

Sociology 117 | Sports as a Social Institution

Instructor: **Linus Huang**

Office Hours: **Mondays, 1:30-2:30 PM, 487 Barrows**

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Final exam: **Wednesday, May 10th, 7-10 PM**

Readers: **TBD**

Course Overview

The late sociologist Pierre Bourdieu wrote that the mission of a sociology of sport is to understand how the *supply* of sporting activities and the *social demand* to either participate or spectate in them come to be. There is no shortage of passionate, reasoned discussion about sports in the world today, but this discussion almost always assumes the existence of things that Bourdieu believed ought to be the proper objects of investigation themselves. We debate whether one player is better than another, whether one team is better than another, what sports strategy is more effective than another, whether *X* is a sport but *Y* is not, whether college athletes should be paid or not, etc., without questioning where the criteria we use to evaluate one position or another come from, what social forces produced these criteria, and/or what the social implications of “how sports work” are vs. possible alternatives that we often aren’t even aware exist.

The purpose of this course is to understand how the sports world is *institutionally constructed*. To say that sports are institutionally constructed is to say that they are shaped not simply by universal sports imperatives of logic, efficiency, profit, physiology or biology, athletic merit, etc., but by *social institutions*—cognitive understandings of the world shared and reinforced by social groups that have legitimacy (are seen as “legit”) whether or not they are, upon reflection, compatible with the supposed athletic meritocracy of sports. Against the notion that the supply and demand for sports simply reflect essential needs that have existed for all human history, our approach in 117 will be to investigate the way that social institutions shape both the supply of sporting activities in contemporary society and the forms in which we demand (or don’t demand) these activities.

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 later during the term. 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 3-5 “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: Wednesday, May 10th, 2017, 7:00-10:00 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:

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|----|-------|---|-------|----|-------|
| A+ | 99+ | A | 93-98 | A- | 90-92 |
| B+ | 87-89 | B | 83-86 | B- | 80-82 |
| C+ | 77-79 | C | 73-76 | C- | 70-72 |
| D+ | 67-69 | D | 63-66 | D- | 60-62 |
| F | 0-59 | | | | |

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.

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|-----|----|-----|----------------------------|
| Jan | 18 | Wed | Course introduction |
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No readings.

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| | 20 | Fri | (cont'd) |
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| | 23 | Mon | (cont'd) |
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| | 25 | Wed | What counts as “sport”? |
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Readings:

- Laura Grindstaff & Emily West, “Cheerleading and the Gendered Politics of Sport” *Social Problems* 53(4): 500-518
- Ben McGrath, “Good Game: The rise of the professional cyber athlete” *The New Yorker* 24 Nov 2014

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| | 27 | Fri | (cont'd) |
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| | 30 | Mon | (cont'd) |
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Feb 1 Wed **Why isn't American football played by women?**

Readings:

- Andrei Markovits & Lars Rensmann, "A Silent 'Feminization' of Global Sports Cultures"? ch 4 (but just pp. 157-187) from *Gaming the World: How Sports Are Reshaping Global Politics and Culture*
- Douglas Foley, "The Great American Football Ritual: Reproducing Race, Class, and Gender Inequality"

3 Fri (cont'd)

******* SPORTS FANDOM SURVEY DUE FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 3RD *******

6 Mon **Race and sports, Part I: participation**

No readings.

8 Wed **Race and sports, Part II: fan consumption in an American context**

Readings:

- Malcolm Gladwell, "The Sports Taboo" *The New Yorker* 19 May 1997
- Adam Felder & Seth Amitin, "How Baseball Announcers Subtly Favor American Players Over Foreign Ones" *The Atlantic* 27 Aug 2012

10 Fri (cont'd)

13 Mon **Race and sports, Part III: fan consumption in an international context**

Video in-class: BBC | Panorama, "Stadiums of Hate"

15 Wed **Social institutions on the field of play**

*Reading: Malcolm Gladwell, "How David Beats Goliath" *The New Yorker* 11 May 2009*

17 Fri (cont'd)

******* TAKE-HOME MIDTERM #1 DISTRIBUTED ON BCOURSES FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17TH *******

20 Mon ******* PRESIDENT'S DAY: NO CLASS**

22 Wed **Institutions of sports fandom**

Readings:

- Richard Giulianotti, "Supporters, Followers, Fans, and *Flâneurs*" *Journal of Sports & Social Issues* 26(1): 25-46
- Ben McGrath, "When Fantasy Sports Beat Real Ones" *The New Yorker* 13 Apr 2015

24 Fri (cont'd)

******* TAKE-HOME MIDTERM #1 DUE ON BCOURSES FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24TH *******

27 Mon (cont'd)

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| Mar | 1 | Wed | How do sports become popular?, Part I: The role of sports leagues <i>Reading: Eric Leifer, Making the Majors intro, ch 1, ch 5</i> |
| | 3 | Fri | (cont'd) |
| | 6 | Mon | (cont'd) |
| | 8 | Wed | How do sports become popular?, Part II: The role of social class <i>Reading: Jason Kaufman & Orlando Patterson, "Cross-National Cultural Diffusion: The Global Spread of Cricket"</i> |
| | 10 | Fri | (cont'd) |
| | 13 | Mon | (cont'd) |
| | 15 | Wed | Why are college sports so popular in the U.S.? <i>No readings.</i> |
| | 17 | Fri | The organizational field of college athletics in the U.S. <i>Reading: Taylor Branch, "The Shame of College Sports" The Atlantic Oct 2011</i> |
| | 20 | Mon | (cont'd) |
| | 22 | Wed | (cont'd) |
| | 24 | Fri | (cont'd) |
| | 27 | Mon | ***** SPRING |
| | 29 | Wed | ***** BREAK |
| | 31 | Fri | ***** (no class) |
| Apr | 3 | Mon | The economics of big-time college athletics <i>Readings:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • James Andrew Miller, Steve Eder & Richard Sandomir, "College Football's Most Dominant Player? It's ESPN" <i>The New York Times</i> 24 Aug 2013 • Steve Eder, Richard Sandomir & James Andrew Miller, "At Louisville, Athletic Boom Is Rooted in ESPN Partnership" <i>The New York Times</i> 25 Aug 2013 |
| | 5 | Wed | (cont'd) |
| | 7 | Mon | (cont'd) |

***** TAKE-HOME MIDTERM #2 DISTRIBUTED ON BCOURSES FRIDAY, APRIL 7TH *****

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| Apr | 10 | Mon | The political economy of professional team sports <i>Readings:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dennis Coates, “A Closer Look at Stadium Subsidies” <i>The American</i> 29 Apr 2008 • Rick Eckstein & Kevin Delaney, “New Sports Stadiums, Community Self-Esteem, and Community Collective Conscience” |
| | 12 | Wed | (cont’d) |
| | 14 | Fri | (cont’d) |

******* TAKE-HOME MIDTERM #2 DUE ON BCOURSES FRIDAY, APRIL 14TH *******

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| | 17 | Mon | Sports & nationalism, Part I <i>Reading:</i> Andrew Bertoli, “Nationalism and Interstate Conflict: A Regression Discontinuity Analysis”, 21 Jul 2013 |
| | 19 | Wed | Sports & nationalism, Part II <i>Reading:</i> Raffaele Poli, “The Denationalization of Sport” |
| | 21 | Fri | (cont’d) |

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| | 24 | Mon | An institutionalist approach to deviance in sports <i>Reading:</i> Bryan Sluggett, “Creating the ‘Pure’ Athlete” ch 2 |
| | 26 | Wed | (cont’d) |
| | 28 | Fri | (cont’d) |

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| May | 1 | Mon | ***** READING, |
| | 3 | Wed | ***** RECITATION, and |
| | 5 | Fri | ***** REVIEW (no class) |

May 10 Wed **FINAL EXAM IN-CLASS MAY 10, 2017 7:00-10:00 PM**