Sociology 202: Theory and Research in Sociology--Moving to Los Angeles

Fall 2007

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“We entered a very spacious valley, well grown with cottonwoods and alders, among which ran a beautiful river from the northwest. It has all the requisites for a large settlement…” Father Juan Crespi, 1796.

“The continent tilts to the southwest and everything loose slides into Los Angeles...” Frank Lloyd Wright

“It is a scientific fact that if you stay in California, you lose one point of your I.Q. every year.” Truman Capote

“Nothing is wrong with Southern California that a rise in the ocean level wouldn't cure.” Ross MacDonald

“There is science, logic, reason; there is thought verified by experience. And then there is California.” Edward Abbey

The one thing you all have in common is that you moved to Los Angeles to become sociologists. Sociology’s history has been intertwined with the growth of cities and industrialization. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Chicago was the birthplace of sociology in the U.S. Robert Park and Ernest Burgess would send graduate students into the rapidly changing metropolis with the mandate to study the city as a social laboratory. In this course, we explore the city of L.A. as a segue into sociology. Using typical L.A. topics such as immigration, traffic, popular culture, and race riots as our starting points, we explore sociological scholarship. Our goal is not necessarily to hit all the high-points of sociology but to stimulate your conceptual, methodological, and theoretical thinking with a broad diversity of themes, methodologies, and substantive topics.
The primary analytical goal of the class is to help you begin the profound transformation from being a consumer of knowledge to becoming a producer of knowledge. You come from a variety of backgrounds, both intellectually and socially. Whether your academic is preparation is sociology, English, physics, or history, you are bringing something that can contribute to your becoming a sociologist. Becoming a producer of sociological knowledge means honing theoretical, methodological and substantive skills, but most importantly applying a sociological imagination. In this course we will capture that rich intellectual diversity and excitement that is the hallmark of UCLA Sociology. When we are dealing with topics or approaches that may not be how you expect to do sociology, we ask an open mind. We will work with you to find out how to make each topic and approach meaningful and beneficial for you.

Every class meeting, we play a song about Los Angeles or the topic of the class. Students are encouraged to contribute music to compensate for the archaic tastes of the faculty.

Requirements
* **Reading**: You are expected to come to class having read all the materials.
* **Class participation**: You are also expected to participate in class discussions. Here, quality of contributions is most important. On Tuesdays, one of us will lead the discussion but on Thursdays two of you are responsible for leading the class discussion.
* **Writing**: We listed five position papers spread over the quarter. We expect you to complete the first one and three of the remaining papers. The first paper is ungraded and will be read by both instructors. In these position papers, we expect you to stake out a position in contemporary sociology that reflects your personal convictions as a sociologist-in-training. These positions may be methodological, theoretical, conceptual, substantive, or any combination of these dimensions. We expect you to closely engage with the sociological literature related to the class. You have the option to completely rewrite and resubmit a previous position paper if your position has evolved over the class.

Your final grade will be based on 25% for each graded position paper and 25% for class participation.

You are expected to familiarize yourself with and abide by UCLA’s policy on plagiarism.

Failure to meet the requirements may lead to a failing grade in the course.
Readings
* Reading is posted under “List of Links” at the class website
**Reading has been ordered for the UCLA Bookstore in Ackerman Union
Other readings are available online. Finding sociological readings is one of the skills that a graduate student should develop if you don’t already have it. The instructors can help if needed.

1. Los Angeles and sociology

Week 0 (Thursday, September 27). Introduction
   Welcome
   What this class is about.
   The meaning of life in graduate school. The pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Why and how do you become a successful sociologist?
   What is sociological about sociology?

Week 1. What is sociological about Los Angeles?

Week 2. The birthplace of sociology

Position Paper 1: How do sociological classics inform current sociology? Where do you see current research most fruitfully informed by classic theories? When is contemporary research held captive by its origins in classical theorizing? What classical insights require a conceptual or theoretical rehabilitation? Due October 16

2. Entering the city
Week 3. The Stranger

3. Living together in the city

Week 4-6. Social isolation
Week 4:

Position Paper 2: What is the relationship between empirical research and personal values? The issue is not whether value-free research is possible—nearly all sociologists agree that it is not. Rather, the issue is where in the process of doing research values are implicated. Due October 30.

Week 5:
  b. *Fischer, Claude S. 1982. To Dwell among Friends: Personal Networks in Town and City. Chicago: University of Chicago. Chapters 1,2,5,10

Week 6:

**Position Paper 3:** Pick a single reading from 202 up until now. What are the heuristics adopted by the author(s)? How would the study be different if different heuristics were employed? What heuristics do you think are most appropriate or promising for this topic? Due November 13.

**Week 7-8. Looking for intimacy in the city**

**Week 7:**


**Week 8**


b. No class Thursday: Thanksgiving Holiday

**Position Paper 4:** Design a study of assortative mating using Goffmanian hypotheses? What is the logic by which you derived these hypotheses from Goffman’s writing? Due November 27

**Week 9-10. Immigration**

**Week 9:**


**Week 10:**


**Position Paper 5:** Synthesize a study of immigration and some other sociological specialization (e.g. race, gender, culture, political sociology, economic sociology, social movements, crime, deviance, etc.). How does immigrant status or immigrant experience affect the social relations studied by the specialization? Can you think of any way in which broadening that specialization to study immigrants might require adapting it? Due December 11.