

**U.S. Society \***

SOCY-100-002 - Spring 2014  
Ward 106, W 8.55am – 11.35am  
<http://tinyurl.com/AUSOCY100>

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**Course Description**

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"[D]iscovery...is not the excitement of coming upon the totally unfamiliar, but rather the excitement of finding the familiar becoming transformed in its meaning. The fascination in sociology lies in the fact that its perspective makes us see in a new light the very world in which we have lived all our lives."

- Peter Berger, *Invitation to Sociology*, p. 21

Sociologists aim to make sense of how society shapes and is shaped by human behavior. Those aims shape what sociologists study, how they design and implement research projects, and to whom they direct the results of that work. This course provides an introduction to the varied aspects that make up the sociological perspective. You will then have the opportunity to apply that perspective to what you read for this course (and others), your lives, and the world around you.

To demonstrate the utility of this perspective, typical introductory sociology classes often survey its application to many domains of social life. Ours will not. Instead, we will focus on in-depth examples of sociological work that touch on a few of the field's core themes, theoretical perspectives and methods, including (but not limited to): diffusion of innovations, globalization, labor, popular culture, poverty, race, social networks, and socialization. In combination, these will begin to equip you with the tools sociologists use to understand why social structures exist in the forms they do and explain their durability, while identifying conditions that can bring about social change.

**Objectives**

This course meets AU's **Foundational Area 4 (Social Institutions and Behavior)** General Education Program requirement. Our objectives will therefore combine an introduction to sociology with considering the utility of a sociological perspective for making sense of the world around us. By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- **Describe** several aspects of how social organization and individual behavior are intertwined within contemporary US society;
- Identify meaningful dimensions of *primary* research methods that allow you to critically **interpret & evaluate** social scientific evidence, for qualitative *and* quantitative approaches;
- Use existing empirical data & theoretical reasoning to **develop & critique** extensions of existing knowledge to pose new questions for investigation and/or specify evidence-based approaches to interpreting/constructing policies.

\* This course benefited from syllabi/materials for similar courses taught by Jenny Trinitapoli (Penn State University) and Shamus Khan (Columbia University). I gratefully acknowledge their influence in developing the course.

- Find **secondary research** that allows you to determine whether posed research questions have been satisfactorily resolved, or strategize ways to address those that remain unanswered.
- **Write** more clearly than when you started this course.

### Required Books:

1. Harrison, Jill Ann. 2012. *Buoyancy on the Bayou: Shrimpers face the Rising Tide of Globalization*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University (ILR) Press.
2. Rossman, Gabriel. 2012. *Climbing the Charts: What Radio Airplay Tells Us about the Diffusion of Innovation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
3. Sharkey, Patrick. 2013. *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress toward Racial Equality*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
4. Watts, Duncan J. 2011. *Everything is Obvious (Once You Know the Answer): How Common Sense Fails Us*. New York, NY: Crown Business.

All books are available in the campus bookstore, can be readily found for sale online, and are available as e-books (the e-book for #3 is available for free via the AU library), and (#s 1,2,4) have been placed on reserve for use in the library.

### Additional Blackboard readings (These may be changed and others may be added at a later date):

- Berger, Peter L. 1963. *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*. New York: Anchor Books. (excerpts)
- Dixon, Marc & Andrew W. Martin. 2012. "We Can't Win This on Our Own: Unions, Firms and Mobilization of External Allies in Labor Disputes." *American Sociological Review* 77(6): 946-969.
- Downey, Douglas B., Paul T. von Hippel & Melanie Hughes. 2008. "Are 'Failing' Schools Really Failing? Using Seasonal Comparison to Evaluate School Effectiveness." *Sociology of Education* 81(3): 242-270.
- King, Marissa & Peter Bearman. 2009. "Diagnostic Change and the Increased Prevalence of Autism." *International Journal of Epidemiology* 38: 1224-1234.
- Lena, Jennifer C. & Richard A. Peterson. 2008. "Classification as Culture: Types and Trajectories of Music Genres." *American Sociological Review* 73:697-718.
- Salganik, Matthew J. & Duncan J. Watts. 2008. "Leading the Herd Astray: An Experimental Study of Self-Fulfilling Prophecies in an Artificial Cultural Market." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 71(4): 338-355.

## Course Structure & Requirements

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### Structure:

This course is organized as a seminar. I do this *very* intentionally for a number of related reasons:

1. Our aim is to enhance learning skills that equip you to build knowledge. I'm not interested in seeing how much you can cram into memory, momentarily regurgitate, and then immediately forget. As such, the course has no exams. The skills you're after here are to engage ideas by: distilling them down to their central point(s), identify critical elements for evaluating their claims, and clearly communicating your interpretation of them to others.
2. Our efforts to develop this skill will require a lot of reading. It will also mean regularly participating in class (you are expected not only to attend, but to be prepared to contribute to each meeting). You will also produce regular (but mostly brief) writing. In combination, these will encourage you to thoroughly engage material.

3. My expectations of you, and yours of me should be the same for each class. Take advantage of this. This leaves it up to you to determine how to deal with life outside our classroom. No need for doctor's notes or absence justifications. Simply be appropriate in your own determination of when you need to miss a class session; then pick back up with regular contributions to our class.
4. In sum, I anticipate this structure will allow you to retain more from our class. You will strengthen skills you can use to enhance other classes, and be more informed consumer/producer of knowledge in general. Your writings will be more accessible and potentially helpful to you in the future when encountering events (including classes) for which they are salient.

### Requirements:

#### I - Reading Reactions (up to 150 points, 25 points each):

For **6** of the 9 assigned daily readings, you will be responsible to complete a *brief* (250-400 words) reading reaction. The central aim of this assignment is to *make sense of what you've read*. What this entails can vary by person and reading. Sufficient demonstration of reading engagement can include (but is not necessarily limited to): summarizing (in your own words) the central aspects of the reading's argument/findings, questioning/critiquing the reading's premise/approach, identifying aspects that the reading should have covered but didn't, etc. In evaluating these, my primary question will be "does this show *accurate engagement* with the assigned reading?"

#### II - Reading Extensions (up to 150 points total, 50 points each):

For **3** of the 4 assigned books, you will be responsible to complete a paper (~900 words) that extends the perspective offered in the book. The central aim of this assignment is to *use what you've read*. The idea is to build on (one of) the book's central argument(s) to describe how that theory/evidence would help to make sense of question(s) *not* addressed by the book. You can derive examples for extension from theory or empirical contexts, using external sources or other course readings where appropriate. In evaluating these, I will be assessing two primary questions - (i) "How accurately have you represented the central point(s) of the reading used?" and (ii) "Does your extension adhere to sound logical *and* appropriate social scientific reasoning in application of those idea(s)?"

#### III - In-Class Exercises & Discussion Board (up to 150 points total)

The final component of your grade will be a combination of in-class exercises, which will come in a variety of formats. Some will be quizzes, which will occur at the beginning of class and ask you to summarize key points from assigned readings and/or previous classes' lectures. Some will be in-class writings that will provide you an opportunity to react to the day's material. Others will be more participatory in nature (e.g., debate, brief presentations, etc.). **Each class session** will have some form of in-class exercise (14 total opportunities). Your **top 13** grades from these will count. There are **NO** opportunities to make up in-class exercises.

In addition to in-class exercises - and to spur in-class discussions - each reading has a discussion forum on Blackboard for you to post questions that interpret/evaluate/extend assigned readings. Posts that demonstrate a basic understanding of the reading *and* interpret/use it in some meaningful way - i.e., do NOT simply restate it's central point(s) - can earn **up to 5 points per reading** (i.e., up to *half* an "exercise" grade). Discussion questions should be posted **no later than midnight** the day **before** a reading is **first** to be covered in class. Discussion questions can account for up to **30** exercise points.

Finally, for one In-class Exercise grade, you can sign up to initiate the discussion of one assigned reading. This will entail a presentation of approximately five minutes per person. The presentation

should summarize the main ideas from the assigned reading, provide some critical commentary on the reading and provide a few questions that will help guide our discussion's interpretation of the reading. A sign-up sheet for serving as a Discussion Guide for a reading will be made available in class. It will be administered on a first-come, first-served basis. If multiple people sign up for the same reading, it will be up to you to coordinate amongst yourselves to be sure that: (1) between the presentations, you cover the full assigned reading, and (2) that your presentations are not redundantly covering the same material. It is up to you to decide how to do that (i.e., whether you will break up the reading into separate sections that you present independently or if you cooperatively develop a joint presentation).

## Grading

### Potential Points / Allocation:

- |                      |                   |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| • Reactions          | 150 (33%)         |
| • Extensions         | 150 (33%)         |
| • In-class Exercises | 150 (33%)         |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>450 (100%)</b> |

### Final Grade Computation:

Your final grade will be determined by summing the number of points earned across all required course components. The "In-class Exercises" section has the opportunity to earn more than 150 points. Up to **10** "excess" points (i.e., no more than **160** total) can be retained from this component of the course for your final grade. No other "extra credit" will be available in this course. Letter grades will be determined from your point total as follows:

<u>Letter Grade</u>	<u>Points Range</u>	<u>Letter Grade</u>	<u>Points Range</u>	<u>Letter Grade</u>	<u>Points Range</u>
<b>A</b>	419+	<b>B</b>	373-393	<b>C</b>	328-348
<b>A-</b>	405-418	<b>B-</b>	360-372	<b>C-</b>	315-327
<b>B+</b>	394-404	<b>C+</b>	349-371	<b>D</b>	270-314

Any student accumulating 269 or fewer points will receive an F for the course.

### Grading Expectations:

The grades you earn will reflect how thoroughly your work demonstrates the specific assignment requirements *and* overall course aims, which will correspond to the following sets of expectations:

- F Work that **fails to address** the assignment's **minimum requirements** will earn grades in the F range.
- D Work that **incompletely addresses** the assignment's **minimum requirements** will earn grades in the D range.
- C Work that **addresses only** the assignment's **minimum requirements** will earn grades in the C range.
- B Work that, **in addition to** meeting an assignment's **minimum requirements**, also **occasionally** reflects **engagement** with other material from the course where appropriate, in ways that **meet course objectives** will earn grades in the B range.
- A Work that, **in addition to** meeting an assignment's **minimum requirements**, also **consistently** reflects **engagement** with other material from the course where appropriate & in ways that **exceed course objectives** will earn grades in the A range.

## Course and College Policies

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### Due Dates:

Since there are multiple opportunities to complete each assignment in this course, **NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS** will be accepted for any reason. Plan accordingly. Assignments are due as follows:

- Reading Reactions are due **before class** on the day the reading is to be covered.
- Reading Extensions are due by **midnight** on the dates listed on the course calendar.
- In-class Exercises can **only** be completed when they are administered in class.
- Discussion Questions are due by **midnight** the day **before** a reading is covered in class.

### Written Assignments Format:

Reading Reactions & Extensions should:

- Be submitted as Word (.doc or .docx) files to the corresponding Blackboard Assignment;
- Be named as YourLastName\_YYYY-MM-DD\_Assignment (e.g., my Reading Reaction to the King reading would be adams\_20140205\_Reaction2.doc);
- Be properly formatted which includes:
  - ✓ double-spaced,
  - ✓ 1-inch margins,
  - ✓ 11 or 12 point New Times Roman font, and
  - ✓ page numbers;
- Be properly sourced - i.e., providing full **in-text citations and bibliographic information** when referencing others' ideas. (A guide for using ASA Format is available on Blackboard.);
- Be spell-checked and carefully proofread before submission.

When submitting an assignment to Blackboard, please be certain that you have the final version you intend to upload for grading. Re-submissions will not be accepted for any “I forgot to...” reasons, and original submissions are the versions that will be graded.

### Course Communication:

- The Syllabus has answers to the most common questions pertaining to the course. Be sure check the syllabus first, before asking me about due-dates, assignment requirements, etc.
- Blackboard will be used for the majority of communication in this course. You can find a copy of the syllabus, additional assigned readings, and all assignments there. I will also post any lecture notes after each class. I strongly encourage you to make visits to this resource a regular part of your preparation for this course.
- E-mail should be used for quick communications (things that can be responded to in no more than a few sentences); use office hours for anything requiring more depth. You should only use your AU email account for communication related to this course; I will not read/reply to emails from your personal accounts (e.g., Yahoo!, Hotmail, etc). Please consider e-mail as subject to the same standards of communication as you would all other forms written material in this course (i.e., you should use complete sentences, proper punctuation, etc.). I will typically respond to email within **48 hours**. I will **NOT, under any circumstances** discuss grades over email.
- Office Hours are available to add to your experience in this course. Please make use of them. These are meant to supplement required course work and in-class elements. As such, while I am happy to discuss course materials or other aspects of sociology/academia in general with you during this time, they should not be viewed as an opportunity to ask, “What did I miss in class?” (You should find peers in the class with whom you can share notes for that purpose.)

**A Note on Participation:**

The topics of study in this course will at times touch on personal and/or controversial issues. Your thoughts and opinions in discussing these topics will be valued and respected. To foster this, the following ground rules will apply for all in-class *and* online interactions:

- 1- Be respectful of others and their opinions. While healthy debate will be constructive in the learning process, disrespectful or insulting contributions *will not be tolerated*.
- 2- The content of your expressed *opinions* will in no way affect your grade. You are encouraged to share your *thoughtful* opinions, beliefs and values openly. The class will particularly benefit from statements that support and/or challenge both those of other students and the instructor (*as long as it is done in a manner consistent with rule #1*).

**Academic Integrity and Conduct:**

All students are expected to follow the policies of American University with respect to academic conduct and integrity. For more information on academic integrity at AU, please go to <http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/code.cfm>. Your registration in this course assumes your familiarity with these standards. Any violations of this policy will be referred to the AIC administrator.

**Request for Academic Adjustment or Accommodation:**

Please notify the instructor at the beginning of the class if you are a student with a documented disability who may require appropriate accommodations so we can make arrangements to ensure your needs are addressed in this course. If you need university assistance with documentation or with services, please see Disability Support Services (206 Mary Graydon, 885-3315), or visit their website at: <http://www.american.edu/ocl/dss/For-Students-Services-Provided.cfm>

**University Services:**

Students are encouraged to seek out appropriate university services that support student learning and success. Among those, where appropriate, please consider making use of the Academic Support Center (243 Mary Graydon Center, [www.american.edu/ocl/asc/index1.html](http://www.american.edu/ocl/asc/index1.html)); the computer services/technology help (<http://www.american.edu/oit/index.cfm>), the Writing Center (228 Battelle-Tompkins Hall, (<http://www.american.edu/cas/writing>), and Library Research Help (<http://www.american.edu/library/ask/index.cfm>).

**Emergency Preparedness:** In the event of a declared pandemic (influenza or other communicable disease), American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence due to illness. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of a declared pandemic or other emergency, students should refer to the AU Web site ([www.prepared.american.edu](http://www.prepared.american.edu)) and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/ college-specific information.

**Tentative Course Schedule**

**Please Note, this schedule is subject to change – all changes will be announced in class.**

Day	Topic	Readings Due	Assignments Due
15 Jan	Introductions	none	
<b>1 - What is Sociology?</b>			
22 Jan	The "Sociological Perspective"	#BB Berger 1963	
29 Jan	Sociological Knowledge	<i>Watts</i> *	Reaction 1
05 Feb	Medicalization	#BB King 2009	Reaction 2
12 Feb	<i>EiO</i> cont'd	none	Extension 1
<b>2 - Inequality</b>			
19 Feb	Intergenerational Inequality	<i>Sharkey</i> #	Reaction 3
26 Feb	Education	#BB Downey 2008	Reaction 4
05 Mar	<i>SiP</i> cont'd	none	Extension 2
12 Mar	<b>NO CLASS MEETING - Spring Break</b>		
<b>3 - Labor</b>			
19 Mar	Louisiana Shrimpers	<i>Harrison</i>	Reaction 5
26 Mar	Labor Unions	#BB Dixon 2012	Reaction 6
02 Apr	<i>BotB</i> cont'd	none	Extension 3
<b>4 - Diffusion</b>			
09 Apr	Diffusion	<i>Rossman</i>	Reaction 7
16 Apr	Music Scenes	#BB Lena 2008	Reaction 8
23 Apr	Experiments	#BB Salganik 2008	Reaction 9
30 Apr	Extension 4 (due – by 11:25am)		

Reading Notes:

\* For the Watts book, focus on all of Part 1, and any 1 chapter from Part 2.

# For the Sharkey book, focus on chapters 1, 3-5 and 6 OR 7.