

INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL ECONOMY
Society, Space, and Transformation in the San Francisco Bay Area

Instructor Information:

Mary Shi
Email: mary.shi@berkeley.edu
Mailbox: 410 Barrows Hall

Seminar Times and Location:

F 10:00am -12:00pm
Barrows 104

Office Hours: F 2:00pm and by appointment

Drop-in, until last student leaves

Location: Caffè Strada

Course Overview:

How does the organization of economic production and exchange affect other areas of social life? And how is the economy itself a socially embedded institution? As residents of the Bay Area, we are experiencing the ongoing, global transformation of capitalism from a particularly privileged vantage point. From urban restructuring to precarious work to neoliberal self-governance, reverberations of the emerging knowledge economy are visible throughout our everyday lives. This course has two main goals: (1) to give students an introduction to a sociological perspective on political economy; and (2) to challenge students to critically interrogate their own lived experience in the Bay Area as a reflexive entry-point into larger political economic questions. To these ends, after using Marx, Polanyi, and Weber to lay a groundwork in classical political economy, this course will be organized around two themes—the production of space and the production of economic agents—as focused lenses into the literature and for student reflection.

Course Design and Requirements:

In addition to providing students with an introduction to political economy, the below course requirements are designed to help students hone their critical reading, writing, and oral communication skills. Students can expect timely feedback on all written assignments and to work with the instructor throughout the course towards writing their final paper. By the end of the course students should be able to (a) apply a range of political economic theories to analyze contemporary changes to the economy and society; (b) produce well-crafted, analytical writing; and (c) think critically about the relationship between individual experience and the social structure.

To meet the below requirements, students will need to complete the readings listed under each week of the syllabus. The reading load for each week will be kept relatively light (~50 pages/week) with the expectation that students read each text very closely. All readings will be made available online via bCourses or university e-book.

broad themes should be able to encompass a range of more specific questions, although other themes are allowable subject to instructor approval.

Final papers can either be *theoretically* or *empirically* oriented.

- An effective *theoretical* paper will engage one or more theorists in depth to (a) compare and contrast their underlying assumptions and discuss the implications of that analysis; *or* (b) synthesize multiple theorists to develop a more integrated understanding of some concept or empirical phenomenon (e.g. capitalism, neoliberalism, gentrification).
- An effective *empirical* paper will take one empirical phenomenon (e.g. Uber ride sharing, your own experience trying to enter the labor market with a university degree), situate that phenomenon in some theoretical context, and use those theoretical connections to discuss the broader implications of that particular phenomenon. Students are not expected to engage in systematic, new data collection although they should certainly consult the relevant secondary literature where appropriate. This empirical option effectively gives students the opportunity to write a focused auto-ethnography of some aspect of their lived experience, although they can also choose to write on a more distal phenomenon.

To help prepare for the final paper, students will:

- Meet with the instructor (5%) the week of March 11 or 18 to discuss potential final paper topics. To prepare for this meeting, students are required to upload a preparatory document to bCourses by **midnight of Sunday, March 10** that (a) identifies *at least* one research topic; (b) proposes 2-3 related research questions for that topic, and (c) presents a bibliography including at least 5 relevant, scholarly texts. Students may present up to 3 research topics, along with their respective research questions and bibliographies. Students are not expected to have exhaustively read any of the bibliographic materials they propose yet—this exercise is only meant to get students browsing the relevant scholarship.
- Prepare a rough draft of the introduction (5%) to their papers that will be workshopped in class on May 3rd. Documents must be uploaded to bCourses by **Thursday, May 2nd at 12pm**. Introductions (250-500 words) should include the paper's preliminary thesis statement and be accompanied with the full bibliography of the paper, not only what is cited in the introduction.

Final papers (30%) should be 15-20 pages, double spaced with 1" margins and 12pt Times New Roman font, inclusive of bibliography and exclusive of figures. Papers are to follow the norms of academic citation. Papers should be uploaded to bCourses and submitted via hardcopy to the instructor's mailbox in Barrows by **Monday, May 13th at 2pm**.

Classroom Expectations and Guidelines

Students are expected to arrive on time, having prepared for discussion by thoughtfully completing the readings and being ready to participate. All students are expected to engage in a thoughtful and respectful manner with one another. This includes monitoring themselves to ensure no one student holds the floor too long or dominates the discussion.

Weber, Max. 2011 [1905]. "Chapter 2." *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

Stephen Kalberg, trans. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 76-98.

Weber, Max. 2013 [1922]. Sections 11 (main text only) and Section 13 from "Sociological Categories of Economic Action." *Economy and Society*. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press. 90-94, 107-109.

Week 3 (February 8): Karl Marx

1. What is Marx's 'labor theory of value'? How does this compare to Weber's understanding of profit?

Marx, Karl. 1994 [1867]. Chapters 6, 7, and 26 from "Selections from Capital, vol 1." *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*. Lawrence H. Simon, ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. 264-300.

Week 4 (February 15): Karl Polanyi

1. For Polanyi, what is the hallmark of modern capitalism? What are its origins and how do these compare to Weber and Marx's understandings of the origin of capitalism?

Polanyi, Karl. 1957 [1944]. "Chapter 5," "Chapter 6," and, "Chapter 12." *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Boston: Beacon Press. 56-76, 135-150

PART II. CONTEMPORARY TRENDS

Week 5 (February 22): 'Classical' Industrial Production

1. What were the conditions of 'classic' industrial production? How and why did they seem to be changing by midcentury America?

Schoenberger, Erica. 1988. "From Fordism to Flexible Accumulation: Technology, Competitive Strategies, and International Location." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 6: 245-262.

Bell, Daniel. 1976. "The Coming of the Post-Industrial Society." *Educational Forum* 40(4): 574-579.

Week 6 (March 1): The Knowledge Economy and the Decline of U.S. Manufacturing

1. How is production different in the 'knowledge economy' than in mass manufacturing? What consequences emerge from these differences?
2. Would Marx consider manufacturing and knowledge based economies to be distinct

***** Spring Break *****

Week 10 (April 5): Subprime Lending and Precarious Places

1. 'Financial de-regulation transformed American cities while enrolling them in new, global relations of capital.' Discuss.
2. Is the destructive capacity of markets visible in this week's readings rooted in the same processes Polanyi described in his critique of fictitious commodities?

Chomsisengphet, Souphala and Anthony Pennington-Cross. 2006. "The Evolution of the Subprime Mortgage Market." *Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Review* 88(1): 31-56.

Schafran, Alex. 2013. "Origins of an Urban Crisis: The Restructuring of the San Francisco Bay Area." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37(2): 663-88.

Pick, Erica and Nancy Holman. 2013. "A Fetish and Fiction of Finance: Unraveling the Subprime Crisis." *Economic Geography* 90(2): 213-235.

SECTION 2. THE PRODUCTION OF ECONOMIC SUBJECTS

Week 11 (April 12): Economy and Polity in the Formation of Subjects

1. 'Different structures of economic organization presuppose different types of economic agents, and states take an active role in producing those agents.' Discuss.

Esping-Andersen, Gosta. 1990. "The Three Political Economies of the Welfare State." *International Journal of Sociology* 20(3): 92-123.

Ferguson, James. 2010. "The Uses of Neoliberalism." *Antipode* 41(1): 166-184.

Week 12: (April 19): Flexibilization and Precarity in the New Economy

1. How would Marx, Weber, and Polanyi understand the rise of flexible work? Pick at least two to discuss.

Kalleberg, Arne. 2009. "Precarious Work, Insecure Workers: Employment Relations in Transition." *American Sociological Review* 74(1): 1-22.

Smith, Vicki. 2010. "Enhancing Employability: Human, Cultural, and Social Capital in an Era of Turbulent Unpredictability." *Human Relations* 63(2): 279-303.

Week 13 (April 26): New Technologies of Self

- I. 'New technologies for more minute-monitoring of the self help/hurt us.' Take a stance and discuss.