PROSEMINAR IN PUBLIC AND APPLIED SOCIOLOGY

SOCIOLOGY 601-001 - Graduate Seminar - 3 Credits

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FALL 2015 (CRN 78541)  
Robinson Hall B 105  
Wednesdays, 4:30 – 7:10 pm  
office hours: Wednesdays, 3-4:00 pm

Course Description

This graduate pro-seminar is a core course for all graduate students in the Sociology Program. This course is typically taken in the student's first semester in the Program. The course examines diverse theories and practices of public sociology, as well as debates over the meaning of the concept. Inevitably, we will confront and discuss the nature and purpose of sociological inquiry, the relationship between commitments to ethics, law, and social justice and to modes of science and “knowing.” The intent is to help us better grasp how and why differing communities of scholarship in sociology have responded as they have to the call for more public sociology.

The meaning of Public Sociology is contested terrain. Long before Michael Buraowy's stimulating and provocative 2004 ASA Presidential Address that catalyzed the past decade of Sociology's reflexive and collective inquiry into the discipline's relationship to “the public,” Sociology has periodically addressed many aspects of the roiling debate that has ensued. Some suggest that it is simply about presenting the sociological findings and perspective of our research for audiences beyond our own disciplinary boundaries. For others it is about deliberately engaging matters of consequence and working to influence public policy from positions informed by our sociological research – getting our alternative sociological discourses into the public mix, so to speak. Some question whether we should strive to become public sociologists at all. Some suggest we already are, and always have been. Still others claim that there is no meaningful "public" anymore, while others (agreeing with this assessment) maintain that Sociology should strive to re-assert one – or even create one (or many) anew. In this course, we will explore a wide variety of perspectives on what it means (or should mean) to practice public sociology.

My own perspective is that public sociology is inherently embedded in a more general – even global-- production of knowledge. Its meaning emerges from the relationships that our disciplinary field’s practitioners (empirical, sociologically informed researchers) establish with their research subjects through the methods that they use to co-produce knowledge. It is less about getting one's perspective into the existing institutionalized media, and more about creating new, alternative media, the social organization of which embody, reflect, or demonstrate the alternative value commitments that we wish to (or are attempting to) institutionalize. How does the way in which we organize our own production of knowledge as individual or collaborative researchers reflect our own value commitments – or our own alternative media (a word which derives etymologically from the Latin, meaning "community," “publicity,” or “public”)? Thinking in this light about the ways that we organize our research might lead us to be more self-reflexive in our methods courses. We are not simply "learning the tools of the trade," but rather learning about tools that others created and used in the production of knowledge while embedded in particular socially structured contexts in specific times and places. The development and practice of these methods, and the data that they “produce” (or "collect") has not occurred in a political vacuum. What are the politics, histories,
geographies, biographies, and sociologies behind their making? Can we imagine and create new sociological methods to address the particular challenges that we want to confront and relationships, collective identities, and institutions that we want to generate through our own research? Whether we acknowledge it or not, we are embedded (in various ways) in the process and relations that constitute our own efforts to produce knowledge through the research projects that we co-create, organize, coordinate, represent, take money and/or credit for, derive pleasure and/or satisfaction from, screw-up or improve lives or change worlds with.

By the end of the course, you should be better prepared to begin forging your own position as a sociologist amidst the call for a more public sociology, and to explain what you mean by the concept, and why you take the position that you do. Undoubtedly, your position will continue to develop, possibly in completely new directions, by the end of your graduate studies. But my hope is that this course will have prepared you well for the fundamental challenges of this journey.

**Required Texts**

These texts are listed in the order in which we will read them. They are not available in the GMU Bookstore. Order them now (amazon, abebooks, powells, betterworldbooks, etc). Many can be ordered as used books, or in a Kindle edition.


- Patricia Mooney Nickel. *Public Sociology and Civil Society: Governance, Politics, and Power* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2012). [$42.95 Amazon; but many used copies (20) at under $10.]

**Use of Technology in the Classroom**

Students taking this class will need to familiarize themselves with Blackboard. All announcements and most of the readings will be distributed on Blackboard. Unless you are registered for the course through GMU, you will be not be able to access Blackboard.

Students are welcome to use personal laptops or iPads to take notes during class, but please do not use them to chat or surf during class if you cannot do so without causing distractions for your fellow classmates. The same principle applies to the use of cell phones and so-called “smart” phones. You may keep your phone on for emergencies, but please them in vibrate mode – and take all calls and messages outside the classroom. Please refrain from texting, or wearing headphones or earbuds, during class, unless it is necessary apparatus for overcoming visual or hearing impairment that without which would hinder your ability to participate in our course discussion. Again, if you must respond to an urgent matter, please attend to this outside the classroom.
GMU students enrolled in this course who wish to contact Professor Dale should contact his mobile phone (preferably during the day), or through GMU e-mail accounts only. Non-GMU e-mail will often be filtered as junk mail and is more susceptible to spreading e-viruses.

**Course Requirements**

I will post a full schedule of reading assignments for the semester on the course website (on Blackboard). The course requires a healthy dose of reading, and you should keep pace with the scheduled assignments. Class participation starts before you come to class, with having done the readings and thought about what seems useful and illuminating, what seems wrong or unclear. A good practice would be to take brief notes on your week’s reading – indicating what issues you found most interesting or most problematic – and therefore most worth attention during class meetings. Doing so will facilitate not only your comprehension of the lectures, but also regular class discussion, which is a central aspect of the course.

Active, effective contribution means being attentive to the flow of the class’ discussion, and being able to distinguish an apt intervention in an ongoing argument from an attempt to redirect the discussion to a new topic. Students are expected to actively engage with issues raised in classroom discussions and in homework assignments, and with students at our partnering institutions who are also participating in this course.

It is useful to remember that the diversity of our student body can be an asset to classroom conversations and student learning. I trust that we all will interact respectfully with one another in class, as well as in course-related communication with each other outside of class. Please be sure to read the George Mason University Diversity Statement: [http://cte.gmu.edu/Teaching_at_Mason/DiversityStatement.html](http://cte.gmu.edu/Teaching_at_Mason/DiversityStatement.html)

All students expected to participate in class discussion. For some students, this task requires greater effort than for others. The idea is not simply to talk a lot, but rather to contribute to our collective, public discussion in productive and meaningful ways. Neither hogging the spotlight nor remaining silent throughout the semester are wise strategies or behaviors for maximizing your participation in this class. Try to listen to and understand what your co-participants are attempting to communicate, and reflect thoughtfully on your response before publicly registering it. But push yourself to contribute in each class to the discussion. We will introduce ourselves from the start of the semester and work toward addressing each other on a first name basis (yes, you can call me John), and we will strive to create a sense of familiarity and mutual respect. If you sense that you are being regularly marginalized from classroom discussion, please let me know. I will be working to provide everyone with an even-handed opportunity to participate in our discussions.

**Course Format and Written Assignments**

Class periods will be organized around mini-lectures, presentations, and guided, yet open, discussions of the readings. On presentation days, presenters will follow a short lecture and will be expected to lead discussion for 30 to 60 minutes. I will then try to fill in the gaps and respond to student discussion points for the remainder of the class.

The requirements for the course are as follows.

- 7 weekly discussion points 35% [5% per DP] You do not have to write one every week, but you
cannot skip two weeks in a row, until you have completed all seven.
• Class participation and one presentation 20% [10% for participation; 10% for your presentation]
• Short reflection paper on Contexts 10% [Due September 16th]
• Final Essay 35% [Due December 9th]

1. Weekly Discussion Points (DPs). For seven different class periods, each student should prepare a reaction/question/comment on the readings for that day. These DPs will be due by 5 pm the day before class and will be distributed electronically to everyone else in the course using the course Blackboard discussion forum, which will give the rest of the class roughly 24 hours to read these before class begins (a requirement for everyone). These discussion points should serve to help you organize your thoughts on a main theme from the readings and facilitate discussion in class. The topic of each weekly discussion point will be up to you and you should feel free to pick what is especially interesting/relevant/puzzling to you.

Each discussion point should:
• Consist of a minimum of 600 words (roughly 1 single spaced page with a standard 12 pt. font and inch margins)
• Include an explanation of the issues at stake and why you think they are important, even if you cannot fully answer the question(s) you ask.
• Include at least 2 questions you have about the readings. Formulate these carefully and think of them as critical questions you would pose to the author(s) if you could or questions involving the interrogation of one author by another.
• Discuss connections between at least two of the readings for that day
• Involve a serious engagement with the material. You may reference the discussion points of your fellow students but you must lay out your own ideas and concerns.

I would encourage you to make references to readings from previous weeks of the course, as you find useful and appropriate. I will grade these discussion points on a regular basis; my feedback will be posted on Blackboard as comments on the discussion board itself and/or individual feedback via the Blackboard grading section. You are required to provide at least seven discussion points over the course of the semester. Again, regardless of whether you have completed a DP for a given week, you are required to have read all posts for the week before class and be prepared to discuss them.

2. Class participation and presentation. Each course member should be prepared to be actively involved in discussions of the readings each week, regardless of whether you are presenting that week or whether you have completed a “discussion point” (DP) assignment for the week. I will be prepared to do some lecturing on the material but the success of the course depends heavily on your active engagement. Your grade for this component of the course will be determined by the quality and consistency of your participation in class discussions and your presentations.

Each person will also be expected to do one class presentation – either alone or with one co-presenter. Each presenter or team of co-presenters will be assigned to read, present, and lead (or jump-start) a discussion of the readings for that day. The initial presentation should last no longer than 15 minutes, after which the presenter or co-presenters will also be expected to lead a class discussion of that material and also respond to pertinent discussion points made by other course members. Presenters should provide a brief written summary or detailed outline for the rest of the class members just prior to the presentation. Presenters may want (but do not have to) to anticipate comments from discussion points posted during the week in advance on Blackboard. We will organize a voluntary sign up sheet (or, if this fails, randomly assign presentation dates) during the first week of class. Everyone will be participating in a class debate (defending an author’s
position) on *September 23*rd, so no presentations will be scheduled for this day.]
Note: A presentation will not substitute for a DP, but nor will it count as one of two skipped DPs.

4. **Final Essay:** In this 15-20 page essay you will be articulating and supporting your own position on what public sociology is and/or should be. You should integrate course concepts, theories, and ideas, and situate your own position within (or in relations to) the readings for the class. We will discuss this in the following weeks, and I will provide a handout specifying the requirements. This essay will be due (in class) December 9th, on the last day of class.

**GRADING**

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*Late Assignments*
Late assignments will not be accepted for a grade unless authorized by the instructor prior to the due date.

*Incomplete Grades*
The instructor discourages incomplete grades and will give them only in unusual circumstances and, even then, only when formally arranged in advance between the student and the instructor.

**CONTESTING GRADES**
I strongly encourage you to talk to me about any grade I give you in this course. The best time for this is during my office hours or by appointment. While there is no guarantee that I will change your grade, at the very least you will get a better sense of what my expectations are - and this may help you on future assignments.

**GETTING ASSISTANCE DURING THE COURSE**
I strongly encourage you to contact me if you want to discuss or clarify any course material. I check my email regularly, and am also willing to chat any time I am in my campus office. Please do not hesitate to let me know if there is anything I can do to make your experience in this course more positive for you.

**ENROLLMENT STATEMENT**
Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes.
Last Day to Add/Drop (without tuition penalty): September 8, 2015
Last Day to Drop (with tuition penalty): October 2, 2015
After the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons.

MASON EMERGENCY INFORMATION!!!

To provide by e-mail and/or text message all members of the University community with emergency information relating to our safety and security, you are encouraged to sign up for the Mason Alert System, available at https://alert.gmu.edu.

Also, every classroom on campus has an emergency poster explaining what to do in the event of crises, and further information exists about emergency procedures at http://www.gmu.edu/service/cert.

The Mason Safety Bulletins page at http://respond.gmu.edu/ provides ongoing information for students, faculty, and staff concerning the H1N1 virus and provides links to other health related resources. We will continue to monitor any new developments and keep you informed.

ARRANGING SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

I am very happy to work with students in need of special accommodations in order to ensure that everyone is able to learn and participate fully in the course. If you need disability-related accommodations in this class, or if you have emergency medical information, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please see me privately after class or at my office. The Disability Resource Center is the campus office responsible for verifying that students have disability-related needs for academic accommodations, and for planning appropriate accommodations in cooperation with the students themselves and their instructors. The Disability Resource Center is located in SUB I, Room 2500, where you can make an appointment, or call 703-993-2474 or 703-993-2476 (TDD/TTY).
A web page describing the Center’s resources and policies regarding accommodations is available at http://www.gmu.edu/student/drc/.

HONOR CODE POLICY ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I expect you to understand and abide by the University’s policy regarding the Honor Code, which may be found at http://www.gmu.edu/catalog/apolicies/#Anchor12. In short, the University’s policy regarding the Honor Code prohibits any form of cheating on exams or written assignments. It also prohibits plagiarism, so be certain to properly cite all information that you use in your papers. Also, make extensive, very specific references to our course materials in your papers. Cheating and plagiarism are very serious infractions, and I deal with them severely in this course. If I receive a paper that has few specific references to our course materials, I will be inclined to assume that you have downloaded it off the Internet. If I determine that the paper has been plagiarized, then I will give you a failing grade. I will also likely report this alleged violation to the Honor Committee, who will consider further sanctions. If you have any questions about this policy I encourage you to come and talk with me about it. For more information or assistance, visit http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/mason-values-academic-integrity/. You can find information and forms pertaining to the Honor Code and Committee at http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/. Also, you can always consult the Student Academic Affairs Ombudsman Dolores Gomez-Moran, who provides
students with a neutral, independent, informal, and confidential resource for resolving academic concerns fairly. Her office is located at the Johnson Center, Room 245. Phone: 703-993-3306; E-mail: ombuds@gmu.edu; Web http://ombudsman.gmu.edu/.

GUIDELINES FOR WRITTEN WORK

Always put your name on your paper. Give your paper a title and page numbers. Do not insert double-returns between paragraphs. Unless I request it, do not turn assignments in with report covers. Use 1 inch margins, a normal font size, and double-spacing on each page. Please do not use small fonts or single spacing, as this makes it hard to insert comments.

**KEEP MULTIPLE COPIES OF ALL YOUR WORK**

Always keep a duplicate copy of your paper or any other course work in a safe place, in case the original gets lost or you run into computer problems. Save a copy of your paper on a separate computer diskette, and update frequently as you are writing. Keep extra copies of all your assignments until after the semester ends and you have received your official grades from the Registrar’s Office. This is a crucial point: No credit can be given for papers that are lost (by you or me) or rendered un-retrievable because of computer problems. There are no exceptions to this rule, so be extremely careful to keep a backup copy of all your work!

TEN POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN WRITING CRITICAL REFLECTION ESSAYS/PAPERS

1) Begin your paper with an engaging introductory paragraph. Make the reader really wants to read your paper.
2) In the first or second paragraph of your paper, insert one sentence that clearly states what your paper is about. (Your thesis, if this is an expository paper, would go here.)
3) In general, use normal terminology in your papers. Avoid the use of overly-complicated phrases or jargon.
4) Avoid relying on over-generalizations. Refer to specific cases and evidence to build your arguments.
5) In general, do not begin or end paragraphs with quotations from sources.
6) Do not turn in papers that are mostly quotations. Make sure most of the words in your paper are yours.
7) Make sure that every sentence in your paper is very straight-forward and clear.
8) Make sure that every sentence in your paper builds on the last. Organize your ideas carefully.
9) Carefully construct your paragraphs. Make certain all sentences in a paragraph are connected with one another.
10) End your paper with a strong conclusion. Leave the reader with something intriguing to think about.

GRADING CRITERIA FOR WRITTEN WORK

1) Logical coherence (33%)
   -Organize your thoughts and information in a clear order.
   -State your observations and conclusions clearly.
   -Use evidence to support your conclusions.

2) Engagement with course issues and concepts (33%)

- In every paper, make use of concepts/methods of analysis discussed in class.
- Unless I give you specific permission, you should be sure to incorporate at least three course readings/lectures into any research paper you write. Shorter critical essays must incorporate the key concepts from at least one course reading/lecture.

3) Quality of your particular analysis (33%)
- Try to make your paper interesting and unique.
- Try to go beyond simply re-stating someone else's argument.
- Always make sure that your paper ends with a clear and interesting conclusion.

GUIDELINES FOR CITING YOUR SOURCES

In your papers, you must cite all sources of information used in the body of your paper and then include a complete list of references (“Works Cited”) at the end of your paper. For a list of citation examples http://infoguides.gmu.edu/c.php?g=120797&p=786913. I prefer to use the Chicago Manual of Style (documentation style 2), but you can use whichever style you prefer. The only requirement is that you select one style and use it consistently. Remember, you must cite not only direct quotations (which should be identified with quotation marks and page numbers), but also summarized information you got from a text.

ADDITIONAL UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

Student services: The University provides a range of services to help you succeed academically and you should make use of these if you think they could benefit you. I also invite you to speak to me (the earlier the better).

Counseling Center: Student Union I, Room 364, 703-993-2380. Web-site http://www.gmu.edu/departments/cisd/

University Writing Center: Robinson Hall Room A114, 703-993-1200. Web-site: http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/ The writing center provides tutoring and workshops, and includes assistance for students for whom English is a second language. It also is helpful for students in general who wish to improve their writing skills. I recommend making appointments in advance: http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/contact

University Catalog: http://catalog.gmu.edu
University Policies: http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu
Schedule of Assignments

September 2 - Introduction & Orientation to the Course
Organize who will be presenting on which days; and organize debate for September 22nd.

September 9 – Public Perceptions of Public Sociologists (in America)

Reading Due:


September 16 – What is “Public Sociology”?

Reading Due:


Writing Assignment Due: Go to http://contexts.org/. Explore the website, read a few of the blog entries and/or short articles. Take some notes on your first impressions, observations and thoughts about this project’s relationship to “public sociology.” Then, drawing upon your notes, write a 2-3 page reflection paper (as if you were writing this to the readers of Contexts). This assignment does not count as a DP, nor is it optional.
September 23 - Professional Conflict over the Concept of Public Sociology

Reading Due:


Read the following:
Alain Touraine
Sharon Hays
Judith Stacey
Patricia Hill Collins
Arthur L. Stinchcombe
Douglas S. Massey
Frances Fox Piven
Immanuel Wallerstein
Orlando Patterson
Andrew Abbott
Evelyn Nakano Glenn
Barbara Ehrenreich


September 30 – The Transformation of the Sociological Imagination in America (during and after the Cold War)

Reading Due:


October 7 – Transforming Sociological Discourse vs. Preserving the Professional Discipline of Sociology

Reading Due:


October 14 – The Discipline Strikes Back

Reading Due:


October 21 – Alternative Sociologies of the Past as the Basis for Public Sociology beyond the Discipline

Reading Due:


October 28 - Sociology's Relationship to Civil Society: Governance, Politics, and Power

Reading Due:

November 4 – Case Studies of Public Sociology

Reading Due:


November 11 – Technology's Social Impact on Public Sociology

Reading Due:


November 18 – Transnationalizing the Public Sphere and Civil Society...and Public Sociology?

Reading Due:


Viewing Assignment: Watch Adam Curtis’ BBC Documentary Century of the Self [All four parts, total viewing time: 236 minutes.]

Summary: Four programs describing the psycho/social issues affecting 20th century consumerism against the backdrop of the development of Freudian psychology.

Table of Contents: Part 1. The Happiness machines. Explores the emotional connection to consumerism and the psychological motivation of desires over needs through the historical context of the early 20th century; the use of propaganda and the promotion of Freudian ideologies. The work of Edward L. Bernays, public relations specialist and nephew of Freud, is discussed. Available at: http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2d29tf_the-century-of-the-self-part-1-of-4-happiness-machines_school


Part 3. There is a policeman inside all our heads, he must be destroyed. 1960’s questioning of Freudian principles, liberation of feelings vs. suppressing primitive animal instincts. Available at: http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2d2l6u_the-century-of-the-self-part-3-of-4-there-is-a-policeman-inside-all-our-heads-he-must-be-destroyed_school

Part 4. Eight people sipping wine in Kettering: "Satisfaction of individual feelings and desire is our highest priority." How politicians in Britain and America create, control and respond to this idea. Available at: http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2j38dj_the-century-of-the-self-part-4-of-4-eight-people-sipping-wine-in-kettering-480p_tv

November 25 – Thinking about a Public Sociology for the University as an Institution

NOTE: No Class before Thanksgiving Break. [Prof. Dale will be giving a lecture in Australia.]

Short Reading Assignment for the Week:


December 2 – Public Sociology’s Conception of “Human” and its Implication for Human Rights

*Reading Due:*


December 9 – Discussion of Personal Positions on Public Sociology and Identification of the Diverse Perspectives Within Our Cohort

*Papers Due at the start of class!*