

Sociology 117 Sport as a Social Institution

Spring 2022 | UC Berkeley

Instructor: Dr. Linus Huang, Continuing Lecturer

Office hours:

- *in-person/drop-in:* Mondays, 3:15-4:15 PM, 488 Social Sciences Building
- *Zoom:* Tuesdays, 1-3 PM; sign up on Google Calendar

E-mail: lbhuang@berkeley.edu

Final exam: online, Wednesday, May 11 2022, 3-6 PM

Graduate Student Reader: Adam Storer

What is this course about?

A sociological investigation of sport involves, to paraphrase Pierre Bourdieu, explaining the “supply” of sports that exists at any given time—e.g., what sports we play, who plays them, where sporting venues (i.e., stadiums) come from, etc.—and the “demand” that exists at any given time—e.g., who watches sports, which sports are popular, what makes a sport popular, whether sports is a communal obligation for spectators or a form of consumer entertainment, etc. The central theme of this course is that the way the supply and demand of sports get constructed embody inequalities that are invisible precisely because we tend to think that sports just “are”.

We will consider a range of topics organized into four major mid-level themes: 1) gaps in meritocracy in sport (e.g., how race, gender, and class shape who plays, but also things like why we don’t always choose the best tactical strategy on the field of play); 2) the tension between commercialism and anti-commercialism in sport (e.g., the Olympic Games, but even more familiarly college sports); 3) a critical examination of deviance in sport; and 4) the role of geographic territory in sport.

Readings

All readings for this course are in PDF format on the bCourses site, in the “readings” folder under the Files section of the site. There are no textbooks or course readers to purchase.

I have made a concerted effort to keep the reading workload manageable, both in terms of volume (# of pages) and in terms of difficulty. In many cases, I have assigned shorter newspaper articles that report on longer, more technical academic journal articles, instead of just assigning the latter. I will present this more technical material in lecture and you will be responsible for it. But the assigned readings will hopefully make grasping the more difficult material easier.

In the graded work (see below), you will be responsible for all material presented both in the readings and during lecture.

Grading

Your grade will be determined by three different components:

- **A sports fandom survey** (10%), administered as a bCourses survey. This survey will ask questions about how you go about being a sports fan (including if you're not a sports fan at all). There are no right and wrong answers here, except for not filling out the survey at all. Your responses will remain anonymous. We will use this data throughout the course to illustrate ideas about the social nature of sports fandom.

The survey will become available online early in the course. It must be completed by Friday, February 4th, at 11:59 PM.

- **Two midterm exams** (30% each, 60% total). Each will be a take-home, "short answer"-type exam. Further details will be given as the semester progresses.
- **A final exam** (30%). The final exam will be 100% multiple choice and cumulative. It will be administered as a bCourses quiz (so you will have to be logged in to bCourses to take it) on Wednesday, May 11th, from 3-6 PM.

The distribution of questions will favor material later in the course that you will not have been tested on yet, but there will be questions covering material from the entire course. A study guide for the final exam will be distributed during the final week of instruction.

The course grading scale is as follows:

A+	97+	A	93-96	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		

When it comes time to compute overall course grades, I will round to the nearest whole number using standard rounding conventions—89.49 rounds down to 89, 89.50 rounds up to 90, etc. It doesn't really matter what the letter grade on the individual assignments are.

There are no other discretionary considerations, nor opportunities to earn extra credit on an individual basis, that will factor into your grade.

There are no surprises in how I calculate course grades. The GRADES section on bCourses will incorporate 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 assignments in order to earn a particular grade.

Late grade policy: Work submitted late will be marked down 20% for each 24-hour period the assignment is overdue.

Disabled Students Program (DSP)

DSP students should have their arrangements made as soon as possible. The DSP office will automatically send me a digital copy of your letter, with explanation of your accommodations. It will not be necessary to also provide me with a physical copy of the letter.

Academic Honesty & Classroom Conduct

The UC Berkeley Honor Code states that “As a member of the UC Berkeley community, I act with honesty, integrity, and respect for others” (<https://teaching.berkeley.edu/berkeley-honor-code>). I expect you will follow these principles. You may not copy specific text or ideas from others, whether from fellow students, from authors of our readings or other material you find, without specific attribution. To do otherwise is to plagiarize. You may not cheat on any of the exams by bringing in illicit outside material, copying from fellow students, or engaging in other dishonest practices. Violation of these rules will result in an immediate **-0-** on the assignment in question, plus a report to the Office of Academic Affairs at my discretion.

You may of course discuss the lectures and readings with your fellow students. Forming studying groups on your own is encouraged, especially as 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 has popped up in my courses before.

Study group meetings should be suspended during periods where a take-home exam is active. They can begin again after the exam due date has been reached.

Additional Resources

The University has set up a central online location with links to a variety of resources, both academic and non-academic, that students might need. Go here: One-Click Resources for Undergraduate Resources <https://recalibrate.berkeley.edu/one-click-mode/one-click-resources-undergraduate-students>.

Reading, Assignment, and Exam Schedule

Except where explicitly noted otherwise, all readings listed below are required and must be completed prior to the first meeting of the indicated topic.

Part I: Introduction

Introduction: What is a sociology of sport?

Jan 19, 21, 24

No readings.

Introduction: Is athletic excellence simply about genetics?

Jan 26, 28

Read: David Epstein, *The Sports Gene* 1 “Beat by an Underhand Girl” and 9 “We Are All Black (Sort Of)”

Part II: Gaps in meritocracy in sport**How does race shape perception of athletes?**

Jan 31, Feb 2

Read:

- Jason Reid & Jane McManus, “The NFL’s Racial Divide” *The Undeclared* Apr 26 2017
- Steven Foy & Rashawn Ray, “March Madness and college basketball’s racial bias problem” Brookings Mar 6 2020

Who gets to play a sport?

Feb 4, 7

Read:

- Andrei S. Markovits & Lars Rensmann (2010), “A Silent ‘Feminization’ of Global Sports Cultures?”
- Douglas E. Foley (1990), “The Great American Football Ritual”
- “Martina Navratilova: The rules on trans athletes reward cheats and punish the innocent” *The Sunday Times* Feb 17 2019
- “Megan Rapinoe: Transgender kids should be allowed to play sports like all other children” *The Washington Post* Mar 28 2021

Sports Fandom Survey due Friday, February 4, 11:59 PM**Is cheerleading a sport?**

Feb 9, 11

Read: Laura Grindstaff & Emily West (2006), “Cheerleading and the Gendered Politics of Sport”

What strategies do we employ on the field of play?

Feb 14

Read: Malcolm Gladwell, “How David Beats Goliath” *The New Yorker* May 11 2009

Midterm #1 distributed on bCourses Wednesday, February 16

Does sport facilitate upward mobility, or re-produce class inequality?

Feb 16, 18

Read:

- Harry Edwards (2000), “Crisis of Black athletes on the even of the 21st century”
- Hilary Levey Friedman (2013), “Introduction: Playing to Win”

Midterm #1 due on bCourses, Sunday, February 20, 11:59 PM**Part III: The tension between commercialism and anti-commercialism in sport****Are sports spectators members of a community, or purchasers of goods?**

Feb 23, 25, 28

*No class on Monday, February 21 (President’s Day).**Read:*

- Richard Giulianotti (2002), “Supporters, Followers, Fans, and Flâneurs”
- Ben McGrath, “When Fantasy Sports Beat Real Ones” *The New Yorker* Apr 13 2015

Should student-athletes be paid?

Mar 2, 4, 7, 9

Read:

- Taylor Branch, “The Shame of College Sports” *The Atlantic* Oct 2011
- “The Supreme Court’s unanimous decision on paying NCAA student-athletes, explained” *Vox* Jun 21 2021
- “What to know about name, image and likeness and how it will affect the NCAA” *The Washington Post* Jun 29 2021

Do the economics of college sports actually work for colleges?

Mar 11, 14, 16

Read:

- “College Football’s Most Dominant Player? It’s ESPN.” *The New York Times* Aug 24 2013
- “At Louisville, Athletic Boom Is Rooted in ESPN Partnership” *The New York Times* Aug 25 2013

When do sports NOT become commercialized?

Mar 18

Read: Jason Kaufman & Orlando Patterson (2005), “Cross-National Cultural Diffusion: The Global Spread of Cricket”**March 21-25 Spring Break**

Part IV: A critical examination of deviance in sport**Should politics be kept out of sports?**

Mar 28, 30

Read:

- Michael Serazio & Emily Thorson, “Sports were already politicized. And sports culture is deeply conservative.” *The Washington Post* Oct 2 2017
- Kenneth Cohen, “The Forgotten Origins of Politics in Sports” *Slate* Jan 2 2018

Midterm #1 distributed on bCourses Friday, April 1**What are the rules against PED use protecting us from?**

Apr 1, 4

Read: Bryan Sluggett (2007), “WADA Anti-Doping Policy and Education”**Midterm #1 due on bCourses, Tuesday, April 5, 11:59 PM****Is violence in sport deviant, or normal?**

Apr 6, 8

Read:

- Randall Collins (2010), “On-Field Player Violence”
- Michael Messner (2002), “Male Athletes, Injuries, and Violence”

Part V: What role does geographic territory play in sport?**Where does the institution of the home team come from?**

Apr 11, 13, 15

Read:

- Eric Leifer, “Introduction” to *Making the Majors*
- “Are American Values Ruining European Football?” *The New York Times* Apr 20 2021
- “The Americanization of European Sports Seems Inevitable” *The Wall Street Journal* Apr 21 2021

Should cities subsidize professional sports teams?

Apr 18, 20, 22

Read:

- Andrew Zimbalist & Roger Noll, “Sports, Jobs, & Taxes: Are New Stadiums Worth the Cost?” Brookings Jun 1 1997
- Rick Eckstein & Kevin Delaney (2002), “New Sports Stadiums, Community Self-Esteem, and Community Collective Conscience”

Does *nation* still matter in sports?

Apr 25, 27, 29

Read:

- “A Parade with a Point: Soccer Is Best Avenue for Patriotism” *The New York Times* Jul 10 2015
- “Soccer Violence Escalates in Europe” *The Wall Street Journal* Apr 29 2015
- “Andrew Bartoli: World Cup participation increases state aggression” *The Washington Post* Jun 3 2014
- Raffaele Poli (2007), “The Denationalization of Sport: De-ethnicization of the Nation and Identity Deterritorialization”

May 2-6 Reading, Recitation and Review

Final Exam online Wednesday, May 11, 2022 3-6 PM