Soc 243: Economic Sociology

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Time: Monday 4-6pm
Location: 601 William James Hall
Office Hours: Monday 11am-12pm
Website: http://isites.harvard.edu/k73410

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This course is an introduction to the sociological examination of economic phenomena. As a subfield that has grown rapidly over the past twenty years, economic sociology has focused on three major activities: First, it has examined the prerequisites for and constraints to economic processes as defined by economists. Second, it has extended economic models to social phenomena rarely considered in the domain of economics. Third, and most ambitiously, it has tried to search for alternative accounts of phenomena typically formulated only in economic terms. This course will provide an overview of these broad concerns and approaches in economic sociology, and review the sociological explanations of economic activities of production, consumption and distribution in a wide range of settings.

REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to attend each meeting, do the readings thoroughly and in advance, and participate actively in class. Emphasis is on mastering, responding critically and creatively to, and integrating the course material, with an eye toward developing your own research questions and interests. You should be able to answer the following questions about each assigned reading:

- What research question is the author trying to answer? What is the significance of this question for the key issues in the field?
- What assumptions does the author make? How valid are these assumptions?
- How does the author address the question?
• What does the paper accomplish? What have you learned from it?

If it is an empirical piece:

• What is the nature of the author’s evidence, and how does s/he bring that to bear on the research questions? Is the methodology appropriate?
• How satisfactorily does the author link the evidence to the conclusions?
• How could this work be extended or refined?

Other requirements for the course are as follows:

1. Students are required to prepare a response paper of 1000-1200 words to the week’s readings prior to four of the twelve class meetings (to be posted on the course website by 5pm Sunday evening). These response papers should be viewed as thinking and writing exercises, not as finished products. Use them to engage each week’s readings, respond with questions, criticisms and new ideas they suggest, and put into words impressions that seem worth developing. Come to class having read all the response papers submitted for the week.

2. Each student will be responsible for leading (or co-leading) at least two class meetings. This involves providing a brief summary of the main arguments of the readings for the week, and raising questions for discussion. You can draw upon issues or questions raised in the week’s response papers.

3. Students will write a final paper (approximately 15-20 pages) related to topics covered in the course. The final paper can be a research proposal or a piece of original research. Literature reviews are discouraged. Students will submit a 2-3 page prospectus of their research proposal on November 21 by 5pm. The final paper is due on the last day of the reading period, December 12 by 5pm.

The final paper will constitute 40% of the grade. Participation in class discussions, response papers and interim research proposal will add up to the remaining 60% of the grade.

READINGS

The following books are recommended and available on reserve at the Lamont library. (As we will be reading less than a third of the chapters in each of these books, you are not required to purchase them. However, these books are highly recommended since they provide many of the key readings in the field and are
likely to be of use to students generally if they pursue research in economic sociology.)


Other readings are available through the Social Relations library reserve or the course website.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**Week 1. (Sep 1) Introduction and Orientation to the Field**


**Recommended:**


**No class on Sep 6 – Labor day holiday**

**Week 2. (Sep 13) The Economic Approach** (Note: Skip the technical parts)


**Recommended:**


**Week 3. (Sep 20) Critiques of the Economic Approach**


**Recommended:**


**Week 4. (Sep 27) Economic Activities in Context – The Embeddedness Perspective**


**Recommended:**


**Week 5. (Oct 4) Economic Activities in Context – Social Networks**


• Paul DiMaggio and Filiz Garip. 2010. “Intergroup Inequality from the Diffusion of Practices with Network Externalities through Differentiated
Networks: Applications to the Digital Divide in the U.S. and to Rural/Urban Migration in Thailand.”


**Recommended:**


*No class on Oct 11 – Columbus day holiday*

**Week 6. (Oct 18) Economic Activities in Context - Social Capital**


**Recommended:**


**Week 7. (Oct 25) Economic Institutions - Markets**


Recommended:


**Week 8. (Nov 1) Economic Institutions – Work and Compensation**


Recommended:


Week 9. (Nov 8) Economic Institutions - Corporations


Recommended:


**Week 10. (Nov 15) Economic Institutions – Financial Markets and Money**


Recommended:


Week 11. (Nov 22) Economy and Intimate Worlds - Household Economy and Care Work


**Recommended:**


Week 12. (Nov 29) Consumption


Recommended:


