

**Sociology 684: Seminar in Public Sociology/Social Policy**  
American University  
Fall 2011

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Office Hours: Before and after class, or by appointment

Class meets: Mondays, 8:10 to 10:40 p.m.  
Class location: Battelle Tompkins, T30

**SEMINAR IN PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY**

“I believe that the world needs public sociology - a sociology that transcends the academy - more than ever. Our potential publics are multiple, ranging from media audiences to policy makers, from silenced minorities to social movements. They are local, global, and national. As public sociology stimulates debate in all these contexts, it inspires and revitalizes our discipline. In return, theory and research give legitimacy, direction, and substance to public sociology. Teaching is equally central to public sociology: students are our first public for they carry sociology into all walks of life. Finally, the critical imagination, exposing the gap between what is and what could be infuses values into public sociology to remind us that the world could be different.” –Michael Burawoy (2004 President, ASA... from his personal statement for the ASA elections)

“A public sociologist is a public intellectual who applies sociological ideas and findings to social (defined broadly) issues about which sociology (also defined broadly), has something to say.” – Herbert Gans (1999)

"If we aren't doing public sociology, we're just talking to each other. To claim to study society and to say that you 'needn't bother to make your work relevant or accessible to social members' – well, that seems to me just plain insane."--Sharon Hays, Streisand Professor of Contemporary Gender Studies, University of Southern California

"Once we acknowledge the sharp divisions in our society, we have to decide which publics we want to work with. I propose . . . that we strive to address the public and political problems of people at the lower end of the many hierarchies that define our society."--Frances Fox Piven, former president of the American Sociological Association

**Course description:** In this course, students will review and analyze how well-known sociologists participate in public discourse through theoretically-grounded debate on pressing social issues; gain appreciation of sociology's application to the public sphere; experience first-hand involvement in at least one form of public sociology, such as a policy initiative or research and evaluation of social issues. The overarching goal of this course is to create opportunities for the development of practical skills using the sociological imagination.

Public Sociologists believe that sociologists should not only engage in the intellectual pursuit of knowledge through theoretical analysis and sociological research methodology, they should also engage in public discourse in order to raise awareness of social injustice and inequality.

The focus of the readings, assignments and classroom interaction in this course will be to critically analyze the status of sociology as an applied social science and practice formulating theoretically and empirically grounded solutions to social problems.

In this course, you will be exposed to the various methodologies and theories used to communicate sociological information to a broad audience, employing the techniques used by professionals doing public sociology. These techniques include, but are not limited to: organizational assessment and program evaluation, policy research and analysis, grant research and writing, and applications to key fields and specialties from the discipline of sociology. All of these skills are essential to the success of any Public Sociologist as they help to communicate complex ideas to community leaders and decision makers, facilitate social change and inform debate on critical policy issues.

**The goals of this course are:**

1. To develop an understanding of the value and historical contribution of Public Sociologists;
2. To better appreciate the potential applications of the discipline of sociology;
3. To gain some of the experience and skills necessary to influence decision makers and stakeholders.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

### ***General Class Participation and Attendance (10 points)***

**This is an upper-level graduate course in sociology.** In this course, the expectation is that you are a serious student, committed to excellence in scholarship and professional skills. Class assignments will include individual and group activities involving full class participation, creative writing and societal interaction and research. **Students are expected to complete all reading assignments prior to each class session, participate/engage in class discussions and come to class prepared.**

### ***Class led discussion/Annotated Bibliography (30 points)***

Public sociologists work and are situated in various settings, and specialize in a wide variety of fields. To further the class's appreciation of this reality, each student will select an area and lead a class discussion/present on the chosen area. Example areas are below but you may nominate your own.

- Criminology & Criminal Justice
- Research and Evaluation
  - Applied Social Research
  - Policy Research
- Community & Urban Sociology
- Public Health
  - Substance Use
  - Mental Health
  - Physical Health (Obesity, Physical Disability, etc.)
- Work & Organizations
- Social Psychology/Micro Sociology
- Medical Sociology
- Education

On the evenings of **(DATES TBD)**, these discussions will take place. You are encouraged to select an area that fits with your larger interests within the field of sociology. This assignment, and how it will be evaluated, consists of the following components:

- Presenting on and leading a class discussion of the corresponding assigned chapters from the relevant class text(s) which are indicated on the course schedule page of the syllabus, as well as providing the class with other references/handouts that you, as the instructor, would want the rest of us to read in advance as preparation for the selected topic. You may decide whether to do a formal presentation or not but generating discussion is the primary goal of this assignment. So think about how to engage the class. Also, be sure to think about what makes this topic public or applied in how you generate discussion.
- Preparing a detailed annotated bibliography of the topic you have selected. Specifically, you are to put together a minimum of 15 references (from relevant academic journal articles in sociology or relevant related fields) that represent the latest trends, current research, and common methodological approaches for this topic. If warranted, any of these entries could be provided to the class in advance, if you wish to have the class

review/read it in preparation of your class lead discussion. Be sure to have a copy of your annotated bibliography printed out and available to all members of the class the night of your presentation. Also: send an electronic version of your annotated bibliography to the instructor (in WORD format).

***Applied Sociological Theory Paper (20 points)***

***Due Date: TBD***

The Applied Sociological Theory Paper (ASTP) provides an opportunity for seminar participants to learn about a single Public Sociologist practicing today, and trace her/his theoretical and methodological lineage beginning with the discipline's founders. Through this exercise, seminar participants will gain a deeper understanding of the importance of sociological theory and method, biography and social context in formulating positions on social problems and social issues. To begin the ASTP, students will conduct a brief literature review of a contemporary Public Sociologist of their choosing. The literature review will summarize the subject's professional work in terms of her/his use of theory, methods and subject matter. Students will contact their subject via e-mail or telephone to discuss in greater detail her/his choices of theory, methods and subject matter (i.e. welfare, corporate corruption, social inequality etc) and an explanation of the challenges her/his subject encounters while engaging multiple publics in civic discourse. Then, students will trace the sociological lineage of their chosen Public Sociologist to identify those that have influenced their work. Each paper should include a critique of the approaches used by the subject.

The final product will be a 7-10 page exploration of the biography, professional life and social context of a Public Sociologist. *Papers must use 12 point font with double-spacing. Books, articles, unpublished reports etc., must be correctly cited in a reference section using ASA standards. Please do not rely on Internet articles unless it is absolutely necessary.* Each student will conduct a 15 minute presentation based on her/his ASTP in class (**DATES TBD**).

***Final Project: Organization Assessment & Presentation (40 points)***

***Due Date: TBD***

This experiential learning project (final project approximately 20 pages) and final class presentation is a semester long project that will culminate in a detailed analysis and presentation on a topic chosen by each student. This project involved choosing an organization and conducting a careful assessment of this organization, using the guiding questions below. In order to complete the work of this project, each student should plan on spending 5 to 10 hours on site (minimum) to gather the necessary information for the assignment. A comprehensive presentation will be offered by each student. This presentation needs to be polished, professional, and applied in focus highlighting the public sociology elements to the work you engaged in for this assignment. I will entertain alternative approaches to this, such as selecting a more general topic (e.g. labor issues) but will still expect you to find relevant people to talk to about the topic (for example, for labor, you might contact people at the federal Bureau of Labor, or a local agency that provides workplace support).

**I. Strategic Plan**

- Determine the target level of the social organization
- Engage in steps in the planning process

- What is the organization's purpose?
- What are its abstract statements of purpose (goals)?
- How will these goals be achieved (objective)?
- How can the organization or program be evaluated?

## II. Needs Assessment

- Describe the target population and the service environment
- Identify needs (a need is a “problem” experienced by a group that can be solved)
- Identify solutions
  - cost analysis (resources necessary for the solution to operate; personnel, facilities, equipment, material and supplies, client costs, other)
  - impact (much more difficult to measure than costs, because reliable and valid information is rarely available)
  - feasibility (what will it take – political, social will – to achieve the solution)

## III. Organizational Analysis

- Define the organization's culture and structure (a pattern of basic assumptions-- invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems or external adaptation and internal integration-- that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems). Culture/Structure should include:
  - Norms and dominant values espoused by the organization
  - The philosophy that guides the organization
  - The feeling or climate that is conveyed in the organization by the physical layout and the way in which members of the organization interact with clients and/or outsiders
  - Training, orientation, allocations of resources, policies/procedures, information and communication systems

This project represents an important opportunity for students to gain “real-world” experience in the kind of work that Public Sociologists do. Be sure to use the readings that you are exposed to during the semester as resources for this assignment.

## **TEACHING METHOD**

This class is intended to be conducted in an activity based, interactive style. As such, the standard lecture format is undesirable. You will be required to come to class fully prepared to discuss and share your thoughts about all reading materials and assignments. Students should feel free to construct and express critical opinions about topics addressed but remembering to be respectful of others’ (peer and instructor) ideas and thoughts. All students are expected to attend class regularly and promptly. You are responsible for all material covered in class, announcements, deadlines and discussions about assignments, regardless of whether you are present.

## **Required Reading**

It is expected that each student will complete all required reading prior to class.

### **Blackboard:**

Students are required to access the course's "Blackboard" site, which is an on-line resource with information and resources for this class. You will find required readings, websites, announcements, and other materials relevant to this course. Be certain to check this site on a regular basis.

### **Books:**

Doing Sociology. Jammie Price, Roger Straus, and Jeffrey Breese. 2009. Lexington Books.  
Directions in Applied Sociology. Eds. Stephen Steele and Joyce Iutovich. 1997. SAS.  
Journal of Applied Sociology. Volume 13, Issue 2, 1996.

### **Handouts/References to other readings:**

Additional articles, related handouts, electronic sources and other resources will be distributed in class on occasion, or assigned to review for a future class date.

## **Grading**

Organization Assessment & Presentation	40 points
Class led discussion/Bibliography	30 points
Applied Sociological Theoretical Paper	20 points
Class Participation and Attendance	10 points

### **Final Grades are calculated as follows:**

93-100 A	87-89 B+	80-82 B-	73-76 C	0-69 F
90-92 A-	83-86 B	77-79 C+	70-72 C-	

## **COURSE SCHEDULE – Subject to Change per Instructor's Discretion**

This course is not comprehensive. There are myriad critiques, texts, and research articles of many of these topics, and as such, there are many important areas we will not be able to touch on. However, to maximize the amount we can cover in a single semester, readings considered representative were selected.

### **Course Schedule**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Readings</b>
<i>Estimates</i>		
Aug 29	Introduction to the Course: Overview of Syllabus and Class	
Sep 5	Labor Day – No Class	
Sep 12	Doing Sociology – Examples from the Field	Price et al., Chapters 1 & 2 Directions, Chapters 1 & 7
Sep 19	Sociological Perspective & Public Sociology	Price et al., Chapter 14, C. Wright Mills Kleidman., JASSP, 23:1, 68-82

		Iutovich, JAS, 13:1, 12-30 Weinstein, JAS, 13:1, 31-55 Schultz, JAS, 13:1, 104-126
Sep 26	Making Applications of Sociological Theory	Price et al., Chapter 3 Akers, JASSP, 22:2, 24-41
Oct 3	Public Sociology as Research	Price et al., Chapters 7, 8, 11, 12, 13 Directions, Chapters 4 & 10 Will et al., JASSP, 22:2, 75-90 Embry & Rodabough., JASSP, 22:2, 105-112 Cernia, JAS, 13:2, 79-100
Oct 10	The Nature of Public Policy Research & Work Annotated Bibliography Presentations	Other readings to be assigned
Oct 17	Social Epidemiology Guest: Dr. Yonette Thomas, Howard University	Geography and Social Epidemiology, Ch. 2 & 7 Readings to be provided
Oct 24	The Nature of Public Policy Research & Work, Continued Annotated Bibliography Presentations	Readings to be assigned
Oct 31	Cultural Competence Guest: Dr. Wil Hardy	Readings to be assigned Arredondo Presentation (to be made available)
Nov 7	Annotated Bibliography Presentations	
Nov 14	Some Examples of Public Sociology Education & Criminology	Price et al., Chapters 9 & 10 Dentler, JASSP, 22:2, 16-23 Price et al., Chapters 5, 6 Other readings to be assigned Schwartz & Campbell, JAS, 13:1, 77-10
Nov 21	The Future: How Do We Change the World? Clinical Sociology – is there a fit?	Directions, Chapters 8 & 9 Price et al., Chapter 4 Goldman-Schuyler, SAS article
Nov 28	Jobs in Applied Sociology Guest: Dr. Margaret Vitullo, ASA	Directions, Chapter 5
Dec 5	Organization Assessment due and presentations	