

Sociology 120
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Tu Th 12:30pm-2pm. 101 Morgan
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Economy and Society

In this class, we are going to explore two different ways that sociology understands the relationship between society and the economy. On the one hand, there are sociologists who emphasize that the economy is profoundly shaped by social, cultural, and political life. That is, that markets are far from neutral outcomes but instead depend on the organizational character of firms, governments, laws, culture, moral projects, and trust between people. Prices themselves are not mere reflections of available supply and demand but are dependent on the social relations that make up markets. Sociologists have shown this to be true in the study of market formation as well as the transformation of markets. We are going to learn about the extent to which markets are “embedded” in society.

On the other hand, there are many sociologists who work to emphasize just how much the economy shapes social life. Among many others, class, the financialization of firms, working conditions, debt, growing economic inequality, and patterns of intergenerational wealth have all been shown to influence a broad array of non-economic life. We can see the economic character of social life in such phenomena as racial identity, gender, health, family life, sexuality, and political beliefs.

This course schedule is divided into five parts. Course assignments will coincide with these five parts (five short essays). The first is an analytical perspective that sees institutions (and the social relations that support them) as critical to the formation, maintenance, and transformation of markets. In this perspective the government is not a separate story from the operation of the market, but critical to the smooth functioning of the economy. The question to ask in this perspective is what institutional projects result in positive outcomes and which result in negative outcomes.

Second, we will endeavor to understand a debate about the relationship between the value of commodities and their price. Does price reflect something objective about the value of commodities (either through supply and demand or the value of the labor involved) or is it something that humans come to agree upon in social coordination. We will explore this topic in the areas of real estate, the global market for cotton, and the valuation of “unicorn” start-ups by venture capital firms.

Third, we will turn to the “financialization” of the U.S. economy during the past 40 years. This is a major change in the way that firms are run, work unfolds, inequality, and debt is allocated that has profoundly shaped recent generations and it is one you should know about. The goal here is to understand just how much the rise of finance and the shareholder conception of firms shapes social life.

Fourth, we turn to the way that the economy shapes race, gender, sexuality, and political beliefs. We will explore the role of neighborhood change in Chicago, racial patterns of inheritance, sex work on the frontiers of Asian finance, and political beliefs in the heartland of America.

Finally, we will turn to a debate about capitalism. We will consider those who see crisis and inevitable demise as well as those who see a more stable situation, in which diversification of the economy has essentially brackets periodic economic crises. My hope is that by the end of the class you will have some way of making up your own mind in this debate – and **hopefully will help me make up my mind too!**

Class Format

My form of teaching is primarily made up of short lectures and heavy engagement in discussion with students in class. **If you know you are someone who primarily likes to sit back and digest information on slides or zone out of class I may not be the instructor for you** In each class, I typically get students to talk about their preliminary understanding of the material, provide a short lecture, and then return to class discussion to get students to rearticulate the material in their own voices. I will break up my lectures with short polls, questions, and answer sessions, even breakout sessions, and discussion of some issue of the moment. There is a constant flow of relevant news that we will examine day to day with the intellectual tools we are developing. **If you see something interesting forward it to me via email and if it works, I will use it.** In my experience, this provides for a more vibrant, spontaneous, and fruitful learning experience.

I highly recommend that you do the readings before class. There is one article/chapter assigned per class and they are not easy. While you may not totally understand them at first, it will make the lectures more comprehensible. Then, you should return to the readings and ask questions about what you did not understand. The writing assignments are meant to further push you to express yourself and the issues at stake in the material. To quote Neil Fligstein of the sociology department: “Learning is often about repetition. Multiple exposures to the same material in different settings and with different ways of absorbing the material make it more likely that you will grasp it...”

COURSE POLICIES:

- If you will require academic accommodations, please inform the professor at the beginning of the semester. Requests for religious accommodation should be submitted directly to the professor at the beginning of the semester (preferably within the first two weeks). It is the student's responsibility to notify the instructor in writing by the second week of the semester of any potential conflict of an exam with an extracurricular activity. **Students who need disability accommodations will be accommodated but need to apply with DSP for services.**
- Please familiarize yourself with the University's academic honesty policy: <http://sa.berkeley.edu/conduct/integrity>. The penalties for academic dishonesty are severe and ignorance is not an acceptable defense.

- We only have 3 hours per week together in class and a lot of material to cover. Thus, I ask that you please come to class prepared and attentive. It's a better experience for everyone if you are ready to participate and not messing around on laptops or cellphones. **I reserve the right to ask someone to close their electronic device if I feel it is distracting me or others.** To that end, consider this research in deciding whether to take notes on the laptop or by hand:
<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>.
- You are expected to attend lecture on a regular basis (and on time). I will post slide handouts after class, but these are meant as a study aid and not as a substitute for attendance. I urge you to become an active participant in discussions and activities to enhance your learning experience. **You will find that discussion is the main form of lecture in my class.**
- **Communication about changes in course material will be communicated mainly in-class.**

Readings

All the readings are in pdf form on Bcourses and/or linked to through databases in this syllabus. These readings are e-text accessible.

Course Assignments

Your grade will be based on your attendance/participation in class (25%) and five short papers (75%).

Attendance and participation will be assessed with **daily** short answer questions. Each class (there are 25) I will pose a question to the class at some point during the session (beginning, middle, end). These questions may relate to a concept covered in the class, real-world examples raised by your peers, or ask you to apply course ideas to your own lives. Students will submit their answers to these questions via the Bcourses quiz function by the end of the time allotted during class. **The expectation is 3-5 sentences each.** No late answers will be accepted, nor any answers submitted by students who did not attend the class. These answers will mainly be graded as completed (or not), but we will read them to keep track of your current understanding of course material. Special note: my aim with these questions is, of course, to keep track of attendance, but also to encourage you to engage with the material and articulate it in your own words.

The five short papers will coincide with each of the “five parts” of this course. After a few weeks reading, thinking, and reacting to each of these topics you will be asked to apply what you learned to a current event. This will require you to 1) find a news article that interests you; 2) analyze it using the various sociological tools we covered in the preceding weeks; and 3) write a short essay from these different sociological vantage points and how they allow us to see what is going on differently, explain the origins of the events, or hypothesis about some consequences of the event. These papers are to be 2-3 pages long, double-spaced with 12-point Times font and one-inch margins. These papers are to be turned in promptly via Bcourses on the following dates:

9/11 at noon.

10/9 at noon.

10/30 at noon.
11/23 at 5pm.
12/17 at 11:00 am.

As they approach, we will discuss expectations for these essays in greater detail, however it is of utmost importance that you come **prepared to the last class of each of the course parts** These classes will be devoted to sharing your paper ideas and developing your analysis. Please come prepared. Special note: As you can see this course uses these papers in lieu of examinations. I have made this decision because of the outstanding circumstances we are all facing this semester. It is my hope that these papers will allow you to digest the material in a serious manner and learn to apply them to your understanding of the current world.

Course Schedule

Week 1 – Course Intro

August 26

Part I. What is the sociological view of markets?

Week 2 – Market Formation, Stability, and Transformation

August 31. Fligstein, Neil. Chapter 4. pp 67-97, “The Theory of Fields and the Problem of Market Formation.” A Free PDF with Print Disability Access can be found here (you will need to sign up): <https://archive.org/details/architectureofma0000flig>.

September 2. W. Powell and L. Smith-Laurel. 2004. "Networks and economic life" pp. 379-402 A free PDF can be accessed on Bcourses or at this library link with Print Disability Access:
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/reader.action?docID=548759&ppg=670>

Week 3 – Case Application

September 7 Quinn, Sarah. “The Transformation of Morals in Markets: Death, Benefits, and the Exchange of Life Insurance Policies.” A free PDF can be accessed on Bcourses or at this library link with Print Disability Access:
https://search.library.berkeley.edu/permalink/01UCS_BER/s4lks2/cdi_proquest_miscellaneous_66716467.

September 9. Bring your own case/example for class discussion. Essay 1 due Saturday (9/11) at noon.

Part 2. What is the relationship between value and price?

Week 4 –What do Marx and neoclassical economists have in common?

September 14 – David Harvey, ch. 1 pp 1-23 “The Visualization of Capital as Value in Motion.” PDF available in Bcourses or

https://profilebooks.com/wp-content/uploads/wpallimport/files/PDFs/9781782833680_preview.pdf.

September 16 – Andre Orlean, ch. 1 pp 9-36. “Substance Value” pdf available in Bcourses or <https://direct-mit-edu.libproxy.berkeley.edu/books/book/3439/The-Empire-of-Value-A-New-Foundation-for-Economics>.

Week 5 – Can price determine value?

September 21. Gabriel Mac, “I was a Warehouse Wage Slave”, article access:

<https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/02/mac-mcclelland-free-online-shipping-warehouses-labor/>.

September 23. Boltanski and Esquerre, “Enrichment, Profit, Critique.” PDF available in Bourses or at:

https://search.library.berkeley.edu/permalink/01UCS_BER/s4lks2/cdi_scopus_primary_623621812.

Week 6 – Case application I

September 28. Max Besbris, ch. 4 in “Upsold: Real Estate Agents, Prices, and Neighborhood Inequality.” PDF available on Bcourses or at:

https://search.library.berkeley.edu/permalink/01UCS_BER/s4lks2/cdi_askewsholts_vlebooks_9780226721408.

September 30. Çalışkan, Koray, “The Meaning of Price in World Markets.” PDF available in Bcourses or at:

https://search.library.berkeley.edu/permalink/01UCS_BER/s4lks2/cdi_informaworld_taylorfrancis_310_1080_17530350903345462.

Week 7 – Case application II

October 5. Gornall and Strebulaev, “Squaring Venture Capital Valuations with Reality.” PDF availability on Bcourses or at:

https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2955455.

October 7. Bring your own case/example for class discussion. Essay 2 due Saturday (10/9) at noon.

Part III – Financialization and its Consequences

Week 8 – What is financialization and the rise of shareholder conception of value?

October 12. G. Krippner. 2011. “What is financialization?” Ch. 2 in Capitalizing on Crisis, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Ma. PDF available on Bcourses or at: https://search.library.berkeley.edu/permalink/01UCS_BER/s4lks2/cdi_askewsholts_vlebo oks_9780674735316.

October 1. Fligstein. "The rise of the Shareholder Value Conception of the Firm", Ch. 7. pp. 147-1169. Available for free at (must sign in): <https://archive.org/details/architectureofma0000flig>.

Week 9 – New Inequality

October 19. T. Volscho and N. Kelley. 2012. “The rise of the super-rich: power resources, taxes, financial markets, and the dynamics of the top 1 percent, 1949-2008”. American Sociological Review 77:679-700. PDF available on Bcourses or at: https://search.library.berkeley.edu/permalink/01UCS_BER/s4lks2/cdi_jstor_primary_41723056.

October 21. In-class Movie: “Capitalism hits the fan” by Richard Wolf.

Week 10 – The Transformation of Work

October 26. D. Weil. Ch. 1. 7-27. The Fissured Workplace. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press. PDF on Bcourses or available at: https://search.library.berkeley.edu/permalink/01UCS_BER/1thfj9n/alma991085861413806532.

October 28. Bring your own case/example for class discussion. Essay 3 due Saturday (10/30) at noon.

Part IV – The Economic Determinants of Social Life

Week 11. Wealth and Race

November 2. Oliver and Shapiro. Ch. 5. Pp. 93-128. “A Story of Two Nations: Race and Wealth.” PDF available online or at: https://search.library.berkeley.edu/permalink/01UCS_BER/1thfj9n/alma991085817371606532.

November 4. Pattillo, Mary Ch. 3 pp. 44-67 in “Black Picket Fences.” Available for free here (must sign up): <https://archive.org/details/blackpicketfence00mary/page/n9/mode/2up>.

Week 12 – Gender and Money

November 9. Hoang, Kimberly. “Flirting with Capital: Negotiating Perceptions of Pan-Asian Ascendancy and Western Decline in Global Sex Work.” PDF on bcourses or available at:

https://search.library.berkeley.edu/permalink/01UCS_BER/s4lks2/cdi_crossref_primary_10_1525_sp_2014_12303.

November 11 HOLIDAY

Week 13 – Case Applications

November 16. Daniel, Caitlin. “Economic Constraints on Taste Formation and the True Cost of Healthy Eating.” PDF Available on Bcourses or here:

https://search.library.berkeley.edu/permalink/01UCS_BER/s4lks2/cdi_openaire_primary_oai_dnet_od_267_384547bb1aa4a88d8a22697a20d93683.

November 18. Silva, Jennifer. Ch. 1 pp. 1-19 in “We’re Still here: Pain and Politics in the Heart of America.” Available on Bcourses.

Week 14

November 23. No Class. Essay 4 due at 5pm.

November 25 HOLIDAY

Part V – Capitalist Crisis or Capitalist Diversification?

Week 15.

November 30. Reifer, Thomas. “Giovanni Arrighi & The Long Durree of Geohistorical Capitalism.” PDF on Bcourses or Available here:

<https://jwsr.pitt.edu/ojs/jwsr/article/download/324/336/>.

December 2. Fligstein, Neil. Ch. 10. Pp. 223-237. “Conclusion.” Available for free at (must sign in): <https://archive.org/details/architectureofma0000flig>.

Week 16 Reading Week

Week 17

Friday December 17 essay due at 11:00am.