revolve around the theme of public sociology. This theme will serve as a bridge between students' academic training and the future beyond college. In designing this course, my aim is to begin a conversation in which we will reflect on what we have learned thus far and imagine the insights our sociological imaginations may bring in the years to come.

Learning objectives:

Students will emerge from this class able to do the following:

1. Identify sociological arguments and accounts in popular media and culture and deconstruct them using relevant sociological theory.
2. Identify areas in popular media in which sociological perspectives are lacking but could add to the discourse.
3. Craft an intervention into popular media that represents a sociological perspective.

Required Books:

This course has no required books. All readings will be available online.

Assumptions of this course:

1. As this is a capstone seminar, I assume you come prepared with a well-developed sociological perspective, as well as areas of academic interest. This course will require that students engage with scholarly and popular materials, and assumes you are well-prepared and interested in doing so.
2. I also assume that students have a high level of comfort discussing and debating sociological ideas, including the often-difficult subjects of race, gender, class and sexuality.
3. Beyond an initial introduction to the theme of public sociology, I expect to act as a facilitator, rather than a traditional instructor. Student-centered learning requires a high degree of initiative from students. In turn, students are empowered to have more say in the direction of class discussions.

Students needing accommodations

If you need special accommodations for learning disabilities, please notify me during the first week of the semester. Please arrange for me to receive an accommodations request letter from the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities in Bannister Hall Room 101.

Honor Code

All your submitted writings must be your own original work. You must acknowledge any borrowing of ideas and words from other by standard documentations in various forms, such as parenthetical references, and bibliography. Keeping track of the sources you use and using a consistent style of documentation will help you avoid unwittingly committing plagiarism. Plagiarism is intellectual theft and fraud. Examples of plagiarism include buying papers from the Internet or other sources; downloading materials from the Internet and passing it off as your own writing or using any part of it without acknowledging the source; taking published ideas of others and claiming them as your own. In the case of a suspected violation of the University academic honor code, the faculty member will evaluate the alleged infraction and report it immediately to the chair of the department, the College Academic Affairs office, and the Office of Judicial Affairs, which will begin a formal investigation. If the Office of Judicial Affairs determines that the student is responsible for the honor code violation, the standard penalty in the College is failure of the assignment and/or the course. In such cases, the student will be prevented from dropping or withdrawing from the course, even if the deadline to do so has not expired. Further disciplinary action may also be taken by the Office of Judicial Affairs.

General overview of required work

Each Monday, students will present a series of short papers. For these assignments, you will survey the popular media and bring in a newspaper or magazine article, media clip, or other source that either represents a sociological perspective or could benefit from one. In a short paper (1-2 pages) describe the sociological perspective contained in the article and how it relates, or the sociological perspective that might benefit the popular account. Refer to specific theories, authors and pieces you're your previous sociological education. Mondays' discussions will begin with a presentation of these assignments.

Each Wednesday, we will have a series of readings that explore one topic in both its scholarly and popular forms. Each week, several students will act as the discussion leader for this session. Each student is required to create 2 discussion questions and email them to the discussion leaders by Monday night. You must cc me on the email. The discussion leader will then use these questions to guide the class discussion.

Because our class is so heavily based on discussion, attendance and participation are **mandatory**. More than 2 unexcused absences will result in the loss of 1/3 letter grade. Excused absences must be documented.

Assignments:

Almost every week, you will be required to submit a short analysis of popular media. The foci for these analyses change over the course of the semester.

For **Jan 24, Feb 7 and Feb 14** the topic is “Where do you see sociology in popular media and what type of sociology do you see” For each of these weeks, write a brief essay analyzing a text (newspaper or magazine article, blog, film or TV clip, etc) that makes use of a sociological theory that you have learned about in past courses. Your essay must make reference to a specific theory or theorist, and demonstrate how that particular sociological perspective is represented in popular media.

For **February 28, Mar 14 and Mar 21**, our question shifts to “Where is a sociological perspective needed?” For each of these weeks, please compose a 1-2 page essay analyzing a text that demonstrates a lack of a sociological perspective. In your essay, specify which sociologist or sociologists you would draw on, what their approach to the topic at hand might look like, and how it would change the popular debate at hand.

In addition, each student will engage in sociological research on a topic of her or his choice and share that research through a variety of popular media. On **Mar 28**, you will submit a 2 page **proposal** detailing the topic, the theories you will employ, and the venues to which you will submit your research. On **April 4** you will submit an **opinion piece** for a newspaper of your choice. On **April 20** you will submit a **blog** for a website of your choice. Your final paper will be written as a **magazine article** sharing your sociological insights with a popular audience. A draft is due **Apr 25**, and the final draft will be due during finals week. You will have the opportunity to informally present and receive feedback on this work during class.

We will also be creating a collaborative visual sociology project that will replace the bulletin board next to my office. The entire class will work together on this project, which must be a visual representation of sociological insights, and can be done using collage, photography, art or any other medium of your choice. Students desiring extra credit can submit a one page single spaced curator’s statement explaining the sociological import of the class’ piece.

GRADING

Attendance and Participation	15 %
Discussion leader	10 %
6 Short papers	30 %
Visual sociology assignment	5%
Op Ed	10%
Blog	10%
Magazine Article	20 %

Schedule of Topics and Readings:

M January 10: Course Intro

W Jan 12: Introduction to Public Sociology

2004 American Sociological Association Presidential address: For public sociology
pages 259-269 (1-11) and 287-290 (29-32)

The Promise, Introduction to *The Sociological Imagination*.

M Jan 17: No Class. MLK Holiday

UNIT ONE: SEEING SOCIOLOGY IN PUBLIC

W January 19: Politics and the Role of Storytelling

Polletta, Storytelling in Politics. *Contexts*. 7:4. 2008

Waldman, The Power of the Campaign Narrative and The Triumph of Narrative

Global Language Monitor, Obama's Final Narrative

The Backfire Effect

<http://youarenotsmart.com/2011/06/10/the-backfire-effect/>

M January 24: Due 1-2 pages. Where do you see sociology and what kind of sociology do you see?

W Jan 26: Food Justice

Moore and Diez Roux, 2006

Association of Neighborhood Characteristics With the Location and Type of Food Stores

American Journal of Public Health

Griffith, Mark Winston

The "Food Justice" Movement

<http://www.gothamgazette.com/article/communitydevelopment/20031218/20/808>

M Jan 31: Future Career Presentation: Social Work

M February 7: 1-2 pages. Where do you see sociology and what kind of sociology do you see?

W February 9: Stratification

C. Wright Mills. 1956. "The Structure of Power in American Society."
(Introduction to *The Power Elite*.)

Egan, Timothy. "The Betrayal." *New York Times*. 11/11/09

What is the Military Industrial Complex.

<http://www.militaryindustrialcomplex.com/what-is-the-military-industrial-complex.asp>

The Military Industrial Complex: Its larger than you think. July 28. 2008.
Commondreams.org

M February 14: Due 1-2 pages. Where do you see sociology and what kind of sociology do you see?

W Feb 16: Neoliberalism-

Harvey, David. 1996. Introduction to *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

Klien, Naomi. *The Shock Doctrine*. 2007.

Miami Rice: The Business of Disaster in Haiti

<http://www.otherworldsarepossible.org/another-haiti-possible/miami-rice-business-disaster-haiti>

Monday Feb 21: **NO CLASS, PRESIDENT'S DAY**

UNIT TWO: DOING SOCIOLOGY FOR THE PUBLIC

W February 23: Sociologists in Political Debate

Intro to Fischer et al. 1995. "Why Inequality" (introduction to *Inequality By Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth*.)

Center for Economic and Policy Research. "Inequality as Policy." on Sakai

Introduction to Ehrenreich, *Bait and Switch*

M February 28: Due 1-2 pages "Where is a sociological perspective missing and what would it add?"

W March 2: Correcting the Myth of the Free Market

Excerpt from Raj Patel's *The Value of Nothing*

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=122125016>

Carruthers, A Sociology of Bubbles
Kenworthy, Tax Myths
King, When Markets become Contentious

All from Contexts, Summer 09,

March 7-11 **SPRING BREAK**

M March 14: 1-2 pages “Where is a sociological perspective missing and what would it add?”

W: March 16: Race and the Recession

Applied Research Center: Race and the Recession

Blacks & Latinos earning over \$200k were more likely to be given subprime loans than Whites earning under \$40k

M: March 21: 1-2 pages “Where is a sociological perspective missing and what would it add?”

Distribute guidelines for proposal

W: March 23:

The Prison Industrial Complex

Introduction to RW Gilmore’s *Golden Gulag*

What is the Prison Industrial Complex

<http://www.criticalresistance.org/article.php?preview=1&cache=0&id=58>

Braz, R. and C. Gilmore. (2006). Joining forces: Prisons and environmental justice in recent California organizing. *Radical History Review*, (96), 95-111.

M: March 28: **Due 2 page proposal for final project**

W March 30:

Education for Liberation

Pedagogy of the Oppressed Chapter 1,

bell hooks, except from *Teaching to Transgress*

Martha and Meg

M April 4: Watch *Capitalism, A Love Story*

The goal of this unit is for you to collectively create a public display of some sociologically relevant theme on the bulletin board next to my office. Please look over the readings and displays and come to class with some ideas of potential themes.

W April 6:

Visual Sociology

Becker, Howard. Backup of Visual Sociology, Documentary Photography, and Photojournalism: It's (Almost) All a Matter of Context

<http://oldweb.uwp.edu/academic/criminal.justice/beckerbk02.htm>

Sylvia's stock photo project

Paintings of most and least wanted

<http://awp.diaart.org/km/painting.html>

Description of Visual Sociology Workshop

<http://www.asanet.org/footnotes/septoct01/fn18.html>

Examples from Contexts, IVSA

Brainstorm topic for Visual Sociology Project

M April 11: Visual Sociology Critique

Due Op Ed

W: April 13: Design and assembly of bulletin board

Due: Curator's statements

M: April 18: Visual Sociology captions and wrap up, *Exit interviews*

W: April 20: **Blog Due**

M April 25: *Presentation of final projects*

Draft of Magazine Article due