

SOCI 3300: Urban Sociology

University of North Texas – Fall 2026

Contact Information:

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Office Hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 11:30-12:30pm (in-person at my office, or by Zoom*)
*zoom link available on Canvas

Regular Class Meetings

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:20pm to 3:40pm, ENV 115

Course Description

What does it mean to be *urban*? Why do people of different races and ethnicities live in different neighborhoods? Is gentrification good or bad? In this course, we will tackle these questions and more by exploring the origins of urban sociology and the different methods sociologists have used to understand the social forces that influence our urban environment, and the everyday lives of people who live in cities. We will review empirical research about urban problems and engage in solutions-oriented analyses about policies and practices that could be used to address urban inequalities.

Learning Outcomes

In this course, students will learn to:

- Think critically about the city in which they live
- Understand the social, economic, and political structures that influence urban processes
- Make evidence-based claims in writing and during class discussion
- Practice solutions-oriented thinking about urban social problems

Required Texts and Materials

All course readings will be posted on Canvas. Please bring paper and a pen/pencil to every class. Occasionally, we will complete in-class activities that will involve an electric device, like a laptop or smartphone. Students are welcome to share with a peer if they are not able to bring one of these devices to class.

Preparing for Class

To succeed in this class, students should actively read all of the assigned chapters and articles prior to the date they will be discussed in class. Regular class attendance and full participation in seminar discussion is required for success in the course.

Assignments

Attendance and Discussion (20%)

Everyone brings a unique perspective to this course. When we read scholarly research, we filter information through our own experiences and understanding of the world. In order to learn from each other and practices 'speaking up,' a core component of this course will be seminar-style, in-class discussions. To receive full credit, students must attend class regularly and participate fully by reading the assigned readings ahead of class and coming to class prepared to discuss the core ideas. Student may miss

a total of three classes without any impact to their grade. Additionally, students will be asked to write self-assessments of their progress with participation in seminar discussion, which will be factored into their final attendance and discussion grade.

Newspaper Article Analyses (2 required, 30% total)

In order to foster solutions-oriented thinking about current events, these writing and critical thinking assignments ask students to a) read a daily newspaper (in print or online), and b) prepare a brief, typed analysis of a current news article about an urban issue in a format to be provided, drawing on material from the course. Two of these analyses will be required during the semester. GenerativeAI is not permitted to be used in any stage of this assignment.

Midterm Ethnography Project (20%)

The tradition of the “urban flaneur” or the urban ethnography is a rich one. The term “flaneur” is French, and it is a word to describe someone who strolled, lounged, or sauntered around the city: “he is an ambivalent figure of urban riches representing the ability to wander detached from society with no other purpose than to be an acute observer of society.” (Wikipedia). In this course, we will read several accounts of urban observations written in the flaneur style. This assignment invites students to become urban flaneurs of Denton, Texas (or the local city of their choosing), by taking a stroll, writing field observations, and finally, composing an interpretation and analysis of their field notes. More detailed instructions will be provided. GenerativeAI is not permitted to be used at any stage of this assignment.

Final Project (30%)

The final project in this course is an opportunity for students to apply what they have learned about urban sociology to a contemporary analysis of an urban social problem in a neighborhood/city of their choosing. Students will be expected to conduct research on the urban problem; gather secondary data about the problem; and write a 2-3 page, single-spaced “issue brief” about the problem and potential solutions. Some examples of potential projects are to 1) use census tract data or tools like historical redlining maps to analyze racial residential segregation and economic disparities in a specific neighborhood or metro area; 2) analyze municipal or court data to evaluate eviction rates in a local city or neighborhood; 3) use Google Earth to look at present and past iterations of neighborhood spaces to assess changes under gentrification; 4) research an urban social movement tied to a digital campaign and analyze online discourse about it. Students may also propose their own ideas. You are welcome to use GenerativeAI during the brainstorming stage of this project, but you may not use it for writing, editing, or to generate images or any other content for your “issue brief.”

Grade Policies

Your final grade is made up of the following components:

1. Attendance and Discussion	20%
2. Newspaper Analyses (2 total)	30%
3. Midterm Ethnography	20%
4. Final Project	30%
100% Total	

The cutoffs for final letter grades are as follows. I will round final grades up at the 0.5 threshold (i.e., 89.5% becomes 90%).

A	90-100	Excellent Work
B	80-89	Good Work
C	70-79	Fair Work
D	60-69	Passing Work
F	0-59	Failure

Absence Policies

This course is designed to be a face-to-face and discussion oriented. This means that regular in-person attendance, discussion, and participation in the course is expected, and makes up a substantial portion of your final grade. However, there are some cases when you may benefit from asking for an accommodation: e.g., if you have a disability that limits your ability to attend class on an ongoing basis; if you have required military service or a religious holiday; if you have experienced a sudden emergency; or some other extenuating circumstance that is impacting your ability to attend class in accordance with [UNT's attendance and absence policies](#). Accommodations will not be made for occasional absences due to routine illness, oversleeping, or work/scheduling conflicts.

Late Work

Late work is accepted in this class. A late penalty of 5% will be deducted for each 24-hour period the assignment is late, starting the first minute after the original deadline. If an emergency makes it impossible to complete an assignment on time and you would like to discuss whether an accommodation can be made, please email Dr. Helmuth to set up an appointment to discuss the situation.

Academic Integrity Policy

According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University. Please note that the use of generative artificial intelligence software (like ChatGPT), (un)intentionally copying from the Internet, copying from a classmate, etc. are all example of violations of UNT's Student Academic Integrity policy.

AI Policy

In this course, the use of GenerativeAI tools, such as Claude, ChatGPT, and Gemini, is limited. Students may use GenAI in the brainstorming stage of their Final Project, but they may not use it for any other assignment or any other stage of their Final Project, including editing, writing, or generating images or content for their final issue brief. Any use of GenerativeAI outside of brainstorming for the final project will be considered an academic integrity violation. Substituting your own work with GenAI output undermines the learning process in this course and violates UNT academic integrity policy.

Disability Accommodations

UNT makes reasonable academic accommodations for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a

new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the ODA website at disability.unt.edu.

Syllabus Change Policy

This syllabus is only a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice.

Contacting Dr. Helmuth

Please contact Dr. Helmuth by email or make an office hours visit (in-person or by Zoom) if there is anything we can do or that we need to know to help make your experience better. You can always walk into office hours without an appointment, or you can email me to set up an appointment at another time.

COURSE SCHEDULE*

*Readings on this list may be changed or updated with at least one-week advanced notice. Please check an updated version of the course schedule prior to each class.

Week	Date	Readings (To be read by class-time on the date listed)	Assignment Due
Wk1	Tues, Aug 18	No reading due today	
	Thurs, Aug 20	<u>Foundations in Urban Sociology I</u> • “Simmel, Georg. 1903. “The Metropolis and Mental Life” • [Pages 18-24 only]. Wirth, Louis. 1938 “Urbanism as a Way of Life,” <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> 44.1.	
Wk2	Tues, Aug 25	<u>Foundations in Urban Sociology II</u> • “The Great Towns,” from <i>The Conditions of the Working Class in England</i>, by Frederick Engels • Excerpts from <i>Philadelphia Negro</i> by W.E.B. DuBois • “Recreation as a Public Function in Urban Communities,” by Jane Addams	
	Thurs, Aug 27	<u>Human Ecology</u> • “The Growth of the City,” by Earnest Burgess	
Wk3	Tues, Sept 1	<u>Political Economy of Place</u> • Molotch, Harvey. 1976. “The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place,” <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> 82.2: 309-332.	
	Thurs, Sept 3	<u>From Human Ecology to Political Economy</u> • Gottdeiner and Feagin. 1988. “The Paradigm Shift in Urban Sociology.” <i>Urban Affairs Review</i> 24.2.	

Wk4	Tues, Sept 8	<u>Eyes on the Street</u> Jacobs, Jane. 1993 (originally 1961). "The Uses of Sidewalks: Safety," in <i>The Death and Life of Great American Cities</i>.	
	Thurs, Sept 10	<u>Streetlife</u> Hubbard, Phil and Dawn Lyon. 2018. "Introduction; Streetlife—The Shifting Sociologies of the Street." <i>The Sociological Review</i> 66.5: 937-951.	Newspaper Analysis #1 due
Wk5	Tues, Sept 15	<u>Urban Ethnography</u> Anderson, Elijah. 2004. "The Cosmopolitan Canopy," <i>Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science</i>, 595: 14-31.	
	Thurs, Sept 17	<u>Urban Ethnography, cont.</u> "Following the Flaneur: the Methodological Possibilities and Applications of Flanerie in New Urban Spaces," by Rizk & Birioukov.	
Wk6	Tues, Sept 22	<u>Origins of Racial Residential Segregation</u> Rothstein, Richard. "If San Francisco, then Everywhere?" from <i>Color of Law</i>	
	Thurs, Sept 24	<u>Midcentury Suburbs and Segregation</u> Jackson, Kenneth. 1985. Ch. 11 "Federal Subsidies and the Suburban Dream," from <i>Crabgrass Frontier</i>	
Wk 7	Tues, Sept 29	<u>Contemporary Racial Residential Segregation</u> Massey, Douglas and Nancy Denton. 1993. Excerpt from <i>American Apartheid</i>. "Segregation and the Making of the Underclass"	
	Thurs, Oct 1	<u>Concentration of Poverty</u> Wilson, William Julius. 1997. Excerpt from <i>When Work Disappears</i>. "Chapter 1: From Institutional to Jobless Ghettos."	
Wk8	Tues, Oct 6	<u>Ghettoization of Public Housing</u> Jackson, Kenneth. Ch.12 "The Cost of Good Intentions: The Ghettoization of Public Housing in the US" in <i>Crabgrass Frontier</i>, Oxford U Press	
	Thurs, Oct 8	<u>Ethnographies of Public Housing</u> Venkatesh, Sudhir. 2008. Excerpt from <i>Gang Leader for a Day</i>. Penguin Group.	

		Civics 101: A Podcast. "The Government and Housing: One City's Story." https://www.civics101podcast.org/civics-101-episodes/atlantahousing	
Wk9	Tues, Oct 13	No Class Today – midterm project due	Midterm Project Due: Urban Ethnography
	Thurs, Oct. 15	<u>Racialization of Crime</u> Alexander, Michelle. 2012. Pages 40-58. "The Birth of Mass Incarceration." Excerpt from Chapter 1 of <i>The New Jim Crow</i>.	
Wk10	Tues, Oct 20	<u>Hyperincarceration</u> Wacquant, Loic. 2010. "Class, Race, and Hyperincarceration in Revanchist America." <i>Daedalus</i> Summer Issue.	
	Thurs, Oct 22	<u>Culture of Poverty and "Crimes of Resistance"</u> Rios, Victor M. 2012. "Stealing a Bag of Potato Chips and Other Crimes of Resistance." <i>Contexts</i> 11.1: 48-53.	
Wk11	Tues, Oct 27	<u>Horror Films and Urban Sociology</u> - Luger, Jason (2021). "Scary Cities: The Urban as Protagonist/Antagonist in Horror Films." <i>Urban Cultural Studies</i>. https://urbanculturalstudies.wordpress.com/2021/10/04/scary-cities-the-urban-as-protagonist-antagonist-in-horror-films/ - Talbott, Clint (2021). "CU Boulder sociologists who teach courses on the sociology of horror talk about their podcast, why horror films are popular and their favorite scary movies." <i>UCB Arts and Sciences Magazine</i>. https://www.colorado.edu/asmagazine/2021/10/27/say-hello-our-collective-nightmares-horror-films	In-Class viewing of <i>Candyman</i>
	Thurs, Oct 29	<u>Horror Films and Urban Sociology</u> [optional] Happy Friday, North Texas Podcast: Interview with Dr. Helmuth about "What Makes Scary Movies Scary" https://www.iheart.com/podcast/269-happy-friday-north-texas-161959505/episode/hfnt-38-what-makes-scary-movies-scary-304133281	In-class viewing of <i>Candyman</i> , cont.
Wk12	Tues, Nov 3	<u>Gentrification</u> Lees, Slater, and Wyly. "Producing Gentrification," chapter from <i>Gentrification</i>	
	Thurs, Nov 5	<u>Gentrification, cont.</u>	

		Lees, Slater, and Wylie. "Consuming Gentrification," chapter from <i>Gentrification</i>	
Wk13	Tues, Nov 10	<u>Affordable Housing Crisis</u> Greenberg, Michael. 2017. "Tenants Under Siege: Inside New York City's Housing Crisis." <i>The New York Review</i>. https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/08/17/tenants-under-siege-inside-new-york-city-housing-crisis/	
	Thurs, Nov 12	<u>Eviction</u> Desmond, Matthew. Excerpts from <i>Evicted: Poverty and Profit in The American City</i>.	Newspaper Analysis #2 Due
Wk14	Tues, Nov 17	<u>Homelessness</u> Fowle. 2022. "Racialized Homelessness: A Review of Historical and Contemporary Causes of Racial Disparities in Homelessness." <i>Housing Policy Debate</i> 32.6.	
	Thurs, Nov 19	<u>Care and Resistance</u> (Required). Williams, Miriam J. 2020. "The Possibility of Care-Full Cities." <i>Cities</i>. (Optional). Summers, Brandi and Desiree Fields. 2022. "Speculative Urban Worldmaking: Meeting Financial Violence with a Politics of Collective Care." <i>Antipode</i>.	
Wk15	Tues, Nov 24	Fall Break <i>No Class This Week</i>	
	Thurs, Nov 26	Fall Break <i>No Class This Week</i>	
Wk16	Tues, Dec 1	Final Project Workshop	In-Class Workshop
	Thurs, Dec 3	Final Project Workshop	In-Class Workshop
	Dec. 7- 11	Final Exam Week <i>Final Project Due at 5:30 PM on Tuesday, December 8th via Canvas</i>	Final Project Due