Sociology

Sociology explores the processes that create and transform structures within social systems. Teaching and research in the Washington University Department of Sociology address central questions about how modern U.S. and global societies operate and evolve.

The department was re-established in 2015 after a hiatus of more than two decades. In the initial years of the new program, we will have a rapidly expanding set of activities that explore a variety of critical social issues. Examples include inequality across race, gender and economic class, as well as the sources and consequences of social conflict.

Sociological analysis begins from theoretical perspectives that explain how the structures that organize and govern social systems emerge and change. Our curriculum and research also emphasize an understanding of social processes that is well grounded in empirical data on how societies actually function. The evolving program will give students the research tools to develop their own perspectives on social function. We also seek to engage with social policies and formal and informal social institutions to better understand the world in which we live and to help guide social change.

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Faculty

Professors

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Majors

The Department of Sociology was re-established in 2015, and its first courses were offered in the fall semester of 2015. Plans are underway to introduce a major during the 2016-17 academic year, but it is not yet possible to declare a sociology major. Undergraduate students interested in specializing in sociology should contact the department office for information on how to use the rapidly evolving curriculum to support their educational objectives.

Minors

The Department of Sociology was re-established in 2015, and its first courses were offered in the fall semester of 2015. Plans are underway to introduce a minor during the 2016-17 academic year, but it is not yet possible to declare a sociology minor. Undergraduate students interested in specializing in sociology should contact the department office for information on how to use the rapidly evolving curriculum to support their educational objectives.

Courses


L40 SOC 2010 Sociology of Race and Ethnicity

An overview of sociological understandings of race and ethnicity, with a particular focus on race and ethnic relations in the contemporary United States. We begin by investigating how sociologists understand racial and ethnic distinctions, asking: What comprises a racial or ethnic group? We then shift our attention to patterns of racial and ethnic inequality in the U.S., investigating the intersection of economic and racial/ethnic stratification. After analyzing national trends in race and ethnic stratification, we narrow our focus to particular regions and metropolitan areas, including St. Louis, to shed light on pressing public concerns such as the interrelationships between race/ethnicity and the criminal justice system. The course also looks beyond U.S. borders and asks: How is race/ethnicity understood in other countries? What makes our own system of racial and ethnic stratification distinctive? Are there common patterns of racial and ethnic classification shared by many societies? Credit 3 units. A&S: SS, SD A&S IQ: SSC, SD Arch: SSC Art: SSC BU: BA EN: S
L40 SOC 2020 Order and Change in Society
Identification and analysis of processes that create social order and forces that generate social change. What kinds of structures make social life coherent so that we all can navigate a wide range of social settings? How do societies sometimes mobilize to alter the status quo, and what kinds of barriers limit those efforts to change social systems? This course engages with such core issues through a sociological lens. Specific topics include: the emergence of social roles and status systems; how social networks matter in communities, schools and other groups; and the performance, reproduction and subversion of privilege and inequality. No prerequisites.
Credit 3 units. A&S: SS & S IQ: SSC BU: BA EN: S

L40 SOC 2030 Social Movements
Social movements are collective efforts to produce political, economic and/or cultural change. This course draws on a range of historical and contemporary case studies to analyze such collective actions by interrogating distinctive aspects of movements and their associated campaigns. Key questions include: When and where do movements occur, who participates and why, how do protest strategies and tactics develop, how do police and other movement targets react to challenges to the status quo, and how can we assess the direct and indirect impacts of contention? Introductory level, no prerequisites.
Credit 3 units. A&S: SS & S IQ: SSC Arch: SSC Art: SSC BU: BA EN: S

L40 SOC 2110 Social Inequality in America
Americans face different challenges and opportunities that depend on a variety of characteristics, including race, class, gender and sexual orientation. This class examines these intersecting categories from a sociological perspective—not simply as ways to classify people, but as social constructions that help to explain social inequality. We examine these systems in a variety of institutional contexts, such as popular culture, family life, education, the criminal justice system and the labor force. Introductory level, no prerequisites.
Credit 3 units. A&S: SS & S IQ: SSC Arch: SSC Art: SSC BU: BA EN: S

L40 SOC 3001 Social Theory
Overview of major theoretical frameworks used by sociologists to understand social behavior and group patterns. Explores classical theories, including those developed by Marx, Weber, and Durkheim along with contemporary perspectives such as exchange and feminist theories. Class discussions and writing assignments emphasize application of theory to understand current social experiences and structures. The course has no specific prerequisites, but students should be prepared for intensive study of challenging ideas and the application of these ideas in new contexts relevant to modern society.
Credit 3 units. A&S: SS & S IQ: SSC BU: BA EN: S

L40 SOC 3030 Introduction to Research Methods
Overview of research methods commonly used to investigate sociological phenomena including experiments, surveys, ethnographic field research, and analysis of existing data. The course explores general issues in sociological research, such as research design, conceptualization and measurement, reliability, validity, sampling and ethical conduct. We also review applications of research methods in specific sociological studies and analyze how research results are communicated. This is a core course in the study of sociology. It has no specific prerequisites but some familiarity with sociological analysis is recommended.
Credit 3 units. A&S: SS A&S IQ: SSC BU: BA EN: S

L40 SOC 3212 The Social Construction of Race
Examination of race, ethnicity and racism from a sociological perspective to understand race as a socially constructed phenomenon manifested in a wide range of social institutions. The course focuses on how race and racism impact contemporary social problems and public policy issues including immigration, affirmative action, education, media representation and work. Application of sociological analysis to understand current race-related events. This course has no specific prerequisites but completion of an introductory course in sociology is recommended before enrollment.
Credit 3 units. A&S: SS, SD A&S IQ: SSC, SD Arch: SSC Art: SSC BU: BA EN: S

L40 SOC 3310 The New Inequality
Exploration of recent trends of economic inequality in the United States that have reached levels not seen since before the Great Depression. We examine factors that account for the decades-long increase in economic disparities, paying particular attention to patterns in educational attainment, political developments, and the role of technological change. We will also compare recent movements in economic inequality and macroeconomic performance in the U.S. with other advanced industrialized nations. This course has no specific prerequisites but completion of an introductory course in sociology is recommended before enrollment.
Credit 3 units. A&S: SS, SD, WI A&S IQ: SSC, SD, WI Arch: SSC Art: SSC BU: BA EN: S

L40 SOC 3350 Poverty and the New American City
Exploration of structural changes that are transforming the American urban landscape, especially for low-income populations. We begin with a review of classic theories of urban poverty and consider their relevance in the modern context. We then analyze key political, economic, demographic and geographic shifts in how urban poverty is organized and reproduced, including gentrification, immigration, social policy reform and the credit crisis. Special attention will be devoted to exploring the social and political implications of changing urban policy approaches, as well as the “suburbanization” of poverty. We will conclude by discussing how urban poverty interfaces with broader social structures, including law, markets and the state. Prerequisite: an introductory course in sociology or consent of the instructor.
Credit 3 units. A&S IQ: SSC EN: S

L40 SOC 3710 Sociology of Immigration
A review of theoretical and empirical research on how and why people migrate across international borders, and the consequences of international migration for immigrants and natives in the United States. While immigration is one of the most controversial issues in the contemporary United States, these contentious debates are not new. Americans once voiced the same concerns about the economic and social impact of Southern and Eastern European immigrants that today are aimed at immigrants from Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. In this course we will compare historical (1880-1920) and contemporary (1965-present) waves of immigration to the United States. We will explore why and how people migrate, immigrant integration, the impact of immigration on native-born
Americans, and how government policies — at the national, state, and local level — shape immigrant assimilation and what it means to be considered truly "American" in a social as well as a legal sense. Prerequisite: completion of an introductory sociology course or consent of the instructor. Credit 3 units. A&S IQ: SSC EN: S

L40 SOC 3910 Economic Realities of the American Dream
Exploration of the realities of economic life in the U.S. and how they correspond to the American Dream. Interdisciplinary perspectives from economics, sociology and other areas of social inquiry. Emphasis on the consistency between empirical data and different concepts of the American Dream. Specific topics to include sources of economic growth and changing living standards, unemployment, impact of globalization on U.S. citizens, economic mobility, poverty and inequality, and social justice. Prerequisites: Econ 1011 and Econ 1021, or consent of the instructors.
Same as L11 Econ 348
Credit 3 units. A&S SS A&S IQ: SSC Arch: SSC Art: SSC BU: BA EN: S

L40 SOC 4750 Sociology of Education
Same as L12 Educ 453B
Credit 3 units. A&S: SS, SD A&S IQ: SSC, SD Art: SSC BU: BA, ETH