Sociology/USP 901, Spring 2017:
Urban Social Structure

Thursdays, 4:30 – 7:10 pm, Bolton Hall 757

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Course Overview

In sociology, structural perspectives emphasize that understanding social organization requires careful analysis of how individuals and other social actors are distributed across social positions, as well as the patterns of interaction and communication between these positions. Such perspectives assert that examining the development and consequences of social structures is a more fruitful path to understanding social organization than attending to individual cognition or cultural values and norms, or “what goes on in people’s heads.” This course applies structural perspectives to the analysis of urban neighborhoods, cities and metropolitan regions, while also comparing social structural perspectives with those that emphasize the social psychological and cultural dimensions of urban life. Our focus will be on neighborhoods, cities and metropolitan regions in the contemporary United States, but we will also selectively compare and contrast these urban social structures with those in other times and places. While we will primarily consider sociological perspectives on urban social organization, we will also consider relevant perspectives from urban planning, geography, history and policy research.

Required Texts


All other assigned readings will be available on the course D2L site in PDF format.
Assignments & Grading

Class Participation: I expect each student in the class to complete all the assigned readings each week and to participate actively in the class discussion.

Response Papers: Each week except Week 14, each student will be required to submit a 2-page (double spaced) response paper reflecting on the assigned readings for that week at the beginning of class. While response papers do not need to present a formal argument, they should include coherent reflections that demonstrate that you have completed the assigned readings and given them some thought. Each response paper may include brief statements of what you see as the major themes that cut across the assigned readings, findings you thought were particularly surprising or significant, and critiques of specific authors’ logic, method or interpretation of evidence. Your response paper should end with 2 or 3 questions that will inform our class discussion.

Discussion Facilitation: During our first class meeting, I will ask one student to sign up to be the co-facilitator for each class meeting. As co-facilitator, you will initiate the evening’s discussion by making a brief, informal presentation in which you provide a broad overview of the assigned readings and your reaction to them. Your informal presentation should NOT summarize each reading in detail, but instead identify general themes and present critiques, either of arguments or interpretations offered by specific authors or of the overall approach to the topic taken by the assigned readings as whole. Your goals should be to get the discussion going—so don’t hesitate to be creative and even provocative. Toward that end, you should produce a brief handout that includes 3-5 discussion questions about each assigned reading. You will then take a lead role (in collaboration with me) in keeping the discussion going throughout the class period. Perhaps most importantly, it will be your responsibility to supply a snack to be shared by the class (nothing elaborate, just a bag of chips, some cookies, or whatever).

Comparative Analysis of Cities: During Week 14, we will turn our attention to a comparison of two very different U.S. metropolitan regions: Milwaukee and Las Vegas. In order to facilitate our discussion, students will be expected to write a slightly longer paper (4 to 5 pages, double spaced) which compares and contrasts these two metros in light of the theories and research findings we have read about and discussed throughout the semester and, optionally, additional sources that the student identifies. More detailed instructions for this assignment will be provided after spring break (March 19th – March 26th).

Final Paper: My goal with the final paper assignment is to give you an opportunity to reflect more deeply on some of the assigned readings from the semester, delve further into one (or more) of the topics we covered (or a closely related one), and make progress on a major task that you are required to complete to finish your degree (your master’s proposal or thesis, your dissertation, etc.). Accordingly, you may select some variation on one the following options: a literature review, a “white paper”/policy recommendation, or research proposal. Whichever option you choose, the final product should be approximately 15 double-spaced pages and should include complete documentation of your sources using ASA or APA format for both in-text
citations and your reference list. Your cited sources should include, but not be limited to, several of the assigned readings from the course. Due dates associated with this assignment are as follows:

1) You must submit a one-page prospectus outlying your topic and approach at the beginning of class on April 20th. You should also be prepared to discuss your topic briefly with the class.
2) Your final paper must be uploaded to the Dropbox on D2L by noon on Thursday, May 18th.

In addition, I encourage you to submit a rough draft of your paper in advance of the deadline, ideally by the last day of class (Thursday, May 11). I will do my best to provide feedback on your draft if I receive it after that, but I cannot guarantee that you will receive a detailed review.

Grading Scale
Class Participation 15%  Discussion Facilitation 15%
Comparative Analysis Paper 15%  Response Papers 25%
Final Paper 30%

95% = A; 90% = A-; 97% = B+ ; 94% = B; 80% = B-; 70% = C-; 60% = D- ; >60% = F

Policies

Attendance and class participation. As noted above, it is essential that you come to each class meeting prepared, having completed all the assigned readings and prepared to participate actively in class discussion. Attendance is required. Repeated absences and/or failure to participate in discussions will result in a lower grade.

Classroom environment. Many of the assigned readings express strong, controversial political views, explicitly or otherwise. I encourage you to challenge the perspectives offered by the assigned readings, by me, and by your fellow students. However, please voice opinions, disagreements and criticism in a respectful tone; I will make every effort to do the same. We all have a responsibility to ensure that the classroom environment provides both a venue for the free exchange of ideas and perspectives and a welcoming, respectful environment.

Grading: Except in cases of medical or family emergency, late work will not be accepted. Please come and talk to me in the event of such an emergency. Grade appeals must be submitted in writing.

Disability Accommodation: To request academic accommodations due to a disability, please contact the UWM Accessibility Resource Center and inform me as soon as possible about special accommodations so that I can best meet your needs. The Accessibility Resource Center, Mitchell Hall Room 112, (414) 229-6287, http://www4.uwm.edu/arc/
Course Schedule

Part I: Social Structures and the Social Psychology of Urban Experience

Week 1: Introductions (1/26)

Week 2: Sociological Perspectives on Social Organization & Social Structure (2/2)

Required Readings:


Week 3: Cities and Urbanism – Social Psychological and Historical Perspectives (2/9)

Required Readings:


Recommended (Optional) Readings:
Part II: Public & Parochial Spaces; Neighborhoods as Sites of Social Interaction

Week 4: Public Space (2/16)

Required Reading:


Week 5: Neighbors and Neighboring (2/23)

Required Reading:
Grannis, chapters 1 through 5, pp. 1-57


Neal, “Chapter 2 / Community: Lost or Found,” “Chapter 3 / Subculture / Finding Your Crowd in a Crowd,” and “Chapter 5 / Form / Getting from Here to There,” pp. 11–49, 69–87


Recommended (Optional) Reading:
Week 6: Neighbors and Neighboring (continued) (3/2)

Required reading:

Week 7: Neighborhood Attachment, Social Control & Reputation (3/9)

Required Reading:


Part III: Governing Cities, Building & Sustaining Metropolitan Regions

Week 8: Urban Political Economy & Interorganizational Networks (3/16)


Neal, “Chapter 4 / Politics / We Don’t Want Nobody Nobody Sent” and “Chapter 6 / Function / Working Together,” pp. 50-66, 88–106


4) Wu, “From ‘State-Owned’ to ‘City Inc.’: The Case of Shanghai,” pp. 207–31

Spring Break: March 19th – March 26th

**Week 9: Metropolitan Regions as Networks and Actors (3/30)**

Neal, “Chapter 7 / Regional: From City to Metropolis,” pp. 109–24

Katz & Bradley, chapters 1 – 5, pp. 1–109

**Week 10: Urban Sprawl and Global Warming (4/6)**


**Week 11: Sustainable Urban Development and Urban Agriculture (4/13)**


**Week 12: Segregation & Inequality in U.S. Metropolitan Areas (4/20)**


**Part IV: Comparative Analyses of U.S. Cities**

**Week 13: Urban Riots and Resistance to Segregation & Inequality (4/27)**

Week 14: Comparison of Las Vegas & Milwaukee (5/4)


Part V: Interurban Networks

Week 15: Regional, National & Global Urban Networks (5/11)

Katz & Bradley, chapters 7–9, pp. 144–208
