SOC 401B: Sociology of Culture  
Values, Identities, and Actions

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Office Hours: By appointment.  
Course Website: https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/1175356

Course Description and Objectives:
As anyone who has traveled to a foreign place can tell you, norms, values, customs, and practices can vary between populations. The experienced ‘culture shock’ offers a moment to reflect on how we often take our own culture for granted. Sociologists ask some fascinating questions involving culture: did cultural values contribute to the rise of capitalism? is getting high on marijuana a cultural experience? can cultural practices influence with whom we fall in love?

In this course, we will become familiar with the major approaches to the sociological study of culture. We will consider how culture can affect our bodies, our brains, our goals, our actions, and our identities. We will investigate how culture can change and cause changes. Course materials will include classical understandings of culture, but we will mainly focus on contemporary debates and practices in the sociological study of culture. Students will design and execute an original research project using a sociologically-informed approach to some aspect of a culture or subculture. Projects may include fieldwork observations, interviews, or other qualitative methods.

Our goals are to
1. explore the theoretical debates in the sociology of culture, focusing on the concepts of values, identities, and actions,
2. consider how these concepts help us understand the role and influence of culture in contemporary societies, and
3. analytically apply these ideas to an original research topic employing qualitative methods.

Required Texts:

All other texts will be available for download from Canvas. You must complete all reading by the day it is listed on the syllabus.

Required Tasks:
**Final Paper:** Students will write *one paper of 10-15 double-spaced pages* on an independently researched topic related to course themes. I encourage students to conduct qualitative fieldwork for this paper. This can include ethnography, interviews, or participant observation. I will evaluate the paper by the strength of its theoretical framework, quality of the research,
sociological interest of the research question, its clarity, and style. A rough draft is due in the ninth week of the quarter. Further instructions are available on the Canvas website.

**Blog posts:** Students will write two ‘blog posts’ (1-2 pages each, double-spaced) on a current event (from the past 2 months) which concerns course topics OR a “notes from the field” style update on their ongoing research. You may choose to do one and then the other. Students will sign up for dates to briefly present (5 minutes) their ideas to the class by describing the event or ongoing research and relating it to course topics. Further instructions are available on the Canvas website.

**Participation:** Class involvement is key to a successful course. In addition to contributing to class discussion, completing quizzes and handing in in-class ‘free writing’ assignments, you will be required to bring at least 2 discussion questions to class each Wednesday.

**Paper Proposal:** A one page, double-spaced paper proposal briefly explaining your paper topic, identifying your research question, discussing possible methods, and referencing at least one source is due during the third week of class. Further instructions are available on the Canvas website.

**Annotated Bibliography:** An annotated bibliography including at least 3 outside sources you plan to use for your final paper is due in the sixth week of class. Students will select one of these sources for the entire class to read in the last weeks of the quarter. Further instructions are available on the Canvas website.

**Grades:**

Grades for the course will be scored based on the following assignments:

- **Final Paper:**
  - Final draft: 25 points
  - Peer-editing workshop: 5 points
- **Class Participation:**
- **Blog Posts:**
  - 2 posts x 10 = 20 points
- **Paper Proposal**
- **Annotated Bibliography**

Total: 100 points

**Scoring:**

- All written assignments and exams will be scored in increments of half points in rubrics posted on the course website.
- You will be graded on grammar and style for all assignments (with slightly more lax standards on exams).
- Your participation scores will be based on your activity answering/asking questions in class and section, timely posting online, and the satisfactory completion of your service learning commitment.
Final Grades
The University of Washington uses numerical grading on a 4.0 scale.

4.0 = 95-100 points  
3.5-3.9 = 90-94  
3.2-3.4 = 87-89  
2.9-3.1 = 84-86  
2.5-2.8 = 81-83  
2.2-2.4 = 77-80  
1.9-2.1 = 73-76  
1.5-1.8 = 69-72  
1.2-1.4 = 65-68  
1.0-1.1 = 61-64  
0.0 = <60

Academic Responsibility:
I expect students to do their own work and cite others’ work properly. If you are unsure if you are plagiarizing, ask for help! I will deal with instances of cheating and plagiarism harshly.

Late Assignment Policy:
Subtract 1 point (1% of final course grade) for each day the assignment is late.

Contesting a grade:
I take great care to be fair and consistent in grading, however, everyone makes mistakes. If you think I scored your assignment incorrectly or you do not understand the reasoning behind your score, I will happily take a second look at it and discuss with you during my office hours or a scheduled appointment. Please make these appointments through e-mail, NOT before or after class.

Unforeseen circumstances:
Please let me know as soon as possible if you will miss an exam or assignment due to a health (including mental health) issue, death in the family, or other personal catastrophe. I respect your privacy and only need to know the general nature of the problem. Late exams and assignments are a hassle for everyone (including you) so I expect students to seriously consider before requesting an extension or make-up.

Accommodations for students with disabilities:
I will accommodate students with documented disabilities in any way deemed appropriate by the Disability Resources for Students (DRS Office). If possible, please submit any accommodation requests within the first week of the quarter.

If you have another disability or temporary disability for which you’d like to discuss accommodations, I can work with you. Please send me an e-mail to schedule a meeting.

Writing resources:
Sociology Writing Center: Located in SAV 203. Call (206-543-5396) or email (writesoc@uw.edu) to make an appointment.
Odegaard Writing & Research Center: Located in Odegaard Undergraduate Library. Make appointments online.
CLUE Writing Center: Located in MGH 141 (CUADSS lobby). Drop in on a first come, first served basis from 7PM to 12AM, Sunday through Thursday.

Official sport travel:
All in-season athletes must submit ALL travel dates before the last day of the second week of classes.

Disclaimer:
I reserve the right to change or rearrange any part of the following reading, lecture, and exam schedule. I will never add a reading, assignment, or other obligation without subtracting a similarly taxing one.

Reading, Lecture, and Exam Schedule
Reading should be completed by the day it is listed.

I. Background
In this module, we’ll refresh ourselves on sociological theoretical perspectives in general. Then, we’ll start to consider how these perspectives approach culture differently and may shape the relationships we find from our research.

Week 1: Values, Identities, and Actions
What is culture? How have sociologists approached studying it?

Wed, Sept. 27:
No required reading.

Week 2: Roots of the Sociology of Culture
How can we measure culture or its influences? Why should we consider culture at all?

Mon, Oct. 2:


Wed, Oct. 4:


II. Values
In this module, we’ll learn how many sociologists thought of (and continue to think of) culture’s main influence as shaping individuals’ values, which then shapes their actions. On Oct. 11, we will informally share and workshop our research questions.

**Week 3: Rationality and Culture**

Is there room for both rationality and culture in a sociological approach to action? What roles do values play?

**Mon, Oct. 9:**


**Wed, Oct. 11: Paper proposals due by class time.**


Research question check in.

**Week 4: Taste, Cognition, and Values**

Do we need rationality to understand why values affect action? Could values affect *how* we think through decisions, not just our end goals?


**Wed, Oct 18:**


**III. Identities**

This module explores how culture can shape who we are and how we think of ourselves as individuals and groups. Also in this module, we will check in on our use of qualitative methods for our research projects in a methods workshop on Oct. 25.

**Week 5: Socialization, Subcultures, and Countercultures**

Does the sociology of culture help us understand how we become ourselves?

**Mon, Oct. 23:**


**Wed, Oct. 25:** Blog post 1 due by class time.
Methods workshop. No required reading.

**Week 6: Nation, Race, and Ethnicity**
Is the nation a culture? Is it a cultural system? How can we think of race and ethnicity as different from and similar to national identity? Where do these identities intersect?

**Mon, Oct. 30:**


**Wed, Nov. 1:** Annotated Bibliography due by class time.


**IV. Actions**
So, how does culture affect action? Is it through shaping our identities, our values, and/or our mental processes? This module reflects on how culture can influence action and action can influence culture in complicated or variable ways. On Nov. 8, we will share the successes and challenges of our research thus far to strategize for timely completion of realistic projects.

**Week 7: Action, Power, and Context**
Can culture work differently depending on the actors’ access to power or other contextual factors?

**Mon, Nov. 6:**


**Wed, Nov 8: Blog post 2 due by class time.**
Research incubator. No required reading.

**Week 8: Diffusion and Competition**
How do cultures spread, change, and affect one another? What role does power play in these processes?

**Mon, Nov. 13:**


**Wed, Nov. 15: Student-selected articles for the next module due by class time.**


### V. Your Research
In the final module, we’ll look into the topics, debates, and arguments that you’ve identified as important to your research projects. We will draft and edit your papers.

**Week 9:**
**Mon, Nov. 20:**
2 student-selected articles or chapters.

**Wed, Nov. 22: Rough draft of paper due by class time.**
2 student-selected articles or chapters.

**Week 10**
**Mon, Nov. 27: Peer editing and writing workshop**
No required reading (aside from your partners’ papers).

**Wed, Nov. 29:**
2 student-selected articles or chapters.

**Week 11**
**Mon, Dec. 4:**
2 student-selected articles or chapters.
Wed, Dec. 6:
2 student-selected articles or chapters.

Final papers are due by 5PM on Tuesday, December 12 (scheduled final exam date).

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End of Syllabus------------------------