

## **Public Sociology**

Sociology 498X  
Fall 2010

*Imagination is more important than knowledge*  
Albert Einstein

### **COURSE INFORMATION:**

Meeting: Mondays, 3:00-5:40p.m., 3215 Art-Sociology Bldg.

Instructor: Patricia Hill Collins, Professor of Sociology

Office: 4143 Art-Sociology Bldg.

Email: [pcollins@socy.umd.edu](mailto:pcollins@socy.umd.edu)

Office Hours: by appointment.

Public Sociology Project Coordinator: David Strohecker

Email: [dstrohecker@socy.umd.edu](mailto:dstrohecker@socy.umd.edu)

Office Hours: To be determined.

### **COURSE OVERVIEW:**

This course introduces the newly emerging sub-field of public sociology: what it is; what it does, and what we might imagine it to be. When most students ask what they can do with an undergraduate major in sociology, they typically think about what jobs sociologists can get. Here we examine how public sociology might help us think more expansively about sociology in general: How might sociological questions, knowledge and interpretive frameworks be of use in helping people think through and live better lives? What important social issues might benefit from sociological knowledge and ideas? Which communities of people have special need for sociology and what aspects of sociology might be especially useful to them? How might doing public sociology permeate the professional, career, community, and/or other aspects of our personal lives? Public sociology takes up these important questions.

This course asks you to examine your current identities as sociologists and/or imagine your future engagement with public sociology. Toward this end, crafting your own public sociology project lies at the heart of the course. Our weekly meetings are designed to examine issues that permeate public sociology but that might take different forms in your individual projects. Because the course will be conducted as a workshop, our analysis of public sociology will emerge primarily from thinking about doing public sociology rather than reading about and/or talking about it.

At the conclusion of this course, you should be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of what public sociology is and what it involves
- Design an original public sociology project that reflects the core ideas of public sociology
- Assess how you might be able to use public sociology in your future career and/or life plans

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

The course is designed for junior and senior sociology majors who are independent, self-disciplined

learners. Because the course is project-based, we use a collaborative workshop format where we learn from and teach each other. Key information, theories and concepts will be introduced and supplemented with a variety of visual and textual examples. You will be encouraged to reflect upon and introduce your own perspectives through a series of focused activities supplemented by weekly readings. The class also requires individual and/or collective off-campus activities. Your class preparedness, attendance and participation are all important to the course's success.

Class Participation	60%
Public Sociology Project Proposal	20%
Reflective Essay	20%

### **Class Participation (60%):**

We will use several mechanisms to assess your class participation. They are (1) class attendance; (2) an on-line research journal, posted weekly on our course Blackboard site about the status of your project; (3) and your participation in class activities and/or discussions.

(1) **Attendance:** Please sign the attendance sheet at the beginning of each class. There are 14 scheduled class sessions. Please keep in mind that, if this course met two or three times each week, missing *one* of our class sessions is the equivalent of missing *one entire week* of classes. If you miss two full weeks of classes (two class sessions), we reserve the right to drop your final grade for the course one-half grade (from A to B+ or B to C+). For each class session you miss after that, your grade will be similarly affected. In other words, when we calculate your final course grade, we will review your attendance record carefully. No partial credit for attendance is granted – you are either in class or you are not.

(2) **On-line Research Journal:** We expect you to be active learners throughout the course. We encourage collaboration, as it is one hallmark of public sociology. No later than 24 hours before the start of each week's class, we want you to make one weekly post on our Blackboard site to the entire class where you share your ideas about public sociology and/or update us on various aspects of your public sociology project. For example, you might send reflections about your project and ask if others are experiencing similar issues. The possibilities here will depend on the topic of the week, on your project, on what your classmates are developing and what you want to share or know. While optional, we also encourage you to send ideas to specific classmates concerning their public sociology projects. Make suggestions, send along resources and contact people – any help you can give. We will use these comments as the basis of class discussion. Please keep in mind that you may be asked to share your comments from your on-line research journal in class. *The most important thing is that you post something weekly.*

(3) **Participation in Class Activities and Discussions:** We understand that some people talk more than others and that each of you may have more or less to say from one week to the next. We are interested in the *quality* of your participation, not the quantity. The class will have some lectures, but the majority of class time will be spent in group discussion and/or activities. This is *not* a class for passive learners.

### **Public Sociology Project Proposal (20%):**

We want you to design a Public Sociology Project on a topic of your choice that explicitly considers how public sociology can be put into practice. In this course, you will be developing, researching and writing a

detailed *proposal* for a public sociology project you would like to do in the future. You may choose to work on your project this semester. *But we do not expect you to complete the project this semester, only the proposal.*

When it comes to your public sociology project, we encourage you to think outside the box. For example, for your Public Sociology project you might develop:

- An action research plan for a grassroots community group that helps them organize for affordable housing.
- A street theatre performance that presents sociological knowledge in a new way to a new audience.
- A funding proposal for a church that enables them to develop a sex education program.
- A storefront museum/bookstore/performing space that provides sociological understanding of schooling, unemployment, incarceration, violence and other issues that disproportionately affect poor and working-class youth.
- A video for the general public that raises awareness on an important social issue.
- A website that develops a social network among people who share some common issue.
- A public art installation.

Regardless of the form that the final project for your public sociology project takes, the substance of the project should be clearly tied to and informed by the field of sociology. In other words, when you complete your Public Sociology Project in the future, the final product for your project need not be a research paper, seminar paper, journal article or agency report (written products more closely associated with professional, critical and applied sociology).

The proposal is a written document that details the thought that went into your Public Sociology Project. We anticipate your proposal to be 8-10 pages. We will distribute more specific instructions about the overall project and requirements for the proposal later on. *We expect you to work on your proposal throughout the entire semester. **Due Date for Proposal: Monday, November 29 3:00 pm.***

### **Public Sociology Reflective Essay (20%)**

Your reflective essay is your opportunity to reflect back over what you have learned and done throughout the semester. This essay should put your Public Sociology Project in context. It might examine (1) your assessment of your performance in the process of doing your project; (2) your evaluation of your public sociology proposal, pointing out areas that might need further work and how you would go about doing it; (3) what issues, if any, your project raises for the field of public sociology; and (4) your plans for implementing your Public Sociology Project. In writing this essay, please consider key readings as well as incorporating your own experiences and opinions into your discussion. Your essay should be approximately 5 pages. ***Due Date for Reflective Essay: Monday, December 6 at 3:00 pm.***

**POLICY ON INCOMPLETES, MISSED WORK AND EXTRA CREDIT:** We typically do not grant incompletes and will calculate grades based on your demonstrated performance in the course. No extra credit will be given. All due dates are firm and extensions will not be given. Please keep in mind that attendance is *very important* in this course. If you find that you will miss more than 3 class sessions or 3 weeks of the 14 weeks course), you should consider withdrawing. In the rare situation where you become unable to

complete your coursework for unexpected reasons, do not hesitate to contact us to see whether you qualify for an incomplete. Do not simply disappear—please withdraw by the official date or try to arrange for an incomplete before the semester ends. We want you to do well in this course!

**Honor Code:** The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit <http://www.shc.umd.edu>.

### **COURSE READINGS:**

C. Wright Mills. 2000 (1959). *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press.  
Barry Glassner. 2010 (2000). *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans are Afraid of the Wrong Things*. New York: Basic Books.  
Charles Fishman. 2006. *The Wal-Mart Effect*. New York: Penguin.  
Elijah Anderson. 1999. *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City*. New York: W.W. Norton.  
Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn. 2009. *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*. New York: Vintage.

All other readings for this course are available through (1) the ELMS Blackboard site [www.elms.umd.edu](http://www.elms.umd.edu); (2) links on the syllabus itself; (3) the *Contexts* web site; and/or (4) the University of Maryland library's research portal.

### **COURSE OUTLINE:**

#### **Part 1: What is Public Sociology?**

**Week 1: Why Public Sociology? Why Now?** (Aug. 30)

**Week 2: Public Sociology** (Sept. 13)

Required Readings:

Michael Burawoy. 2005. "ASA Presidential Address: For Public Sociology." *American Sociological Review*, 70 (1): 4-28.

**Week 3: Public Sociology, Debates and Initiatives** (Sept. 20)

Required Readings:

Patricia Hill Collins. 2007 "Going Public: Doing the Sociology that Had No Name." Pp. 101-123 in D. Clawson (ed.) *Public Sociology: Fifteen Eminent Sociologists Debate Politics and the Profession in the Twenty-first Century*. University of California Press.

Evelyn Nakano Glenn. 2007 "Whose Public Sociology? The Subaltern Speaks, But Who Is Listening?" Pp. 213-230 in D. Clawson (ed.) *Public Sociology: Fifteen Eminent Sociologists Debate Politics and the Profession in the Twenty-first Century*. University of California Press.

Calhoun, Craig, (2009) 'Social Science for Public Knowledge', *Transformations of the Public Sphere*. Social Science Research Council. Online – available at: <http://publicsphere.ssrc.org/calhoun-social-science-for-public-knowledge/>

#### **Week 4: Public Sociology and the Sociological Imagination (Sept. 27)**

##### Required Reading/Website:

C. Wright Mills. 2000 (1959). *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press.

"No! The Rape Documentary" <http://notherapedocumentary.org/>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRGESU0CuvI>  
<http://www.afrolezproductions.com/blog/no-the-rape-documentary/>

### **Part 2: Public Sociology in Action**

#### **Week 5: Picking Up Where Mills Left Off: Doing Public Sociology (Oct. 4)**

##### Required Readings:

Kyle Bishop. 2006. "Raising the Dead." *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 33 (4): 196-205.

Margaret L. Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins, eds. 2010. *Race, Class, Gender: An Anthology, Seventh Edition*. Wadsworth, CA: Cengage. "Contents," p. iii-viii; "Preface," p. ix-xv; "Why Race, Class and Gender Still Matter," p. 1-16.

#### **Week 6. Engaging the General Public: Sociological Best Sellers (Oct. 11)**

##### Required Readings:

Herbert J. Gans. 1997. "Best-Sellers by Sociologists: An Exploratory Study." *Contemporary Sociology* 26 (2): 131-135.

Wesley Longhofer, Shannon Golden and Arturo Baiocchi. 2010. "A Fresh Look at Sociology Bestsellers." *Contexts* 9 (2): 18-25.

Barry Glassner. 2010 (2000). *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans are Afraid of the Wrong Things*. New York: Basic Books. Introductions, xi-xxxvi, Chap.1, 9 & 10. Select two chapters that most interest you from Chapters 2-8.

#### **Week 7. Mass Media and Sociological Knowledge: Race, Urban Sociology and *The Wire* (Oct. 18)**

##### Required Readings:

Elijah Anderson. 1999. *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City*. New York: W.W. Norton. Preface and Introduction, Chaps. 1-3 P. 9-141. Select one chapter from 4, 5 or 6. Skim Conclusion, p. 290-325.

"TV's the Wire Gets New Life in College Classrooms."  
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126021569>

Check out this link to the blog from the course they feature in the story (at Middlebury):

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126021569>

This particular page on the blog has the course syllabus:

<http://blogs.middlebury.edu/thewire/about/>

### **Week 8. Public Sociology and the Web (Oct. 25)**

#### Web Site Assignment:

“Sociology of Black Activism” <http://blackactivism.wordpress.com/>

Live Unchained Web Project. <http://liveunchained.wordpress.com/>

“Contexts” <http://contexts.org/>

## **Part 3: Public Knowledge – Lessons for Public Sociology**

### **Week 9. Public Knowledge - How Other Fields Do It (Nov. 1)**

#### Required Readings:

Charles Fishman. 2006. *The Wal-Mart Effect*. New York: Penguin. Skim the book, read the Source Notes, p. 287-307.

#### Museum Websites:

National Museum of the American Indian - <http://www.nmai.si.edu/>

National Museum of American History - <http://americanhistory.si.edu/>

African American Civil War Memorial & Museum - <http://www.afroamcivilwar.org/>

Frederick Douglass Historic Site - <http://www.nps.gov/frdo/>

Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden - <http://hirshhorn.si.edu/>

National Gallery of Art - <http://www.nga.gov/>

National Museum of African Art - <http://africa.si.edu/>

### **Week 10. Public Knowledge – How Community Groups Do It (Nov. 8)**

To be determined.

### **Week 11. Spoken Word as Public Knowledge (Nov. 15)**

#### Required Readings

Anthony Kwame Harrison. 2009. *Hip Hop Underground*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

“Introduction: A Walk in the Park” p. 1-14 and “Claiming Hip Hop: Race and the Ethics of Underground Hip Hop Participation” p. 83-119.

## Part 4: Doing Public Sociology

### Week 12. Social Justice and Human Rights (Nov. 22)

#### Required Reading:

Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn. 2009. *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*. New York: Vintage. (Introduction and Chap. 1, p. xi-22; Chap. 14, p. 233-254; and 3 additional chapters to be selected by the class through democratic means.)

### Week 13: Public Sociology Projects as Work in Progress (Nov. 29)

**Note:** These last two class sessions are very important and will weigh heavily in your class participation grade. To give you time to prepare your public sociology work-in-progress report and your reflexive essay, there are no assigned readings for either class. We will discuss both your public sociology projects and your reflective essay in class. It is very important that you arrive at class on time with your reflective essay completed.

- Discuss public sociology projects.
- Two panels – present public sociology project to class.

### Week 14: Project Wrap Up (Dec. 6)

- Discuss public sociology projects.
- Two panels – present public sociology project to class.

***Public Sociology Project Proposal Due Monday, November 29 at 3:00 pm.***

***Public Sociology Reflexive Essay Due Monday, December 6 at 3:00 pm.***