

SOCIOL 117 Sport as a Social Institution

Spring 2023 | UC Berkeley

Instructor: Professor Linus Huang, Lecturer

Office hours:

- *in-person (drop-in):* Mondays, 10:00 AM-11:45 AM, 487 Social Sciences Building
- *Zoom:* Tuesdays, 1-3 PM, sign up on Google Calendar

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Final exam: online, Tuesday, May 9, 11:30 AM-2:30 PM

Head GSI: Ghaleb Attrache

Graduate Student Readers: Benjamin Fields, Aian Mendoza

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.

Grading

Course content is organized into case studies, each of which (except for the Introduction) has associated readings. The reading are required, and you will be tested on your understanding of them in the midterm and final exams. However, there is nothing specific to submit for them.

Graded work comes from five 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, January 27, 11:59 PM.

- **A sociological sports biography “email”** (15%). Part of the “sociological imagination”, according to the early 20th century sociologist C. Wright Mills, is to understand the relation between one's self and society. In this assignment, you will explain how your personal biography as a sports fan (or non-fan) or athlete is a product of not just your personal endeavors, but is in part conditioned by social structure external to you.

Why do I call the assignment an “email”? It will not actually be an email to me or the GSIs; it will be a file you upload to bCourses. I'll explain why I call it an “email” in lecture.

- **Two midterm “emails”** (20% each, 40% total). Both will be take-home affairs in short-answer (think: three questions, 1 or perhaps 2 pages per email) format. The logistics of the emails will be discussed in more detail when the time arrives.

These, too, won't actually be submitted as emails (see above), but I'm calling them that anyway for the same reason as above.

- **Sports institutions analysis “email”** (15%). Topic and format specifics to be announced. Also will not actually be submitted as an email (see above).
- **A final exam** (20%). 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 Tuesday, May 9, 11:30 AM-2:30 PM.

Note: For all graded work, you will be responsible for material from the readings but also additional material *not* in the readings but which is presented in lecture. This is not simply to give you an incentive to attend lecture, but to focus reading assignments on conveying conceptual understanding while using lecture to flesh out this understanding with data and other empirical detail.

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.

Reading, Assignment, and Exam Schedule

All readings listed below are required and must be completed prior to the first meeting of the associated topic.

Part I: Introduction

Introduction: What is a sociology of sport?

Jan 18, 20, 23, 25

No readings.

Introduction: Is athletic excellence simply about genetics?

Jan 25, 27

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

Sports Fandom Survey due Friday, January 27, 11:59 PM

Part II: Gaps in meritocracy in sport

How does race shape perception of athletes?

Jan 30, Feb 1

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 3, 6

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

Sociological Sports Biography “Email” due on bCourses, Monday, February 6, 11:59 PM**Is cheerleading a sport?**

Feb 8, 10

Read: Laura Grindstaff & Emily West (2006), “Cheerleading and the Gendered Politics of Sport”**What strategies do we employ on the field of play?**

Feb 13

Read: Malcolm Gladwell, “How David Beats Goliath” *The New Yorker* May 11 2009**Youth sport: fitness, or class credential?**

Feb 15, 17

*No class on Monday Feb 20, 2022 (Washington’s Birthday).**Read:*

- Hilary Levey Friedman (2013), *Playing to Win: Raising Children in a Competitive Culture* “Introduction: Playing to Win” and chapter 1 “Outside Class: A History of American Children’s Competitive Activities”
- Patrick Lie Andersen & Anders Bakken (2019), “Social class differences in youths’ participation in organized sports: What are the mechanisms?” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 54(8)

Midterm “Email” #1 distributed on bCourses Friday, February 17**Midterm “Email” #1 due on bCourses, Tuesday, February 21, 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 22, 24, 27

Read:

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

Why has college sport long been governed by a norm of amateurism?

Mar 1, 3

Read:

- Taylor Branch, “The Shame of College Sports” *The Atlantic* Oct 2011
- Ben Strauss, “College sports was once ‘the scandal beat.’ Then amateurism became the scandal.” *The Washington Post* Jul 1 2021

Is the liberalization of college sport a good or bad thing?

Mar 8, 10

Read:

- Emily Giambalvo, “What to know about name, image and likeness and how it will affect the NCAA” *Washington Post* Jun 29 2021
- Cody J. McDavis, “Opinion: Paying Students to Play Would Ruin College Sports” *The New York Times* Feb 25 2019
- J. Brady McCollough, “Commentary: With attack on UCLA’s Big Ten move, Newsom conveniently forgets he pushed NIL domino” *Los Angeles Times* Jul 20 2022

Sports Institution Analysis “Email” due on bCourses, Friday, March 10, 11:59 PM**Do the economics of college sport work for colleges?**

Mar 13, 15, 17

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

A closer look at Cal Athletics

Mar 20

Read: College Sports Associates, “California Athletics: Intercollegiate Athletics Review” Mar 2018

When do sports NOT become commercialized?

Mar 22

Read: Jason Kaufman & Orlando Patterson (2005), “Cross-National Cultural Diffusion: The Global Spread of Cricket”

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

Mar 24

Read: Michael Serazio & Emily Thorson, “Sports were already politicized. And sports culture is deeply conservative.” *The Washington Post* Oct 2 2017

March 27-31 Spring Break**Should politics be kept out of sports? (cont’d)**

Apr 3

Read: Kenneth Cohen, “The Forgotten Origins of Politics in Sports” *Slate* Jan 2 2018

What are the rules against PED use protecting us from?

Apr 5, 7

Read: Bryan Sluggett (2007), “WADA Anti-Doping Policy and Education”

Is violence in sport deviant, or normal?

Apr 7, 10

Read:

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

Midterm “Email” #2 distributed on bCourses Friday, April 7**Midterm “Email” #2 due on bCourses, Tuesday, April 11, 11:59 PM****Part V: What role does geographic territory play in sport?****Where does the institution of the home team come from?**

Apr 12, 14, 17

Read: Eric Leifer, “Introduction” to *Making the Majors*

Should cities subsidize professional sports teams?

Apr 19, 21

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 24, 26, 28

Read:

- Jeré Longman, “A Parade with a Point: Soccer Is Best Avenue for Patriotism” *The New York Times* Jul 10 2015
- Naftali Bendavid, “Soccer Violence Escalates in Europe” *The Wall Street Journal* Apr 29 2015
- Andrew Bertoli, “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 1-5 Reading, Recitation and Review**Final Exam online Tuesday, May 9, 2023 11:30 AM-2:30 PM**