

HTS 2016—SOCIAL ISSUES AND PUBLIC POLICY

SPRING 2018

Professor Allen Hyde

MWF 11:15am-12:05pm

Classroom: Skiles 268

Office: Old Civil Engineering Building Rm 136

Office Hours: Wed 2-4pm or by appointment

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Course Description:

This course focuses on social issues associated with society in the United States, as well as public policy used to address these issues, by taking a critical sociological perspective in analyzing U.S. culture and capitalism and its impact on our social institutions, social inequalities, and the quality of our democracy. We focus on comparisons of the U.S. with other affluent, market-based countries in order to understand the uniqueness of U.S. society. We will then explore how U.S. capitalism shapes issues of the environment, healthcare, transportation, consumption, finance, inequality (race, class, and gender), and politics. The course is designed to equip students with the critical skills and evidence to challenge conventional wisdom and misconceptions about U.S. society and will provide a solid foundation for exercising their rights and responsibilities as U.S. citizens. This course also has a service-learning component through the Serve-Learn-Sustain Initiative that relates to environmental inequalities, environmental justice, and sustainable communities.

Required Readings:

There is one required book, which is available at the Georgia Tech Bookstore:

Erik Olin Wright and Joel Rogers. 2015. *American Society: How It Really Works*. New York: W.W. Norton. (Second Edition).

Other supplemental readings will be posted to Canvass. Supplemental readings are often optional but encouraged for students to read.

Course Learning Objectives and Outcomes:

- Students will be able to identify and understand key concepts, theories, and research traditions in the field of sociology.
- Students will be able to understand the causes of social issues in American society
- Students will be able to develop your sociological imagination and enable you to critically evaluate our social world
- Students will be able to assess social policy solutions to issues in American society

Course Prerequisites: None



Additional Semester Focus: SLS Affiliation: environmental inequalities and sustainability

This course is part of Georgia Tech's Serve-Learn-Sustain (SLS) initiative, uniting classroom learning with community action. SLS works with all six colleges to offer courses and programs connecting sustainability and community engagement with real-world partners and projects, allowing students to use their disciplinary expertise related to science and technology to help "create sustainable communities" where humans and nature flourish, now and in the future, in Georgia, the U.S., and around the globe. More information about SLS can be found at www.serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu. Visit the website to sign up for the [SLS Email List](#), view the full list of [affiliated courses](#), and find links to Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

SLS Student Learning Outcomes

Develop Knowledge & Skills

1. Students will be able to identify relationships among ecological, social, and economic systems.
2. Students will be able to describe how their actions impact the sustainability of communities.

Put Knowledge & Skills into Action

3. Students will be able to develop approaches to sustainability challenges in communities.
4. Students will be able to communicate effectively with the public about creating sustainable communities.

General Education Requirement, Area E Social Science Approved Learning Outcome:

Student will demonstrate the ability to describe the social, political, and economic forces that influence social behavior.

Explain how the course satisfies the Area E approved learning outcome:

This course focuses on major causes of different social issues in American society and potential policy solutions, with an emphasis on sociological perspectives that look at the interactions of individuals, groups, and institutions with their social environments. To demonstrate that they have met the Area E learning outcome, students will be able to describe how social institutions impact the economy, inequality, and politics in American society, compare the major theories and methods used in studying these social issues, and analyze the causes and consequences of these issues in a variety of circumstances.

Assignments (1000 points total):

Attendance and Participation (100 points): Students are required to attend class and participate during class discussions and activities. Attendance will be taken and some in class assignments may be used to gauge student participation.

Quizzes (180 points; 6 quizzes total of 30 points each): For each of the three parts of the book, there will be 2 quizzes spread out throughout the semester (see course outline for due dates). These quizzes are online and open-book, and they are designed to make sure that students have a baseline understanding and comprehension of key concepts.

Part 1 Assignment-Environmental Issues Report (120 points): Students are required to write a brief report of 4-5 pages related to environmental inequalities, environmental justice, sustainable communities, or environmental policy or applications. Students are encouraged to use the resources and topics that I provide, as well as connect them to the concepts covered in class. These should be used to fuel the Part 3 Assignment PSA. Topics should be chosen by 2/2 (1-3 paragraphs summarizing plan worth 20 points) and the completed 4-5 page report (worth 100 points) will be due 2/26. More info on this project will be available as the semester progresses.

Part 2 Assignment-Stratification Monopoly (200 points): Students are required to participate in the in-class activity on stratification monopoly on March 7th and 9th. This activity will help students understand how inequality shapes opportunity and social mobility in different contexts. Before the activity, students are required to fill out a short assessment worth 30 points due on February 16th. After the activity, students are required to complete a follow-up assessment and 2-3 page reflection on the activity, which will be due March 14th.

Part 3 Assignment-Group Social Issues Video or Poster PSA (200 points): Students are required to create a two- to three-minute PSA or a poster that can be used to raise awareness about a social issue related to environmental inequalities, environmental justice, sustainable communities, or environmental policy or behavior. These should be designed for an audience of children and families in the Atlanta area and will ideally stem from the Environmental Issues Reports done earlier in the semester. Ideally, you will work in groups of 3-4; however, if you consult with me first you could work on a solo or paired project. Groups will be assigned in early February and the PSAs should be completed by April 4th. These will be presented in class (April 23rd) and at the tentative Rally for Resilience event at the end of the semester. More info on this project will be available as the semester progresses.

Service Learning Component (100 points): Students will be required to do 10-15 hours of service-learning related work to help organize a Rally for Resilience Event in Atlanta to help raise awareness of weather- and climate-related issues with a focus on marginalized communities in Atlanta. This event will tentatively take place in April and is co-sponsored by the Center for Sustainable Communities (<https://csc-atl.org/>). Students will work in teams to assist in tasks such as planning of the event; marketing and email/letter writing; social media; and creating engaging content that can be presented at the Rally for Resilience Event. Students are also expected to attend some (if not all) of the event if possible. Students will need to keep a log of the hours that they put into their service learning as well as a description of what they did, which will be due 4/24. More info on this project will be available as the semester progresses.

Final “Exam”-Service learning and PSA reflection (100 points): Students will write a 4-5 page paper summarizing several items. 1) the key issue in the PSA video or poster created and why it was chosen, 2) the policy recommendation or application used to address the issue, 3) the desired effect of the PSA on the audience, and 4) a reflection on the service learning aspect of the course. While the PSAs are (possibly) done in groups, each student will be required to submit their own PSA and service learning. This is due Friday, April 27 at 2:20 PM via email.

Final Grades Rubric out of 1000 points possible (what appears on your transcript)

900 and above = A; 800-899 = B; 700-799 = C; 600-699 = D; Less than 600 points = F

Policy for Exams, Missed Exams, Late Assignments, and Extra Credit:

Late assignments: The policy for late assignments is that you will need a documented health, funeral, or university sponsored excuse for turning in late assignments at full credit. Assignments turned in after their due dates without an excuse will receive a drop in letter grade for every two days beyond their due date.

Extra credit: For up to 15 points of extra credit on their final papers, students can go to an educational/community event outside of class related to social issues and public policy and write 2-3 pages describing how this event is related to or informs knowledge learned in this course. This extra credit can only be done once and is due April 24th. I will post a list of potential events to Canvas.

Communication Center: The Communication Center (CommLab) can provide assistance on communication related assignments, regardless of discipline, including the written papers and presentation assignments in this course. For more information, go to Clough Commons 447 or <http://communicationcenter.gatech.edu/>.

Academic Integrity

In this course we aim to conduct ourselves as a community of scholars, recognizing that academic study is both an intellectual and ethical enterprise. You are encouraged to build on the ideas and texts of others; that is a vital part of academic life. You are also obligated to document every occasion when you use another's ideas, language, or syntax. You are encouraged to study together, discuss readings outside of class, share your drafts during peer review and outside of class, and go to the CommLab with your drafts. In this course, those activities are well within the bounds of academic honesty. However, when you *use* another's ideas or language—whether through direct quotation, summary, or paraphrase—you must formally acknowledge that debt by signaling it with a standard form of academic citation. Even one occasion of academic dishonesty, large or small, on *any* assignment, large or small, can result in failure for the entire assignment and referral to Student Judicial Affairs.

Office of Disability Services: Students with disabilities that need accommodations for class are asked to first contact and inform the Office of Disability Services to arrange accommodations before the semester starts or within the first two weeks of class. Students should receive a letter from the Office of Disability Services outlining the accommodations needed. Before I can grant accommodations, I will need to receive this letter. For more information, please see <http://disabilityservices.gatech.edu/>.

Guidelines for Class Discussions (Open and Small Group):

1. Feel free to speak your mind; however, be respectful of other students and the instructors. We will be discussing potentially controversial topics at times.
2. If someone is speaking, let them finish speaking before the next person begins.
3. If you have a thought, try to raise your hand before speaking. I will do my best to give everyone who has something to say chance to contribute.
4. If you disagree with someone, respond to the argument or idea and not to the person who said it. This keeps the discussions from getting personal.
5. Be careful of generalizing from personal experience. While our personal experiences can inform our sociological discussions, the way we experience or perceive a particular event or experience may vary.
6. When we have a small group discussion, everyone should try to contribute to the discussion. Try not to have one person dominate the conversation. I will provide some questions to guide the small group. The purpose of these small groups is to flesh out some of the tougher topics collectively and to allow everyone a chance to let their voice be heard. I will walk around to help address any confusion. At the end of the small group, the group will turn in their answers to the questions with the names of all group members.

Course Expectations for Students:

Students are expected to keep up with readings from week to week, which are tentatively listed in the course outline. Students are also expected to attend lectures and participate in classroom discussions. I would expect, on average, between 4-7 hours a week of work dedicated to this class. Most importantly, I expect students to put in high quality work into their assignments.

In class, students are expected to arrive on time whenever possible. If you anticipate being late because you have back to back classes, or something of that nature, please let me know ahead of time, and it should be no problem.

Please place all cell phones on silent during class and put out of sight to prevent distractions.

COURSE OUTLINE

NOTE: The instructor reserves the right to change the syllabus as needed throughout the semester. If a change must occur, the instructor will inform the students in advance.

Date ***Schedule of Topics and Assignments***

Week 1: Intro and American Perspectives and Values

M	1/8	Introduction; Prologue: Perspectives and Values	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 1
W	1/10	Guest Speaker: Joy Ann Reid for MLK Day Lecture	
F	1/12	Prologue: Perspectives and Values What Kind of Society Is American Society?	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 1 Wright & Rogers, Ch. 2

Supplemental reading:

“Fostering Critical Thinking: A Guide for Students” by Todd Beer.

https://thesocietypages.org/toolbox/critical_thinking/

Week 2: American Society and Capitalism

M	1/15	MLK Day: No Class; Official Campus Holiday	
W	1/17	What Kind of Society Is American Society?	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 2
F	1/19	The Capitalist Market: How It Is Supposed to Work	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 3

Supplemental reading:

“What if Sociologists Had as Much Influence as Economists?” by Neil Irwin

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/17/upshot/what-if-sociologists-had-as-much-influence-as-economists.html>

Week 3: American Capitalism

M	1/22	The Capitalist Market: How It Is Supposed to Work	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 3
W	1/24	The Capitalist Market: How It Actually Works	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 4
F	1/26	The Capitalist Market: How It Actually Works	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 4

Quiz 1 Due 1/26 by 11pm

Supplemental reading:

“To Address Inequality, Let’s Take on Monopolies” by Barry Lynn and Kevin Carty

<https://inequality.org/research/address-inequality-lets-take-monopolies/>

Week 4: The Environment

M 1/29	The Environment (Tentative Guest Lecture)	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 5
W 1/31	The Environment	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 5
F 2/2	The Environment	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 5

Topic for Environmental Issues Report Chosen 2/2 by 11pm via Canvass

Supplemental reading:

“‘Bomb Cyclone’: Rare Snow in South as North Braces for Bitter Cold” by Richard Fausset, Patricia Mazzei, and Alan Blinder
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/03/us/cold-weather-winter-storm.html>

“The Patterns of Pollution: A Report on Demographics and Pollution in Metro Atlanta” March 2012 by GreenLaw

<http://greenlaw.org/Files/GreenLaw/2012/PatternsofPollution,FINAL,GreenLaw3-26-2012.pdf>

Week 5: Transportation and Consumerism

M 2/5	Transportation (Tentative Guest Lecture)	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 6
W 2/7	Transportation	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 6
F 2/9	Consumerism	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 7

Supplemental reading:

“Metro Atlanta’s ongoing battle for regional transportation solutions” by Michael Kahn
<https://atlanta.curbed.com/2017/9/20/16337022/marta-atlanta-history-cobb-gwinnett-regional-transit>

Week 6: Healthcare and Finance

M 2/12	Health Care	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 8
W 2/14	Health Care	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 8
F 2/16	Finance	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 9

Stratification Monopoly Initial Assessment due 2/16 by 11pm via Canvass

Supplemental Reading:

“Lack of access to adequate sanitation in Lowndes County, Alabama & the impact on health, dignity, and inequality” by <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Poverty/VisitsContributions/USA/ACRE.pdf>

Week 7: Building a High Road Economy

M 2/19	Building a High-Road Economy	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 10
<i>Quiz 2 Due 2/19 by 11pm</i>		
W 2/21	Creating a PSA Day	
F 2/23	Thinking about Fairness and Inequality	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 11

Supplemental reading:

“How to Create a 21st-Century Civilian Conservation Corps” by Jimmy Tobias
<https://psmag.com/environment/how-to-create-a-21st-century-civilian-conservation-corps>

Week 8: Social Class and Rising Inequality

M 2/26	Class	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 12
W 2/28	Persistent Poverty and Rising Inequality	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 13
F 3/2	Persistent Poverty and Rising Inequality	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 13

Supplemental reading:

“World Inequality Report 2018” Written and coordinated by Facundo Alvaredo, Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez, and Gabriel Zucman
<http://wir2018.wid.world/>

Week 9: Potential Policy Solutions and Stratification Monopoly

M 3/5	Ending Poverty and Inequality	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 14
<i>Quiz 3 due 3/5 by 11pm</i>		
W 3/7	Stratification Monopoly 1 (Mandatory Attendance)	
F 3/9	Stratification Monopoly 2 (Mandatory Attendance)	

Supplemental reading:

“Starting the Conversation: The Economics of a Universal Basic Income” by Rakeen Mabud and Felicia Wong
<http://rooseveltinstitute.org/starting-conversation-economics-universal-basic-income/>

Week 10: Racial Inequality

M 3/12	Racial Inequality (or Multimedia Day)	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 15
W 3/14	Racial Inequality	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 15
<i>Stratification Monopoly Reflection due 3/14 by 11pm</i>		
F 3/16	Racial Inequality	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 15

“How wealth inequality has changed in the U.S. since the Great Recession, by race, ethnicity and income” by Rakesh Kochar and Anthony Cilluffo. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/01/how-wealth-inequality-has-changed-in-the-u-s-since-the-great-recession-by-race-ethnicity-and-income/>

“Views of racism as a major problem increase sharply, especially among Democrats” by Samantha Neal
<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/29/views-of-racism-as-a-major-problem-increase-sharply-especially-among-democrats/>

Week 11: Gender Inequality (and leftover discussion from Racial Inequality)

M 3/25	Gender Inequality	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 16
W 3/27	Gender Inequality	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 16
<i>Quiz 4 due 3/27 by 11pm</i>		
F 3/29	Gender Inequality (or Multimedia Day)	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 16

Supplemental reading:

“Stanford sociologist pilots new method to reduce gender inequality at work” by Alex Shashkevich
<https://news.stanford.edu/2017/12/19/new-approach-reducing-gender-inequality-work/>

Week 12: Democracy and Voting

M 4/2	Democracy: How It Works	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 17
W 4/4	Elections and Voting	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 18
<i>PSA completed by 4/4 by 11pm</i>		
F 4/6	Elections and Voting	Wright & Rogers, Ch. 18

Supplemental reading:

“Democracy in America: How’s It Doing?” by Claire Cain Miller and Kevin Quealy
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/23/upshot/democracy-in-america-how-is-it-doing.html>

“Investigating Gerrymandering and the Math behind Partisan Maps” by Patrick Honner and Michael Gonchar
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/30/learning/lesson-plans/investigating-gerrymandering-and-the-math-behind-partisan-maps.html>

Week 13: Taxation and the Media

M 4/9 Taxation and the Attack on the Affirmative State Wright & Rogers, Ch. 19

W 4/11 Taxation and the Attack on the Affirmative State Wright & Rogers, Ch. 19

Quiz 5 due 4/11 by 11pm

F 4/13 Corporate Control of the Media Wright & Rogers, Ch. 20

Supplemental reading:

“Why Corporate Tax Cuts Won’t Create Jobs” by Marcus Ryu
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/09/opinion/corporate-tax-cuts-entrepreneur.html>

“Tax Reform Will Give Workers a Raise” by Lawrence B. Lindsey
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/tax-reform-will-give-workers-a-raise-1507675540>

“Paradise Papers Shine Light on Where the Elite Keep Their Money” by Michael Forsythe
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/05/world/paradise-papers.html>

Week 14: Unions, Democracy from Below, and Possible Futures

M 4/16 Labor Unions Wright & Rogers, Ch. 22

W 4/18 Democracy from Below Wright & Rogers, Ch. 23

Quiz 6 due 4/18 by 11pm

F 4/20 Possible Futures Wright & Rogers, Ch. 24

Supplemental reading:

“How today’s unions help working people” by Economic Policy Institute
<http://www.epi.org/publication/how-todays-unions-help-working-people-giving-workers-the-power-to-improve-their-jobs-and-unrig-the-economy/>

“Five Much-Needed Reforms That Could Make Our Politics Matter Again” by John Nichols
<http://billmoyers.com/2014/01/02/five-much-needed-reforms-that-could-make-our-politics-matter-again/>

Week 15: Social Issues PSA Screening

M 4/23 Screening of Group PSAs

Service Learning Log due 4/24 by 11pm

FINAL EXAM DUE Friday, April 27 at 2:20 PM via email