Sociology 190: Race and Numbers
Sociology 190
Fall 2020, UC Berkeley

Instructor: Robert Pickett
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Office Hours: TBD, online via Zoom

Seminar: Tuesday 4-6pm, online via Zoom.

Course Website: https://bcourses.berkeley.edu/

Course Description

Statistics on race are often leveraged to identify and describe racial inequalities in the United States and guide efforts towards amelioration of those inequalities. This important work, however, can serve to make racial differences appear normal or inevitable. This course explores this tension between racial representation and essentialization. We will become acquainted with distinct perspectives on the social construction of race, discuss how race is measured in practice, review how race is often deployed in statistical work, and how this work is critiqued by critical race scholars. Finally, we will conclude with a sampling of recent work attempting to bring statistical practice closer in line with constructionist theory.

Elements and Evaluation:

As a seminar, this course will primarily focus on reading and discussing the materials. Each class a group of students will provide a synopsis of the week’s reading, develop several discussion questions, and lead the conversation in class. Each student will lead discussion ~3 times over the term. Synopses and questions should be posted on bCourses no later than 24 hours before class. All readings will be made available through the library or on bCourses. All students are expected to complete all readings and engage in discussions each week.

The course will also have a final paper component designed to help put these concepts into practice. The paper will be 15-20 pages (times new roman, 12 pt. font, double spaced) and will either be a critical engagement with existing quantitative race scholarship, or a proposal for a research project that integrates constructionist theory and statistical practice. Students will be asked to provide early thoughts for their paper in week 3 (September 15th), an extended paper proposal (1-2 pages) in week 9 (October 27th), and to engage with and provide feedback on other student’s thoughts and proposals.

Grades will consist of 35% leading weekly discussion, 40% final paper, 10% final paper thoughts, proposal, and peer feedback, and 15% class participation and attendance.
A Note on the Readings:

All of the readings for this course are available for free through UC Berkeley or bCourses (note: you may need to enable your library proxy if you are accessing these readings from off campus, see: https://www.lib.berkeley.edu/using-the-libraries/proxy-server). If you prefer having copies of books and/or reading paper copies, here is a list of books referenced:


I have also tried to cite readings from authors here at Berkeley. The name of the Berkeley author is bolded for those readings. I recommend attending their office hours if you have questions for them.

Respectful Discussion

It is my sincere hope that this class provides a respectful atmosphere for thoughtful discussion. I ask that mutual respect be our first and foremost goal. Efforts to intimidate, demean, or interfere with the participation of other students will not be tolerated. If at any time you feel that there are any barriers to your full participation in class discussions, please contact me.

Academic Integrity

You can find the student honor code here. If you are unsure about the expectations of academic integrity, please feel free to talk to me about it.
Student Accommodations

It is my intention to make this an inclusive course. If you are experiencing disability related barriers in the learning environment, please contact DSP and they will assist you.

Getting Help

College is difficult, especially in these new circumstances, but I will do my best to ensure that you are supported. If you find you are struggling, please feel free to come talk to me. You can find additional resources here: counseling, crisis/suicide prevention hotline, social services counseling, health services, and food security and basic needs resources. You can find academic support services here. Please do not wait until you are suffering to reach out, although you can certainly do so even at that point.

Students who do not have access to the technology resources they need should check out the Student Tech Equity Program (STEP). Resources available include: a new laptop, Wi-Fi hotspot, or other resources to support their studies in time for Fall semester. Devices will be mailed to students’ homes directly. If you have questions, please email ucbstep@berkeley.edu.

For coronavirus specific support please see https://coronavirus.berkeley.edu and/or https://technology.berkeley.edu/COVID-19.

For a longer list (borrowed from another grad student), please see the ‘Resources to Support Student Well-being’ pdf uploaded to bCourses.

Online and Asynchronous Accommodation

One of the primary goals for this course is to provide a platform for high quality discussion about interesting sociological topics. The online format, however, can create unique challenges. It is my hope to provide a place for discussion despite anything that would make synchronous participation in face-to-face discussion via zoom difficult (e.g. if you have issues with consistent internet access, have time zone issues with the usual scheduling of our seminar, etc.). While zoom is still the preferred option, students can also participate in discussion (and fulfill the course requirements) through bCourses discussion boards (and/or slack/discord/other technologies).
Course Calendar

Orientation

Week 1: September 1st

There is no required reading this week, but I strongly recommend you peruse the following for orientation.


Contours of the Debate

Week 2: September 8th

  - Also look through the plates – pp. 51-137.

Covid and Race

Week 3: September 15th

- Cowger Tori L, Bridgette A. Davis, Onisha S Etkins, Keletso Makofane, Jourdyn A.


This is not new:


Perspectives on Constructionism:

Week 4: September 22nd

DUE: Initial thoughts on the final paper (a few sentences to a paragraph). Please post these thoughts to the bCourses discussion board, and provide feedback for at least two students.


Additional Recommended Readings:


Numbers and the State
Week 5: September 29th


Race, Ethnicity, and the Census:

Week 6: October 6th


Week 7: October 13th


Race and the Census: International Perspectives.

Week 8: October 20th


Additional Recommended Readings:


Uses and Abuses of Racial Categories

Week 9: October 27th

DUE: Paper proposal (1-2 pages), submitted through bCourses assignments. You will also be asked to provide feedback as part of the assignment.


Week 10: November 3rd


New Approaches

Week 11: November 10th


Measuring (Race)isms

Week 12: November 17th (Pages: 35)


Statistics of race, not statistics by race

Week 13: November 24th (Pages: 66)


Week 14: December 1st


Week 15: December 8th - RRR Week

Week 16: December 15th – Final Paper Due