

SOCIOLOGY 290 (SPRING 2018)
ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY
T/R 10:05AM-11:00AM
Fowler Hall 202

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Office Hours: M/W 930am-11am or by email appointment
Course Website: <https://moodle.oxy.edu/course/view.php?id=24209>

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course is an introduction to the field of economic sociology. To begin, we will explore how the sociological perspectives differ from those of the discipline of economics, as well as what is at stake in these differences. As economic sociology is a field of diverse theoretical orientations, we will go through structural approaches—the embeddedness and social networks, cultural and moral underpinnings of economic actions, the macro-level analysis of the economy, and finally, the roles of economic knowledge, valuation, classification in economic processes. Throughout the course, we will experiment object-based learning to connect the course materials to real-world economic phenomenon. The goal of the course is to help students develop a sharp sociological imagination on everyday economic actions.

COURSE REQUIREMENT

Grading

Your grade will be based on your class participation, short writing assignments, and midterm and final exam. The grading rubric is as the following:

Participation	20%
Reading Responses	10%
Fun “Things” to Learn	
- Short Papers (4)	40%
- Final Presentation	10%
- Final Research Proposal	20%

Participation (20%)

You have to attend the class to participate. I will exercise attendance checks regularly. You are allowed to be absent without any reason **twice**. Beyond the two absences, you will lose 1 out of your 20 participation points for every absence. If you are late to the class by more than 10 minutes, you will be considered absent for the day.

The quality of our collective learning experience depends on your participation. My advice is simple – I suggest viewing our time together as an opportunity to make new friends, to learn some interesting things about the world in which we live, and to push yourself academically in whatever way makes sense for you. Your high-quality contributions may be rewarded with an extra “plus” on the final grade if you fall on a borderline between two grades.

The reading load for this course is substantial. I expect you to devote much time reading and thinking about the subject. To do well in this class, you aim to master, respond critically and creatively to, and integrate the course material, with an eye toward developing your own research questions and interests. You should be able to answer the following questions about each assigned reading:

- What research question is the author trying to answer? What is the significance of this question for the key issues in the field?
- What assumptions does the author make? How valid are these assumptions?
- How does the author address the question?
- What does the paper accomplish? What have you learned from it?

If it is an empirical piece:

- What is the nature of the author’s evidence, and how does s/he bring that to bear on the research questions? Is the methodology appropriate?
- How satisfactorily does the author link the evidence to the conclusions?
- How could this work be extended or refined?

During each class, I will mix short lectures, classroom discussions, and various activities. To cultivate good conversation, please keep in mind that we are debating ideas, not each other as individuals. Listen carefully. Be respectful. And, don’t be afraid to speak up!

Reading and Film Responses (10%)

Students are required to prepare a 500-word response paper to the week’s readings prior to **one** class meetings (to be sent to the whole class by Monday midnight). These response papers should be thinking exercises to help students engage in that week’s readings. In the week that you write a reading response, I also expect you can take the lead on the classroom discussions. Students will also write a 500-word response paper to one of the documentary films (*Too Small to Jail* or *The True Cost*) that we watch in the class.

“Fun Things to Learn” (70% in total)

In the course, you will write a series of papers based on one “thing”. Your thing has to have a market—somebody can buy and sell this particular thing. It can be physical objects—coffee, soybean, organic strawberries, or diamonds; it can be living organisms—horses, dogs, and genetic materials; it can have moral controversies—guns, marijuana, and organs. I also welcome you to select some immaterial services—such as homework, financial consulting, or babysitting—for this exercise. Choose your topic wisely and creatively, as it will shape your learning experience throughout the semester. Your choice is due in class on February 1.

Short Papers (40%)

During the semester, you explore this particularly thing from various perspectives in economic sociology. I will provide more specific prompt for each writing assignment. To preview, you will be thinking about some of the following questions in 4 separate papers.

- 1) How does your market look like? How is it “embedded” in society? What are some actors may shape the market? (Week5)
- 2) What does your thing symbolize and has it changed over time? What are some “cultural work” in order to place it on the market? Are there moral controversies? (Week 8)
- 3) Where does your thing come from? Who participated in the production process? What does it say about global capitalism? (Week 10)
- 4) How are the market exchanges facilitated and shaped by calculation devices, classification schemes, trade standards, and economic knowledge? (Week 12)

Please bring a print copy to class on the due date. You will lose 20% of your points for late submission. Each paper has a 1,000-word limit.

Final Presentation (10%)

Toward the end of the course, you need to make a 10-15 minutes presentation to share with the class your economic sociology analysis of the object.

Final Research Proposal (20%)

The exercise will culminate in a **research proposal** (2000-2500 words) to extend your inquiry on this thing. You should draw from the course readings to lay out a research plan. Please also include a succinct literature review in the proposal.

The final research proposal is due on May 6th 11:59pm.

COURSE RULES

Office Hour

My office hour is on Monday and Wednesday 9:30am-11am. I enjoy talking to students and I encourage you to stop by. If you need to meet up with me in times other than my regular office hours, you can make an appointment with me. Office hours will not be devoted to tutorial for materials that students miss when not attending class. Also, please strive to ask routine questions of clarification in class.

Email Policies

The primary mode of communication for this course (outside of class meetings) will be email. Please check your Oxy email regularly. I will send course-related information to you at least 24 hours in advance of any deadlines. I will likewise respond to your emails within 24 hours.

Academic Honesty

The College takes academic honesty very seriously. All of the work that you submit for this

class must be your own work, and you are required to quote and cite all references properly. Although this appears straightforward, it can sometimes be confusing. Wherever you are unsure about quoting and citing, I am happy to help you figure out the best strategy.

The penalty for academic misconduct can include disciplinary probation, a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, or expulsion from the college. Every student is responsible for understanding what constitutes academic misconduct. Please read the college's academic honesty primer here: <http://www.oxy.edu/student-handbook/academic-ethics>. If you have any question about whether your work upholds the standards set forth by Oxy, please speak with me.

Electronic Devices

No use of laptops, tablets, phones, or other electronic devices in the class. Although computers are a valuable tool for research and study, they often hinder participation and collegiality in the classroom. Plus, we're really not that good at multi-tasking. If you are interested in this policy, I recommend *The New Yorker's* article "[The Case for Banning Laptops in the Classroom](#)"

Support Services

- The Writing Center (<http://www.oxy.edu/writing-center>) offers students from all disciplines two types of support to work on their writing: peer-to-peer, drop-in consultations with knowledgeable Writing Advisers and appointments with Faculty Writing Specialists from the Writing and Rhetoric department.
- Students who have disability-related needs, please contact me AND the Coordinator of Disability Services—(323) 259-2969—as soon as possible and we will make the appropriate accommodations. Please refer to the information on Disability Services' website: <http://www.oxy.edu/disability-services>
- Finally, the Emmons Health and Counseling Center (<http://www.oxy.edu/emmons-health-center>) is available for assistance with medical and mental health concerns.

Changes to the syllabus

The syllabus is a guide for the course and your learning is my top priority. If the course requires any changes, I will post a revised syllabus on Moodle and inform the class of any changes.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS

- Reading
- ✧ Important Dates

Week 1 (1/23 & 1/25): Course Introduction

- The Syllabus
- Neil J. Smelser and Richard Swedberg. 2005. "Introducing Economic Sociology."
- Paul Hirsch, Stuart Michaels, and Ray Friedman. 1990. "Clean Models vs. Dirty Hands: Why Economics is Different from Sociology."

Week 2 (1/30 & 2/1): The Economic Approach

- Selections from "Naked Economics" (for non-Economics majors)
- Selections from "Introduction to Sociology" (for non-Sociology majors)
- Gary Becker. 1993. "Nobel Lecture: The Economic Way of Looking at Behavior."
- Charles F. Manski. 2000. "Economic Analysis of Social Interactions"
- James Baron and Michael T. Hannan. 1994. "The Impact of Economics on Contemporary Sociology."

- ✧ Describe your thing in class on 2/1

Week 3 (2/6 & 2/8): Economic Actions in Context: Embeddedness

- Karl Polanyi. 1957. "The Economy as Instituted Process"
- Mark Granovetter. 1985. "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness."
- Brian Uzzi. 1997. "Social structure and competition in interfirm networks: The paradox of embeddedness"
- Greta Krippner and Anthony S. Alvarez. 2007. "Embeddedness and the Intellectual Projects of Economic Sociology"

Week 4 (2/13 & 2/15): Economics Actions in Context: Social Networks

- Bruce Carruthers and Sarah Babb. 2013. "Networks in the Economy."
- Mark Granovetter. 1983. "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited."
- Alejandro Portes and Julia Sensenbrenner. 1993. "Embeddedness and Immigration: Notes on the Social Determinants of Economic Action."
- Joel Podolny and James N. Baron. 1997. "Resources and Relationships: Social Networks and Mobility in the Workplace."
- Devah Pager, Bart Bonikowski, and Bruce Western. 2009. "Discrimination in a Low-Wage Labor Market A Field Experiment."
- In-class movie "*Too Small to Jail*"

Week 5 (2/20 & 2/22): Markets: Opening up the Black Box

- Clifford Geertz. 1978. "The Bazaar Economy: Information and Search in Peasant Marketing."
- Neil Fligstein. 1996. "Markets as Politics: A Political-Cultural Approach to Market Institutions"
- Michel Callon. 1998. "Introduction: the embeddedness of economic markets in economics."
- Neil Fligstein and Luke Dauter. 2007. " The Sociology of Markets."

✧ Short Paper 1 due 2/22

Week 6 (2/27 & 3/1): Cultures and Economic Actions

- Bruce Carruthers and Sarah Babb. 2013 "Marketing and the Meaning of Things."
- Viviana Zelizer. 1978. "Human Values and the Market: The Case of Life Insurance and Death in 19th Century America."
- Sarah Quinn. 2008. "The Transformation of Morals in Markets: Death, Benefits, and the Exchange of Life Insurance Policies."
- Cheris Shun-Ching Chan. 2009. Creating a Market in the Presence of Cultural Resistance: The Case of Life Insurance in China.
- Kieran Healy. 2000. "Embedded Altruism: Blood Collection Regimes and the European Union's Donor Population."

Week 7 (3/6 & 3/8): Markets and Morality

- Albert O. Hirschman. 1982. Rival interpretations of market society: civilizing, destructive, or feeble?
- Viviana Zelizer. 2000. "The purchase of intimacy."
- Viviana Zelizer. 2006. "Do Markets Poison Intimacy?"
- Marion Fourcade and Kieran Healy. 2007. "Moral views of market society."
- Michael Sandel. 2012. "What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets." (selection)

✧ Short Paper 2 due 3/8

Week 8 (3/13 & 3/15): Spring Break

Week 9 (3/20 & 3/22): Political Economy

- Frank Dobbin. 2001. "Why the Economy Reflects the Polity: Early Rail Policy in Britain, France and the United States."
- Fred Block and Peter Evans. 2005. "The State and the Economy"
- Timothy Mitchell. 2009. "Carbon Democracy"
- Wolfgang Streeck. 2010. "E pluribus unum? Varieties and commonalities of capitalism."

Week 10 (3/27 & 3/29): Global Commodity Chain

- Gary Gereffi. 1994. "The Organization of Buyer-Driven Global Commodity Chains: How US Retailers Shape Overseas Production Networks."
- Jennifer Bair. 2005. "Global capitalism and commodity chains: looking back, going forward."
- Stefano Ponte. 2002. "The Latte revolution!? Regulation, markets and consumption in the global coffee chain"
- Kenneth L. Kraemer, Greg Linden, and Jason Dedrick. 2011. "Capturing value in Global Networks: Apple's iPad and iPhone"

✧ Short Paper 3 due 3/29

Week 11 (4/3 & 4/5): Pricing, Valuation, and Calculation

- Donald MacKenzie and Yuval Millo. 2003. "Constructing a Market, Performing Theory: The Historical Sociology of a Financial Derivatives Exchange."
- Wendy Nelson Espeland and Michael Sauder. 2007. "Rankings and Reactivity: How Public Measures Recreate Social Worlds."
- Marion Fourcade. 2011. "Cents and Sensibility: Economic Valuation and the Nature of 'Nature'."
- Ashley Mears. 2011. "Economics of the Catwalk."

Week 12 (4/10 & 4/12): The Economics Profession

- David Colander and Arjo Klamer. 1987. "The Making of an Economist"
- Robert H. Frank, Thomas Gilovich, and Dennis T. Regan. 1993. "Does studying economics inhibit cooperation?"
- David Colander, et al. 2009. "The financial crisis and the systemic failure of the economics profession."
- Daniel S. Hamermesh. 2013. "Six Decades of Top Economics Publishing: Who and How?"
- Marion Fourcade, Etienne Ollion, Yann Algan. 2015. "The Superiority of Economists"
- In-class movie: *The True Cost*

Week 13 (4/17 & 4/19): Consumerism and Environmental Sustainability

✧ Short Paper 4 due 4/17

- Bill McKibben, "Deep Economy" Chapter 1
- Juliet Schor, "True Wealth" Chapter 1

Week 14 (4/24 & 4/26): Student Presentation

Week 15 (5/1): Conclusion and Reflection

✧ Final paper due May 6th 1159pm