

## **Sociology 190**

### **Age of Anxiety: Risk and Uncertainty in the Modern World**

University of California, Berkeley  
Fall 2016, W 4-6 pm  
187 Dwinelle

Instructor: Shelly Steward  
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Office Hours: TBA

#### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

From the personal to the global, former sources of stability and predictability are declining and new sources of anxiety are flourishing. Economic inequality is at an all-time high. Contract, part-time, and project-based employment have drastically reduced job security. Media coverage of global and domestic terrorism abounds. At home, family structures are changing and dissolving. All of these trends speak to an era of rising insecurity. From the personal to the global, former sources of stability and predictability are declining and new sources of anxiety seem to be flourishing. This course examines and interrogates this “era of insecurity.” What is insecurity, how can we measure it, and what are its causes and consequences?

We will begin by defining insecurity, discussing how it can be measured, and exploring how it’s changed in recent years. We then examine personal insecurities—the individual experience of rising insecurity, changes to relationships and families, and differences in expectations and experiences of insecurity by gender. Next, we look at insecurity in the workplace, including how labor markets have changed, how workplace experiences have shifted, and how the meaning of insecurity differs by class. Finally, we’ll take a broader perspective, considering the state, global insecurity, and environmental change. Through the term, students will select and explore one area of contemporary insecurity to explore in-depth in a final paper.

#### **LEARNING GOALS:**

- Students will examine how the concept of insecurity relates to different realms of society, from both micro and macro perspectives
- Students will develop an understanding of the extent, causes, and consequences of insecurity in contemporary American society
- Students will analyze media reports and personal experiences sociologically and relate them to various theories of insecurity
- Students will develop analytic reading, writing, and speaking skills, including the completion of an extended paper write an extended paper drawing from a series of related examples

## COURSE COMPONENTS:

**Class Meetings:** You are expected to attend every class meeting having completed the readings listed on the syllabus for that day. Most classes will combine presentations, discussions, and interactive activities. Bring your readings to class. You are allowed one absence without penalty to your participation grade.

**Participation:** There are multiple ways to demonstrate your engagement with class. I encourage you to try all of them, and push yourself to become more comfortable with things that you might be hesitant to try at first. I am happy to provide you with some strategies for gaining confidence and comfort. That said, you will receive credit for demonstrating your engagement in whatever way(s) you want:

- Participating in class discussions
- Being an active participant in class activities
- Contributing to the online community
- Coming to office hours

**Readings:** All readings are available via bCourses. Complete the readings listed on the syllabus before class each week, and come prepared to discuss them—that means provide your interpretation and address outstanding questions. Most weeks, you will not have more than 50 pages of reading. You will receive an email after each class previewing the next week's reading, including background, key questions to guide your reading, and important terms.

**Weekly Responses:** Throughout the course, you will submit a total of nine responses. Every week, you will be provided with a short essay prompt (200-300 words) that asks you to relate the readings for that week to the themes of the course and the world around you. Prompts will be posted the evening after each class meeting, and are due Tuesdays at 11:59 pm. You may select which weeks you would like to submit these responses.

**Applications:** Once during the term, you will introduce a contemporary example of insecurity in the world around you to the class. In order to do this, you will post a news article or broadcast or a short description of an event you witnessed or experienced to the course website by 11:59 pm Tuesday. In class, you will briefly summarize it, and then explain how it relates to the week's readings in order to start our discussion. You will sign up for a week during the second class meeting.

**Final Paper:** You will write a final paper (~10 pages) in which you examine one area of contemporary insecurity in depth. You may present your topic through either A) a series of interviews or B) analysis of current events. You will relate your topic and examples (from interviews or articles) to the various ideas discussed in class and in the readings. Through the paper, you will make a summative argument about the nature of contemporary insecurity. You will receive several assignments throughout the term building up to the final paper, including submitting a topic and having an individual meeting with the instructor.

**Grade Breakdown:**

Participation	25%
Weekly Responses	35%
Application	10%
Final Paper	30%
<i>Topic</i>	5%
<i>Meeting</i>	5%
<i>Final draft</i>	20%

**POLICIES:**

**Attendance:** With such a condensed schedule, we will be moving very quickly and covering a lot of material in each session. Repeated absences will affect your participation grade. If you have to miss a class meeting, please check bCourses to access any handouts, ask a classmate for notes, and then see the instructor with any questions.

**Computers and phones:** It is my assumption that any device you have out you are using as a learning aid for class. If it becomes clear this is not the case, you and/or the device will have to go.

**Email:** I will respond to emails once per day, excluding weekends. If your question is answered in the syllabus or an assignment handout, I will not reply. If your question is better answered with a conversation, I will suggest a time to meet. You need to check your email regularly for class announcements and updates.

**Assignment submission:** All assignments will be submitted electronically through bCourses. Familiarize yourself with the site prior to the first deadline. Late submissions will be penalized one letter grade per day or portion thereof. Expect to submit all assignments from a laptop or desktop computer, not a mobile device.

**Academic honesty:** Always do your own work and provide appropriate citations. Adjusting to college-level work is daunting and there are plenty of chances to unknowingly make a mistake. If you want more information about campus policies, look at the Code of Academic Conduct. If you want more information about citing, check out the Student Learning Center or ask for help. We will go over appropriate use of sources as assignments are introduced. If it's 3 am the night before something is due and you're not sure if you should cite, you should cite.

**Accommodations:** Let me know as early in the term as possible if you require any accommodations.

**Technology:** Unless you alert me otherwise, I assume you have regular access to and familiarity with:

- Your campus email account
- bCourses
- PDFs
- eResources through Cal libraries
- Online video clips (YouTube, vimeo, etc.)

Additionally, you are encouraged to follow the course Twitter feed and to participate in class polls via the mobile app. These are optional, though, and whether or not you participate does not affect your grade. If you would like help accessing or assistance using any of these technologies, please let me know right away so we can work out a solution.

**Classroom atmosphere:** Your success in the course depends on every student feeling comfortable sharing their ideas, interpretations, and questions. The more ideas we have, the more complex and nuanced an understanding we can all get. I also encourage you to meet up outside of class to hash over readings, debate your interpretations, and commiserate on your confusions. If you ever feel like you aren't getting enough opportunities to engage with course material, or have suggestions to make class a better learning experience for you, please let me know! Just as you are expected to be constantly making progress toward the course learning goals, I strive to constantly make your experience in the course more meaningful.

## **SCHEDULE:**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **August 24: Course Introduction**

#### **August 31: What Is "Insecurity"?**

Cameron, W. B., & McCormick, T. C. 1954. Concepts of Security and Insecurity. *American Journal of Sociology*, 59(6), 556–564.

*New York Times*. 2016. "Anxious in America" Series. Specific articles assigned to students first day of class.

#### **September 7: History of Insecurity**

Cooper, M. 2014. "Chapter 1: From Shared Prosperity to the Age of Insecurity: How We Got Here." Pg. 27-45 in *Cut Adrift: Families in Insecure Times*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hacker, J. S. 2008. "Chapter 1: The New Economic Insecurity." Pg 11-34 in *The Great Risk Shift: The New Economic Insecurity and the Decline of the American Dream*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

### September 14: Personal Experience of Insecurity

Pugh, A. 2015. "Introduction" and "Chapter 2: Managing the Unrequited Contract." Pg. 1-41 in *The Tumbleweed Society: Working and Caring in an Age of Insecurity*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Silva, J. 2015. "Coming of Age in Risk Society." Pg. 3-25 in *Coming Up Short: Working-Class Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty*. New York: Oxford University Press.

### September 21: Relationships, Family, and Childhood

Ansari, A. and E. Klinenberg. 2015. "Chapter 4: Choice and Options." Pg. 123-148 in *Modern Romance*. New York: Penguin Press.

Newman, K. S. 2013. "Chapter 1: The Slippery Slope of Adulthood." *The Accordion Family: Boomerang Kids, Anxious Parents, and the Private Toll of Global Competition*. Beacon Press.

### September 28: Gender and Insecurity

Hochschild, A., & Machung, A. 2012. "Chapter 2: Marriage in a Stalled Revolution" Pg. 11-21 in *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home* (Revised edition). New York, N.Y: Penguin Books.

Cooper, M. 2014. "Chapter 3: Downscaling for Survival." Pg. 65-91 in *Cut Adrift: Families in Insecure Times*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

## WORK EXPERIENCES

### October 5: Job Security and Changing Labor Markets

Kalleberg, A. L. 2000. "Nonstandard Employment Relations: Part-time, Temporary and Contract Work." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26(1), 341–365.

Chen, V. T. 2015. "Chapter 1: They Had It Coming." Pg. 1-36 in *Cut Loose: Jobless and Hopeless in an Unfair Economy*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

## **October 12: Consent and Workplace Cultures**

Wu, T. 2015. "You Really Don't Need to Work So Much." *The New Yorker*. August 21. [<http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/you-really-dont-need-to-work-so-much>].

Mears, A. 2015. "Working for Free in the VIP: Relational Work and the Production of Consent." *American Sociological Review*, 80(6), 1099–1122.

*Final Paper Topic Due*

## **October 19: Social Class and the Meaning of Insecurity**

Western, B., Bloome, D., Sosnaud, B., & Tach, L. 2012. Economic Insecurity and Social Stratification. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 38(1), 341–359.

Standing, G. 2014. Pg. 1-21 of "Chapter 1: The Precariat." In *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic.

## **BROADER PERSPECTIVES**

### **October 26: The Economy and Financialization**

Stiglitz, J. E. 2013. "Chapter 1: America's 1 Percent Problem." Pg. 1-34 in *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Krippner, G. 2005. "The Financialization of the American Economy." *Socio-Economic Review*. 3(2):173-208.

### **November 2: The State and Neoliberalism**

Blau, J. "Chapter 1: The Triumph of the Market." Pg. 3-22 in *Illusions of Prosperity: America's Working Families in an Age of Economic Insecurity*. London: Oxford University Press.

Brown, W. 2006. "American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization." *Political Theory*. 34(6)690-714.

### **November 9: Global (In)Security**

Wallerstein, I. 2016. "The Increasingly Unstable United States." Commentary 426. [<http://iwallerstein.com/the-increasingly-unstable-united-states/>].

Sassen, S. 2014. "Conclusion: At the Systemic Edge." Pg. 211-224 in *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

### **November 16: The Environment**

Dalby, S. 2003. Environmental Insecurities: Geopolitics, Resources and Conflict. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(48), 5073–5079.

Klinenberg, E. 2002. "Chapter 5: The Spectacular City." Pg. 185-224 in *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

### **November 30: The Future of Insecurity**

Brynjolfsson, E., & McAfee, A. 2014. "Chapter 1: The Big Stories" pg. 1-12, and "Chapter 15: Technology and the Future" pg. 249-258 in *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.