

Sociology of the City

SOC375H1S

Department of Sociology

Winter 2024

Meeting Time: Thursday, 1:10 PM – 3:00 PM

Location:

Instructor

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Introduction

For over a century, sociologists have focused on understanding different issues related to cities and their urbanization processes. However, in investigating the city, there have been several debates about their past and future. Cities have played a vital role in the global economy, but within the past decade, their importance has increased. From issues of housing affordability to homelessness, from debt crises to energy usage, from insufficient water to the outbreak of diseases, name a problem that concerns any aspect of social life, and the city is the crucible of where you will find it. On the other hand, cities arguably represent our best hope for finding solutions to these enormous problems since they also serve as incubators of innovation, cultural exchange, and wealth creation. It is for these reasons that understanding cities become an important frame for understanding the joys and perils of social life.

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to present and examine some of the major approaches to understanding issues that cities face, from the past to the present. Urban areas are dense settlements of diverse groups of people. Ethnoracial, gender, sexual, cultural, economic, and political heterogeneity all require negotiation and sometimes lead to conflicts that play out in the streets and neighborhoods of major metropolises. Also, local and global elite political and financial actors in cities have a heavy hand in shaping the direction of urban development and the allocation of resources. This course focuses on the role of both institutional actors and city residents in producing and responding to several urban issues.

Course Objectives

- Identify the foundational and dominant themes considered in the sociological study of cities and urban areas
- Critically examine the ways in which cities have been theorized, studied, designed, and planned

- Distinguish between disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to studying cities
- Recognize the range of methodologies utilized to analyze space and place and be able to determine when each is useful

Prerequisites

Completion of 1.0 SOC at the 200-level is required to take to take this course. Students without this prerequisite will be removed from the course.

Required Text

Sarah Mayorga. 2023. *Urban Specters: The Everyday Harms of Racial Capitalism*. University of Carolina Press.

Students are required to buy, rent or borrow the required book. All other readings will be posted on Quercus for their viewing. It is the student's responsibility to download and review all assigned material PRIOR TO CLASS. Additional readings and course materials may be assigned, but at no cost to the student. All additional material can be downloaded from Quercus as well.

Course Grading

The University of Toronto Grading Scheme will be used to evaluate individual assignments as well as the overall grade for each student in this class. For more information, please review the university's grading practices policy:

<https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/grading-practices-policy-university-assessment-and-january-1-2020>.

Course Evaluations

Each student's grade will be based on four areas. The purpose of designing the course in this manner is to allow students the opportunity to engage in different areas of evaluation including traditional examinations and diverse writing and presentation assignments. The following lists depicts the course breakdown:

I. Discussion Questions (15%)

A good question is both answerable and challenging. It inspires analysis, synthesis, interpretation, and critical thinking. A discussion question that is truly great is challenging and inspires people to think critically and respond with well thought out answers. These questions are a framework for creating prompts that encourage inquiry, challenge us to think bigger and connect the classroom to real world ideas and events. For this course, you are to provide one discussion question each week based on the assigned readings (unless otherwise instructed). Discussion questions are due Wednesday by 5 PM. You are also expected to respond to at least one other discussion question posed by one of your peers. Responses to your peers' questions are due Thursday by 11 AM (unless otherwise instructed). Discussion questions are

only due on days where new content is required. Discussion questions should not exceed 125 words. Please review the course schedule and Quercus for further clarification.

II. Mid-Term Test (30%)

There will be one online midterm covering theories and concepts introduced in the course up to that point in time. You will have one week to complete this exam. The exam will include a series of questions such as fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, and true/false. The exams will be administered through Quercus allowing each student to take the exam from any location. While students cannot consult each other regarding the exam, they are allowed to review any of the required readings while taking the exam. The purpose of the exam is not to test memorization but familiarity with scholars, theories, concepts, and empirical approaches in understanding cities. Additional information will be given by February 1st.

III. Group Presentation - City Profile (30%)

Students will be assigned to groups in order to conduct profiles of cities around the world. This will give you a chance to explore the historical and contemporary developments of a single city through a series of questions. Students may present these findings in a number of ways including a PowerPoint presentation, a podcast, a short video, a panel presentation, or any other medium approved by the instructor. Several questions and topics should guide this assignment including:

1. The founding of the city, historical influences on the built environment;
2. Periods of stark demographic changes (population, racial and ethnic composition, age, income, housing costs, etc.);
3. Primary modes of industry and economic activity (past and present);
4. Famous hallmarks/notable staples (e.g., museums, landmarks, food);
5. Pop culture references to the city (e.g., music, movies, documentaries);
6. Recent scholarly books on the city.

The purpose of this assignment is to facilitate a group activity by which students can work together to produce a deliverable. It also allows students the opportunity to interact with one another in a smaller setting. Students will be graded on their 1) creativity, 2) their depth of knowledge about the city, and 3) their presentation skills. Each group will identify the city of interest to their instructor by March 2nd, via email. The instructor will provide some guiding advice for each group to consider when doing their research. Additional directions regarding each medium will be given by February 8th so that each group can plan ahead.

Each group will present their final project on March 14th, 21st or 28th. Each group will have approximately 15 minutes to present their work to the class. Class that day will be treated like a conference presentation in which each group presents, and then the class will discuss overlapping themes and patterns across these case studies. Presentations typically illustrate only a small portion of one's overall knowledge. Given that the presentations are limited, the Q&A section will allow each group the opportunity to shed further insights about research conducted on their particular city. Additional directions will be given to the class by February 1st.

IV. Critical Book Review (25%)

A book review in itself does not only tell you what a book is about, but also whether it achieves what it is trying to do. Therefore, a book review is more than a summary of the content (even though this is an important component), but a critical analysis of the book and your reactions to it. It presents several areas for inquiry.

Here are a series of questions to focus your thinking:

1. What is the thesis—or main argument—of each book? If the author wanted you to get one idea from the book, what would it be? How does it compare or contrast to the world you know? What has the book accomplished?
2. What exactly is the subject or topic of each book? Does the author cover the subject adequately? Does the author cover all aspects of the subject in a balanced fashion? Can you detect any biases? What is the approach to the subject [topical, analytical, chronological, descriptive]?
3. How does the author of each book support his or her argument? What evidence [i.e., sources cited and data collection] does each author use to prove his or her point? Do you find that evidence convincing? Why or why not? Does any of the author's information [or conclusions] conflict with other books you've read, courses you've taken, or just previous assumptions you had about the research problem under study?
4. How does the author structure his or her argument? What are the parts that make up the whole? Does the argument make sense to you? Does it persuade you? Why or why not? Were there any questions left unanswered? Were limitations to the study effectively addressed?
5. How has each book helped you understand the subject? Would you recommend the books to others? Why or why not?

The format should be Times New Roman, 12 pt. font with 1-inch margins, double – spaced using ASA citation formatting. Papers should not exceed 800 words excluding references. Papers should be typed and saved as a word document or PDF and then uploaded to Quercus. Late submissions will not be accepted. Additional information and examples regarding the book review will be given by February 1st. All papers are due Thursday, April 4th, by 12 PM.

Grading Rationale

For the written assignments, I consider an “A” to denote work of excellence, rising above the merely sufficient and competent to incorporate new insights as well as creative and critical thinking. It will, of course, be well written and demonstrate depth of thought and clarity of conception. A “B” denotes a mastery of the concepts and issues, competent and well-written work. A “C” is given for work with logical inconsistencies, which fails to adequately explore all the arguments related to the topic, which has errors of fact, or which is badly written and poorly organized or conceptualized. A “D” is for work that fails to meet even these minimal standards.

An “NC” is for work of exceedingly poor quality, including work that is plagiarized, unintelligible, and/or handed in extremely late. There is no extra credit offered in this course and no replacement assignments will be entertained.

Plagiarism

Be careful to avoid plagiarism. It is a serious academic offense with serious penalties (see the “Code of Behavior on Academic Matters”). If you are using someone else’s ideas, do not present them as your own. Give proper references if you are using somebody else’s ideas, and use quotation marks if you are quoting. When in doubt, it is always safer to over-reference --you are not going to be punished for that. Please also be aware that turning in an old paper, or large parts thereof, for credit in a second (third, etc.) course, is considered an academic offense that results in students being referred off to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Ouriginal

Sometimes, students will be required to submit their assignments to the University’s plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool’s reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University’s use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>).

For some of your assignments, we will be using the software Ouriginal. It uses text matching technology as a method to uphold the University’s high academic integrity standards to detect any potential plagiarism. Ouriginal is integrated into Quercus. For the assignments set up to use Ouriginal, the software will review your paper when you upload it to Quercus. To learn more about Ouriginal’s privacy policy please review its [Privacy Policy](#).

Students not wishing their assignment to be submitted through Ouriginal will not be assessed unless a student instead provides, along with their work, sufficient secondary material (e.g., reading notes, outlines of the paper, rough drafts of the final draft, etc.) to establish that the paper they submit is truly their own.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

The use of generative artificial intelligence tools or apps for assignments in this course, including tools like ChatGPT and other AI writing or coding assistants, is prohibited. The knowing use of generative artificial intelligence tools, including ChatGPT and other AI writing and coding assistants, for the completion of, or to support the completion of, an examination, term test, assignment, or any other form of academic assessment, may be considered an academic offense in this course. Representing as one’s own an idea, or expression of an idea, that was AI-generated may be considered an academic offense in this course. Students may not copy or paraphrase from any generative artificial intelligence applications, including ChatGPT and other AI writing and coding assistants, for the purpose of completing assignments in this course. This

course policy is designed to promote your learning and intellectual development and to help you reach course learning outcomes.

Accessibility Needs

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible: disability.services@utoronto.ca or <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility>.

Policies for Lateness and Absences

Late submissions will not be accepted. Class lateness without prior notice will not be accepted. If students plan to be absent from any class, they are to report the absence to the instructor as soon as possible. Students who miss the test, or are late in submitting an assignment for medical reasons, need to email the instructor (not the TA), and also declare their absence on the system (ACORN). (NOTE: Because of Covid-19, students do NOT need to submit the usual documentation, i.e., medical notes or the Verification of Illness forms). Students who miss the test, or are late in submitting an assignment for other reasons, such as family or other personal reasons, should request their College Registrar to email the instructor. Please be advised that absences related to extracurricular activities are not considered emergency situations. Students involved in such activities should communicate their absences to the professor by the first day of the course.

Policy Regarding Changes to the Syllabus

As the instructor, I reserve the right to make changes to the schedule and structure of the syllabus in order to provide a better learning environment to the students. All changes will be made with advanced notice at no additional costs to the students. Concerns or issues with changes to the syllabus should be addressed to me as soon as possible so a suitable alternative can be determined.

Course Schedule

January 11th – Introduction and Course Requirements

- Introductions
- Review of Course Syllabus
- Video: "[Calthorpe, Peter - 7 Principles for Building Better Cities.](#)" *TED Talk*. 2017, August 31.

January 18th – Towards an Epistemology of Studying Cities

- Amin, Ash. 2007. "Re-thinking the urban social." *City* 11(1): 100-114.
- Gans, Herbert J. 2009. "Some problems of and futures for urban sociology: Toward a Sociology of Settlements." *City & Community* 8(3): 211-219.

- Wu, Cary. 2016. "Moving from Urban Sociology to the Sociology of the City." *The American Sociologist* 47(1): 102-114.
- **Discussion Questions Due**

January 25th – Early Urban Scholars

- Mumford, Lewis. "What is a city?" *The City Reader*.
- Wirth, Louis. "Urbanism as a way of life." *The City Reader*.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. "The Negro problems of Philadelphia," "The question of earning a living," and "Color prejudice." *The City Reader*.
- **Discussion Questions Due**

February 1st – Studying Other Cities

- Ren, Xuefei. 2018. "From Chicago to China and India: Studying the city in the twenty-first century." *Annual Review of Sociology* 44: 497-513.
- Ocejio, Richard E., Ervin B. Kosta, and Alexis Mann. 2020. "Centering small cities for urban sociology in the 21st Century." *City & Community* 19(1): 3-15.
- Garrido, Marco, Xuefei Ren, and Liza Weinstein. 2021. "Toward a global urban sociology: Keywords." *City & Community* 20(1): 4-12.
- **Discussion Questions Due**

February 8th – Owning the City

- Marcuse, Peter. 2009. "From critical urban theory to the right to the city." *City* 13(2-3): 185-197.
- Atttoh, Kafui A. 2011. "What kind of right is the right to the city?." *Progress in Human Geography* 35(5): 669-685.
- **Discussion Questions Due**
- **Midterm Review**

February 15th – Midterm Test

- **Midterm must be completed by Friday, February 23rd by 5 PM**

February 22nd – Reading Week (No Class)

February 29th – Diverse Experiences within Cities

- Walks, R. Alan, and Larry S. Bourne. 2006. "Ghettos in Canada's cities? Racial segregation, ethnic enclaves and poverty concentration in Canadian urban areas." *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien* 50(3): 273-297.
- Beebeejaun, Yasminah. 2017. "Gender, Urban space, and the right to everyday life." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 39(3): 323-334.
- Doan, Petra L. 2007. "Queers in the American city: Transgendered perceptions of urban space." *Gender, Place and Culture* 14(1): 57-74.
- **Discussion Questions Due**

March 7th – Individual Group Meetings with Instructor or TA

March 14th – City Profile Presentations

- In-Class Presentations and Discussion

March 21st – City Profile Presentations

- In-Class Presentations and Discussion

March 28th – City Profile Presentations

- In-Class Presentations and Discussion

April 4th – Critical Book Reviews Due

- Authors Meet Critics and In-Class Discussion