

Sociology 117 | Sports as a Social Institution

Instructor: **Linus Huang**

Office Hours: **Mondays, 11:30 AM-12:30 PM; Wednesdays, 12:30-1:30 PM, 434 Barrows**

E-mail: **lbhuang@berkeley.edu**

Final exam: **Group 6; Tuesday, May 10th, 2016 11:30-2:30 PM**

Readers: **TBA**

Course Overview

Why a sociology of *sports*, of all things? We think of sports as having its own inherent truths and necessities, none of which have anything to do with sociological theory. Action on the field of play, for instance, is explained purely by tactical and physiological factors. Consumption of sport (i.e., being a sports fan) is shaped by rational choice—if teams win, fans come; if they lose, fans stay away.

The premise of this course is that the world of sports is not simply driven by tactical or economic necessity but is instead inextricably shaped by *social institutions*. Social institutions include customs, traditions, norms, and/or rules—both formal and informal—that define our taken-for-granted understandings about how sports should “work”. This premise is important for two reasons. First, social institutions may or may not shape sports in a tactically/economically “rational” way, depending on how we define what is rational. Second, and perhaps more importantly, to the extent that sports are shaped by social institutions, they embody social relations—including relations of inequality or injustice.

The course will be organized around case studies of different areas of the world sport. Our purpose is not to create a systematic classification of the sporting world but rather to explore how “the way things are” in sports are not simply about calculating the right economic/legal policy but are about studying social relations. The case studies I have chosen do reflect some sense of what some of the “hottest” topics related to sports are today. But they are to be taken more as a foundation for discussing the institutional nature of sports than as a firm set of restrictions about what we should and should not discuss.

Grading

Your grade will be determined by the following four components and nothing else:

- One “sports fandom” online survey (5%; details below).
- Two midterm exams, each weighted at 40% (80% total).
- A final exam, administered during exam week (15%).

Sports fandom survey (5%): Early in the semester I will administer a survey through bCourses to assess elements of how you participate and/or follow sports (if at all). Data collected from this survey will supplement our discussion of sports fandom in the sixth week of instruction. The only way you can fail to get the full 5% credit for the “assignment” is to not answer one or more of the questions.

Instructions and other details on taking the survey will be explained at some point in lecture.

Midterm exams (40% each; 80% total): These two exams will be take-home. They will be both distributed and submitted through bCourses. Each will be 3-4 “short essay”-type questions.

Final exam (15%): The final exam will be administered in-class during the University’s officially scheduled timeslot for this course: Tuesday, May 10th, 2016, 11:30-2:30 PM. The exam will be multiple choice and cumulative. I will distribute a study guide for the exam in the last week of instruction.

The grading scale I use is as follows. ‘[‘ means including, and ‘)’ means excluding. So, ‘[83-87]’ for example means everything greater than or equal to 83 and less than but not including 87.

A+	[99+	A	[93-99)	A-	[90-93)
B+	[87-90)	B	[83-87)	B-	[80-83)
C+	[77-80)	C	[73-77)	C-	[70-73)
D+	[67-70)	D	[63-67)	D-	[60-63)
F	[0-60)				

During the course of the semester, all scores will be recorded to two significant digits after the decimal. When it comes time to compute overall course grades, however, I will round the course score (not each individual exam score) to the nearest whole number to determine your letter grade.

There are no other discretionary considerations that will factor into your grade. Furthermore, I do not offer extra credit beyond that which I may build in to the midterm and final exams.

There are no surprises in how I calculate course grades. The GRADES section on bCourses incorporates the weightings above and will accurately keep you apprised of your course progress. During the semester, with a little arithmetic, you can figure out how you need to do on subsequent exams to earn a particular grade.

Academic Honesty, Classroom Conduct

Violations of academic honesty have unfortunately been on the rise at UC Berkeley over the past few years, prompting among other things the posting of plaques in general classrooms around campus re-emphasizing the code of academic conduct. The general rule of thumb behind the code is: act in such a way that no one could possibly question your conduct.

Plagiarism—copying someone else’s work and presenting it as your own—has been the central problem. Copying off either another student or off the readings (whether the readings are on or outside of the syllabus) both constitute plagiarism. We will use TurnItIn software to detect any instances of plagiarism on submitted assignments. All instances of plagiarism will be punished by an immediate **-0-** on the *entire* assignment in question, plus a report to the Office of Academic Affairs at my discretion.

Forming studying groups on your own is highly encouraged, especially since there are no discussion sections to accompany this course. If these groups are used to struggle through ideas or debate topics (both are also good uses of class time, by the way!), then the effort expended can be very rewarding. However, if groups are used simply to memorize a classmate's notes by rote, to subsequently recite on exams, **this is effectively another form of plagiarism** as far as I am concerned. I use this specific example because it recently popped up in one of my courses.

Study group meetings should be suspended while a take-home exam is being taken. They can begin again after the exam due date has been reached.

Use of laptops, tablets, smartphones, etc. in class. I use my laptop for virtually everything and do not expect students not to utilize the various digital technologies we have at our disposal today. However, if you are texting, Twittering, watching Netflix, or some other such thing in class, you are likely distracting others and I will ask you to leave.

Reading/Exam/Survey Schedule

All readings for this course are available on bCourses in the READINGS folder of the FILES section.

Readings associated with a date are to be completed prior to the class meeting on that day. What follows may best be considered a preliminary plan. It may become necessary to adjust the reading schedule as the semester unfolds. If this happens, I will make the change(s) on bCourses—check the SYLLABUS section online to see the most up-to-date schedule. I will not change this PDF file.

Jan	20	Wed	Course introduction
			<i>Readings: none</i>
	22	Fri	(cont'd; no readings)
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	25	Mon	(cont'd; no readings)
	27	Wed	Social institutions on the field of play
			<i>Reading: M. Gladwell, "How David Beats Goliath" <i>The New Yorker</i> 11 May 2009</i>
	29	Fri	Social institutions in pro sports organizations
			<i>Readings:</i>
			• M. Lewis, <i>Moneyball</i> ch 2, 4
			• D. Palmateer, "Outta Left Field" <i>Baseball Prospectus</i> 11 Nov 2015
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Feb	1	Mon	(cont'd; no new readings)

- Feb 3 Wed **How does gender shape what counts as a “sport”?**
Reading: L. Grindstaff & E. West, “Cheerleading and the Gendered Politics of Sport”
- 5 Fri (cont’d; no new readings)

SPORTS FANDOM SURVEY must be taken by FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2016

- 8 Mon **Why don’t women play American football?**
Readings:
- A. Markovits & L. Rensmann, *Gaming the World* pp. 157-187
 - D. Foley, “The Great American Football Ritual”
 - You might save the Foley reading for Wednesday 2/10, if you want. At any rate, read Markovits & Rensmann first.
- 10 Wed (cont’d; no new readings)
- 12 Wed (cont’d; no new readings)
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15 Mon ******* PRESIDENTS’ DAY: NO CLASS *******

- 17 Wed **Racialized meaning in sport**
Reading: A. Felder & S. Amitin, “How Baseball Announcers Subtly Favor American Players Over Foreign Ones” *The Atlantic* 27 Aug 2012
- 19 Fri **Racial and gender equality in sports**
Reading: The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES), “2014/5 Racial and Gender Report Card” (composite of individual MLB/MLS/NBA/NFL/WNBA reports)
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- 22 Mon (cont’d; no new readings)
- 24 Wed **Understanding sports fandom sociologically**
Reading: B. McGrath, “When Fantasy Sports Beat Real Ones” *The New Yorker* 13 Apr 2015
- 26 Fri (cont’d; no new readings)

TAKE-HOME MIDTERM EXAM #1 DISTRIBUTED FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2016

- 29 Mon (cont’d; no new readings)
- Mar 2 Wed **Why are college sports so popular in the U.S.?**
Optional reading: A. Markovits & L. Rensmann, *Gaming the World* ch 6 “The Limits of Globalization”

TAKE-HOME MIDTERM EXAM #1 DUE WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2, 2016

Mar	4	Fri	The institution of the student-athlete <i>Reading:</i> T. Branch, “The Shame of College Sports” <i>The Atlantic</i> Oct 2011
	7	Mon	(cont’d; no new readings)
	9	Wed	(cont’d; no new readings)
	11	Fri	Who plays college sports? <i>Reading:</i> Women’s Sports Foundation, “Who’s Playing College Sports?” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The PDF contains 48 pages, but there are only 42 numbered pages. Read the pages numbered 2 through 38.
	14	Mon	(cont’d; no new readings)
	16	Wed	The social organization of competition <i>Reading:</i> E. Leifer, <i>Making the Majors</i> intro + ch 1
	18	Fri	(cont’d; no new readings)
	21	Mon	***** SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS *****
	23	Wed	***** SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS *****
	25	Fri	***** SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS *****
	28	Mon	Why did the NFL surpass MLB as America’s #1 sports league? <i>Reading:</i> E. Leifer, <i>Making the Majors</i> ch 5
	30	Wed	(cont’d; no new readings)
Apr	1	Fri	Sports and media <i>Readings:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> J. Miller, S. Eder & R. Sandomir, “College’s Most Dominant Player? It’s ESPN” <i>The New York Times</i> 24 Aug 2013 S. Eder, R. Sandomir & J. Miller, “At Louisville, Athletic Boom is Rooted in ESPN Partnership” <i>The New York Times</i> 25 Aug 2013
	4	Mon	(cont’d; no new readings)
	6	Wed	Sports and political economy <i>Reading:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Zimbalist, “May the Best Team Win” D. Coates, “A Closer Look at Stadium Subsidies” <i>The American</i> 29 Apr 2008

Apr 8 Fri (cont'd)

TAKE-HOME MIDTERM EXAM #2 DISTRIBUTED FRIDAY, APRIL 8, 2016

11 Mon **Sports and nationalism, part 1**

Readings:

- A. Bertoli, "Nationalism and Interstate Conflict: Analyzing Two Natural Experiments From International Sports"
- *video in-class:* BBC | Panorama, "Stadiums of Hate"

13 Wed (cont'd; no new readings)

TAKE-HOME MIDTERM EXAM #2 DUE WEDNESDAY, APRIL 13, 2016

15 Fri **Sports and nationalism, part 2**

Reading: R. Poli, "The Denationalization of Sport"

18 Mon **The cultural diffusion of sports**

Reading: J. Kaufman & O. Patterson, "Cross-National Cultural Diffusion: The Global Spread of Cricket"

20 Wed (cont'd; no new readings)

22 Fri (cont'd; no new readings)

25 Mon **An institutionalist approach to deviance in sports**

Reading: B. Sluggett, "Creating the 'Pure' Athlete" ch 2

27 Wed (cont'd; no new readings)

29 Fri **Course wrap-up and evaluations**

May 2 Mon ******* READING,**

4 Wed ******* RECITATION, and**

6 Fri ******* REVIEW (no class)**

May 10 Tue **FINAL EXAM IN-CLASS MAY 10, 2016 11:30-2:30 PM**