

SOC486H1S: Winter 2014
Advanced Topics in Urban Sociology
“The Neighbourhoods of Toronto”
Professor Jooyoung Lee
Fridays 11-1pm
SK 218

Contact Info

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Overview

What is a neighbourhood? How do we study it?

In the early 20th century, Robert Park and Ernest Burgess sent their students out into Chicago with a simple goal: They wanted them to know about the city. Their students went out and produced timeless studies of how immigration, crime, and development were changing Chicago’s neighbourhoods. Their studies also showed us the importance of studying the unique life histories of residents, merchants, and vagrants who called these neighbourhoods home. And finally, their work showed how parks, taverns, and other public places helped define the identity of these neighbourhoods.

Nearly a century has passed since these pioneering studies, but the study of neighbourhoods is still alive and well in Sociology. While some continue in this great tradition, the study of neighbourhoods has since shifted and become less about understanding what makes a neighbourhood unique. Instead of bringing neighbourhoods to life, many sociologists now talk about ‘the neighbourhood’ as an independent variable correlated to outcomes in health, education, and other prized variables in sociology.

In this class, you will go out into Toronto. You will pick a neighbourhood. And you will write short assignments and a longer research paper about this neighbourhood. In other words, you will continue the great tradition paved by Park, Burgess, and many of their students. But, you will also bring some fresh eyes and ideas to this old field.

By taking this course, you will gain important methodological training in studying neighbourhood. You will also gain important training in writing—a skill that will stay with you for years after you have graduated from U of T. And, perhaps most importantly, you will also bring technological insights into the study of neighbourhoods. Today, we have so many cool gadgets and things at our disposal. The assignments that I’ve chosen reflect an eye to the past and an eye to the future.

Prerequisite

To take this course, you will need to have taken SOC200H1, SOC205H1 and at least .5 at the SOC 300 level. Students without this prerequisite will be removed at any time they are discovered.

Course Expectations

Attendance and participation

Attendance and participation are mandatory. You are responsible for all material presented in class. Students who are unable to attend class are responsible for obtaining information about any announcements that may have been made in class as well as notes on the material covered from their classmates. Also, I will only accept assignments from the person who did the work. You can't turn in your friend's homework. Also, proper documentation from a University of Toronto Student Medical Certificate or college registrar is required to justify an absence. Attendance and participation are worth 10% of your final grade. In other words, each class is worth 1 % toward your final grade.

Course Webpage

We will have a course website hosted on Blackboard. This website will contain the course syllabus, links to all the readings that are in journal article form, handouts, and course announcements. You are responsible for all the course materials and for all announcements. Please make sure to check your official utoronto.ca email addresses regularly. Also, you should post your field notes each week onto the class discussion board. This will allow others to read your work and get to know some of the interesting work that you are doing!

Choose a Neighbourhood

- 1) During our first class, you will break off into small groups of 4 or 5. You will pick a neighbourhood to study for the rest of the semester. I highly encourage you to choose where you live, where you have lived, or somewhere that you enjoy going. In the past, students have chosen neighbourhoods that they think will produce "cool" or "gritty" studies, but they end up flopping because students don't go to these places enough to produce revealing and luminous studies. In other words, you should choose a place in which you see yourself spending a day or two per week.
- 2) You will have 1 assigned book for this course. You should purchase *Venice: A Contested Bohemia in Los Angeles* by Andrew Deener. This is written by a good friend and colleague and is an exemplary study that reveals the hidden history, changing demographics, and vibrant cultural life of an iconic beach community in LA. It will be a good model for what you can strive for in your own neighbourhood study.

Assignments

Getting Started

- 1) **First Impression:** Describe your area and give your overall first impression of a place. You should visit the area, look it over and make notes of what you see and hear. Who lives here? Who works here? What brings people to this place? What kinds of things do they do with each other once in this place? What are some local problems that you can imagine from this visit? The first written assignment is a first impression of your neighbourhood. It will be a valuable reference point as you go forward and learn more about this place and the people there.
- 2) **Census:** You will compile census data and write a narrative about the changing character of this neighbourhood in the past 50 years. How has the population changed during this time? How has it stayed the same? What sorts of ideas do you have that might explain these patterns?

Picking a Theme

- 3) **Public Life:** All neighbourhoods have a public place where people like to hang out. These areas are rich field sites that give us a window into the social worlds of people who live here, work here, or simply come here to play. You should pick a popular public place and describe it in detail, providing the reader with a real sense of “being there” with you.
- 4) **Interviewing key people about the place:** You can meet people in different public places and ask them to tell you about their experiences in the neighbourhood. These interviews will provide you with a window into the ways that various individuals make sense of this place. Their stories—some funny, some heartbreaking, and others mundane—will provide an important biographical backdrop to the meaning of this place to varying folks.
- 5) **Life Histories:** Some of the meanings of this place are tied to a person’s biography. You will conduct life histories of residents, merchants, or some class of folks who are regularly here in your neighbourhood.
- 6) **Photographs:** You will also collect photographs of the neighbourhood. Visual data of the place will allow us to see physical characteristics of the neighbourhood. They will also allow us to see social dimensions of neighbourhood life that you might have missed in your own notes.
- 7) **Videos:** Videos are a relatively new technology that we can use to capture short and fleeting moments in interaction. You will use videos in a public setting to systematically observe how people do stuff together.

Writing it all Up

- 8) **Final Paper:** Your final paper will combine all of these sources of data and will draw connections to some key issue that you research.

Plagiarism: Don’t do it. It’s a serious academic offense with serious penalties (see the “Code of Behavior on Academic Matters”). If you are using somebody else’s ideas, do not present them as your own, whether you are quoting exact words, paraphrasing or summarizing. Give proper references if you are using somebody else’s ideas, and use

quotation marks if you are quoting. When in doubt, it is always safer to over-reference -- you are not going to be penalized for that.

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: First Impression: 5%

Introduction and Chapter 1 in *Venice*

Week 3: Census: 5%

Chapter 2 in *Venice*

Week 4: Short Memo #1 Due: 10%

Chapter 3 in *Venice*

Week 5: Public Life: 5%

Chapter 4 in *Venice*

Week 6: Interviewing People about the Neighbourhood: 5%

Chapter 5 in *Venice*

Week 7: Short Memo #2 Due: 10%

Chapter 6 in *Venice*

Week 8: Photographs: 5%

Chapter 7 in *Venice*

Week 9: Videos: 5%

Week 10: Memo #3: 10%

Week 11: Introduction and outline of final paper: 10%

Week 12: class presentations

Final Paper due in exam week: 20%

Attendance: 10%

FINAL GRADE: 100%