

Understanding Communities, Spring 2009

UNST 220, Tuesday 3:30-4:45, Thursday 3:30-4:45

Cramer Hall 224

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Office hours, by appointment

Course Development

This course is part of the Understanding Communities cluster that explores the nature of the communities we live in, whether defined spatially (such as a neighborhood) or as a set of ties based on sharing a common interest. Building community has become a central debate in a number of social sciences, including sociology, political science, economics, and psychology. In a culture emphasizing individualism and individual rights, how can we balance the needs for community and responsibility to others with individual needs for personal development? In this cluster, students have the opportunity to gain practical as well as theoretical experience with building communities.

Course Description

Many sources of information affect one's notions of what cities are and should be. This course reviews the mechanisms by which individuals gather information in and about an urban landscape, the media through which impressions derived from that information are expressed, and the degree to which authoritative perspectives condition both of these processes.

This course considers how to study communities and how well social scientific knowledge squares with the understanding of community members. The study requires students to learn and utilize a variety of skills including calculation, interviewing, and observation, as well as organization of observations through selection and synthesis. We will explore the concepts of community using four themes basic to the cluster: community formation and change; conflict and cooperation within and between communities; balancing individualism and community; and social control.

We will focus on historical and contemporary communities within cities and suburbs that are differentiated along lines of social class, race, ethnicity, lifestyle, and religious affiliation. We will take a social-psychological perspective of identity and explore its relationship to place. Community will be analyzed using materials such as historical documents, census data, field observation, film, fiction, and traditional sociological and historical scholarship. As students examine theories of community they will be challenged to discover how community experiences (their own and others) inform their understanding of the theories. There will be numerous opportunities for reflection and examination of personal beliefs and experiences through discussion and writing.

This course utilizes a lecture / discussion format, therefore attendance in lecture and mentor sessions is mandatory. There will be a sign-in sheet at each session which will be used as a part of the course evaluation.

Course Learning Objectives:

- 1- Develop inquiry and critical thinking skills that will contribute to future learning.
- 2- Increase understanding of the human experience, in particular, to experience some of
 1. the variety of communities in Portland.
- 3- Learn skills that inform different ways of seeing & understanding community.
- 4- Develop an appreciation of the complexity of cities in form and function and the
 2. importance of multi-disciplinary investigation of cities.
- 5- Master the skills of selection and synthesis that enable us to organize our observations and make written and oral arguments from research and experience and further develop the ability to communicate what has been learned.
- 6- Develop an appreciation for and understanding of ethical issues and social
 3. responsibility. In particular the relationship between personal, social, and global wellbeing and personal judgment and action.
- 7- Learn to use our acquired knowledge to contribute to community.

Objectives related to University General Education Goals:

A- Inquiry and Critical Thinking: Students will examine the forces and dynamics that have shaped U.S. American city life. Attention will be given the political, economic, and social factors and students will be challenged to discover how their own experiences and discoveries inform their understanding of the theories.

B- Communication: Students will be required to produce written, visual, and oral presentations in class. In addition, students will facilitate class discussion and research.

C- Human Experience: Students will be challenged to examine theories and practices of urban life within the context of their own personal and community experience.

D- Ethical Issues and Social Responsibility: The themes of the course expose issues and processes that encourage social responsibility and a sense of community. Assignments will call for analysis of personal responsibility for developing oneself as a contributing member of society.

Required Texts:

Sidewalk, Mitchell Duneier, Straus and Giroux

Urban problems in sociological perspective, Thomas R Shannon, Nancy Kleniewski, William M. Cross, Waveland press

Course Requirements:

Reading Reflections and quizzes	100
2 Methodology exercises @ 100ea	200
Critical Observation (including short essay)	
Using Demographics	
Book review / critique	200
Exploring Portland	400
Mentor Section participation (<i>determined by attendance & engagement</i>)	100
<i>Total.....</i>	<i>1000</i>

Grading:

Points 0	.06	.64	.67	.70	.74	.77	.80	.84	.87	.90	.95
Grade F	D-	D	D+	C-	C	C+	B-	B	B+	A-	A

All assignments are due when indicated. Late assignments will result in a loss of 10% per class session.

Assignments are graded up or down from the median. I.e., student work must demonstrate above or below average knowledge and skill to receive a grade higher or lower than a C. No incomplete grades will be given without a substantial and reasonable cause therefore it is imperative to stay current with assignments – students experiencing difficulty should seek help from the professor or mentor as soon as possible.

Weekly Reading Reflections:

Students should bring a *blue book* to class. (Blue books are available in the PSU bookstore – non-blue book reflections will suffer 10% point loss). Beginning with the 2nd class session students will be required to write a concise but engaged response to a question related to the assigned readings (about 1 per week). In most cases students will be allowed to use their texts in writing the response. However, there will also be at least 2 quizzes over the reading where students will not be allowed use of their texts. Response writing will be limited to the first 15 minutes of the class session so promptness is advisable. In some classes the reflection will be based on film shown in class and response to questions distributed in class.

Critical Observation Exercise:

In order to learn or sharpen our skills as trained observers of urban life, each student will spend at least 1 hour two different days observing behavior at Pioneer Court House Square and then write an essay on their findings. A handout will provide greater details.

Using Demographics:

In order to understand the strengths and limitations of demographics as an analytical tool, students will develop a profile of the neighborhood they live in or when they know well. The profile will consist of demographic data, their own observations and 2 other people who know that neighborhood. Students will then compare and contrast the

three types of information.

Book Review / Evaluative Critique:

One of the themes of this course relates to personal and group identity in the urban environment. Students will have the opportunity to read, discuss, review, and evaluate a book (*Sidewalk*) that addresses this theme. A handout will provide greater details.

Exploring Portland:

The centerpiece of our inquiry will be a team fieldwork investigation of a particular aspect of Portland community life. Drawing upon the methods of observation and use of demographics, teams will add the skills of interviewing and presentation. Drawing together skills in oral and written communication students will examine human interaction in the city and suggest topics related to ethics and moral / political responsibility related to their investigation. A handout will provide greater details.

Mentor Session Participation:

Much of the deliberation, workshop, and lab experience associated with this course takes place in mentor section. Therefore attendance and engagement is mandatory. Attendance in the main class will be taken into consideration when determining the final grade for the course.

Sophomore Inquiry and University Studies:

This course is the Sophomore Inquiry course for the Community Studies cluster; it is one of the general education courses you may choose to take following Freshman Inquiry. If you transferred to PSU as a sophomore this may be your first University Studies course. This course is followed by a number of other courses or a "cluster" - three of which you might choose to fulfill your general education UNST requirements. Or, you might choose to pursue three courses from another cluster that follow one of the other Sophomore Inquiry courses you take.

Junior / Senior Community Studies Cluster Courses

CHLA 301U Chicano/Latino Communities

EC 414U Public and Private Investment

EC 419U Economics of Race & Ethnicity

ENG 410U Literary Utopian Communities

ESR 355U Understanding the Environment

ESR 356U Understanding Environmental Conservation

GEOG 332U Urban Geography

GEOG 410U Urban Natural Resources

GEOG 462U Sense of Place

PHE 444U Global Health

PHE 452U Gender, Race, Class and Health

SOC 420U Urbanization and Community

SOC 436U Social Movements

SP 437U Urban Communication

USP 311U Introduction to Urban Planning

USP 312U Urban Housing and Development (prerequisite USP 311)

USP 385U/HST 337U History of American Cities

USP 425U Community and the Built Environment

USP 426U Neighborhood Conservation and Change

Tentative Course Outline

Topic	Reading	Assignments
	Week 1	
Introduction to the course and “what is community?”		Email addresses
	Week 2	
Origins of Urban Crisis	Shannon, Chapter One <i>Sidewalk, Start reading</i>	Choose Groups Select area of town
	Week 3	
Patterns of Regional and Metropolitan Growth	Shannon, Chapter Two <i>Sidewalk, keep reading</i>	
	Week 4	
Nature of Urban Life	Sannon, Chapter Three <i>Sidewalk, keep reading</i>	Critical Observation due
	Week 5	
Problems of Disadvantaged Housing and Urban Decay	Shannon, chapter Four Shannon, Chapter Five <i>Sidewalk, keep reading</i>	
	Week 6	
Transportation	Shannon, Chapter Six <i>Sidewalk, Keep reading</i>	Demographic Profile due
	Week 7	
Urban Political Systems Delivery of Services	Shannon, Chapter Seven Shannon, Chapter Eight <i>Sidewalk, Keep reading</i>	
	Week 8	
Urban Problems other Societies Urban Problems in Perspective	Shannon, Chapter Nine Shannon, Chapter Ten	Sidewalk Review Due
	Week 9	
Exploring Portland Team Presentations		Exploring Presentations
	Week 10	
Exploring Portland Team Presentations		Exploring Presentations
	Final	
Exploring Portland Team Presentations		If necessary