

SOC481H1S: CULTURE AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

Winter 2019

Class meets: Thursdays 2-4 PM, FE 41 (room 41, basement, 725 Spadina Avenue)

Professor: Bonnie H. Erickson
Telephone: 416-978-5263
E-mail: ericson@chass.utoronto.ca

Professor's office hours: Tuesdays 4:00 - 5:00 PM, or by appointment
Room 386, 725 Spadina Avenue

INTRODUCTION

This course introduces students to the critical understanding of how social networks and forms of culture are related. This is a huge, multifaceted topic, so we will focus on two relatively important and coherent subtopics.

First, from January 8 through February 5 we will consider how personal networks and personal cultural repertoires affect each other. Personal network variables include the variety of kinds of people a person knows, the density of networks (the extent to which the people a person knows also know each other), and whether the focal person is a “broker” who connects people who are not otherwise connected. Cultural variables include forms of knowledge, cognitive and evaluative frameworks, tastes, practices, and creativity.

Second, from February 12 through March 26 we will consider whole networks and culture. Instead of looking at personal networks we will look at networks in social settings and how these affect culture. One example of such settings is book clubs, in which people develop their own responses to a novel in the context of the influence relationship structure of their discussion group (February 12). On February 12 we will also consider how culture diffuses (or fails to diffuse) through networks. All other examples are networks of cultural production such as interlinked sets of writers, artists, or musicians. We will ask questions such as how network location is related to cultural status, career success, innovation, and strategic network building.

The work of Pierre Bourdieu is foundational and shows up in most of our readings.

The goals of the course are to build your knowledge of this area, to provide you with ample opportunities to think critically and to discuss issues with others, to guide you in developing your own original essay, and by all these means to enhance your scholarly skills.

This is an advanced undergraduate seminar, not a lecture course. It is essential that you read the readings well ahead of time, think about important issues in the readings, and come to class well prepared to join in discussion.

PREREQUISITES: The prerequisite to take this course is 1.0 SOC FCEs at the 300 level, preferably selected from the recommended preparation courses: SOC355, SOC356, SOC348, SOC381, and SOC382. Students without these prerequisites will be removed at any time they are discovered.

EVALUATION

- 1) Analytic Comments, 10%
- 2) Leading discussions, 15%
- 3) Class attendance, 10%
- 4) Class participation, 10%
- 5) Essay proposal, 10%.
- 6) Second draft of essay, 20%.
- 7) Essay, 25%

For detailed descriptions of these grade components see below, after the week by week outline describing class topics and readings.

Course e-mail policies:

- 1) I will only accept e-mails from your University of Toronto e-mail account. Please put "SOC 481" in your subject line so I know the message is course-related.
- 2) I cannot provide instant or even overnight response. I will make every effort to reply to e-mails promptly.
- 3) Many important course announcements will be sent to you through Quercus, using your University of Toronto e-mail address. Be sure to check this e-mail account regularly.
- 4) E-mails asking for information in this course outline (e.g. "How much is the essay worth?") will NOT be answered. Read this outline!

READINGS

Most of the readings are journal articles that you will be able to get on Quercus. You **MUST** read the readings for each class **BEFORE** the class so that you can participate in class discussion – this is a fourth year seminar, not a lecture course.

TOPICS AND REQUIRED READINGS

January 8: Introduction

Introduces the course and some basics of network analysis and sociology of culture. Some tips on reading high-level scholarly research papers.

READINGS:

Erickson, Bonnie H. 1996. "Culture, Class, and Connections." *American Journal of Sociology* 102:217-251.

READ pages 217- 225 before this week's class, and the rest before next week's class.

Those of you who have NOT taken SOC 355 or SOC 356 need to improve your familiarity with the basics of network analysis. Please read:

Marin, Alexandra and Barry Wellman. 2011. "Social Network Analysis: An Introduction." Pp. 11-25 in *The Sage Handbook of Social Network Analysis*, edited by J. Scott and P. Carrington. London: Sage.

OPTIONAL READING

Granovetter, Mark. 1973. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78:1360-80.

This is one of the most influential articles in social sciences, and several of your readings draw on it. Past students suggested putting it on the reading list, so here it is.

January 15: Network Variety and Cultural Variety

Erickson (1996) pioneered the study of links between the variety of kinds of people you know, and the extent to which you know something about a wide range of genres. While this is a highly cited and influential paper (winner of the Best Article Award from the American Sociological Association Section on Sociology of Culture), it is not without its critics. Holt (1998) is one of the strongest critics, especially of my way of measuring culture. Note that Holt does have information about the network differences that go with different levels of cultural capital. He does not make much of this but it is important for us.

The optional extra reading shows that today's well wired young people still use their networks to find music. The paper also reports on social status, kinds of media use, and opinion leadership in music.

READINGS:

Erickson, Bonnie H. 1996. "Culture, Class, and Connections." *American Journal of Sociology* 102:217-251.

Holt, Douglas B. 1998. "Does Cultural Capital Structure American Consumption?" *Journal of Consumer Research* 25: 1-25.

Optional extra reading

Tepper, Steven J. and Eszter Hargittai. 2009. "Pathways to music exploration in a digital world." *Poetics* 37: 227-249.

January 22: Network Variety and Political Culture

How does network variety affect political attitudes and political practices? For some interesting work on networks and culture in networks of organizations (not people) see the February 19 readings by Bail (2012) and Wang and Soule (2012). For those interested in Cote and Erickson 2009, Cote et al. 2015 goes further in exploring the roles of respondent class and close ties. For work on the diffusion of political views and practices, see Guilbeault, Becker, and Centola, February 12.

READINGS

Côte, Rochelle and Bonnie H. Erickson. 2009. "Untangling the Roots of

Tolerance: How Forms of Social Capital Shape Attitudes toward Ethnic Minorities and Immigrants.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 52:1664-1689.

Erickson, Bonnie H. 2006. “Persuasion and perception: new models of network effects on gendered issues.” Pp. 293-322 in Brenda O’Neill and Elisabeth Gidengil (eds.), *Gender and Social Capital*. New York: Routledge.

Tindall, David B. 2002. “Social Networks, Identification, and Participation in an Environmental Movement.” *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 39:413-452.

Optional extra reading

Côté, Rochelle R., Bob Andersen and Bonnie H. Erickson. 2015. “Social Capital and Ethnic Tolerance: The Opposing Effects of Diversity and Competition.” Pp. 91-106 in Yaojun Li, ed., *The Handbook of Research Methods and Applications on Social Capital*, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

January 29: Personal Network Structure and Culture; ESSAY PROPOSALS DUE

Here we shift from the variety of kinds of people known, to the structure of the ties that connect them. Burt finds that people in brokerage positions generate more good ideas and get more recognition of them. Xiao and Tsui show that the effect of structural holes depends on the prevailing culture in a field.

Aral and Van Alstyne show that sometimes people get more information from a few strong ties than from brokerage. Bruggeman constructively criticizes Aral and Van Alstyne. In the optional reading, Aral replies. This is a fine example of scholarly debate, and a model for your own analytic comments.

READINGS

Aral, Sinan and Marshall Van Alstyne. 2011. “The Diversity-Bandwidth Trade-off.” *American Journal of Sociology* 117:90-171. Read pages 90-110 (and more if you are interested).

Bruggeman, Jeroen. 2016. “The strength of varying tie strength: Comment on Aral and Van Alstyne.” *American Journal of Sociology* 121: 1919-30.

Burt, Ronald S. 2004. “Structural Holes and Good Ideas.” *American Journal of Sociology* 110:349-399.

OPTIONAL READINGS

Aral, Sinan. 2016. “The Future of Weak Ties.” *American Journal of Sociology* 121:1931-1939.

Xiao, Zhixing and Ane S. Tau. 2007. “When Brokers May Not Work: The Cultural Contingency of Social Capital in Chinese High Tech Firms.” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 52: 1-31.

February 5: Effects of Culture on Networks

Networks affect culture, but culture affects networks too.

READINGS

- Edelmann, Achim and Stephen Vaisey. 2014. "Cultural resources and cultural distinction in networks." *Poetics* 46: 22-37.
- Lewis, Kevin, Marco Gonzalez, and Jason Kaufman. 2012. "Social selection and peer influence in an online social network." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 109: 68-72.
- Lizardo, Omar. 2006. "How Cultural Tastes Shape Personal Networks." *American Sociological Review* 71:778-807.
- Vaisey, Stephen and Omar Lizardo. 2010. "Can Cultural Worldviews Influence Network Composition?" *Social Forces* 88:1595-1618.

February 12: Influence and diffusion

We now switch from personal networks to whole networks.

This week, we consider the flow of information, tastes, opinions, and practices through networks.

Childress and Friedkin examine the structure of influence relationships in book clubs and their effects on how people interpret and evaluate a novel.

Centola and Macy make an important contribution to work on network structure and diffusion. The front and back of this paper give useful reviews of big issues in this research area.

In the optional readings, Guilbert, Becker and Centola provide a very recent update on complex contagion research. It includes work on the spread of health and illness, the diffusion of innovations, the role of social media in diffusion, and the diffusion of political views and practices. This is a valuable resource for students interested in doing an essay on one of these topics. Since it is not yet published, but the authors have made it available online, I will put a PDF on Blackboard.

Gondal shows that the distribution of a bit of culture and the nature of social networks can lead to diffusion that reinforces existing inequality, undermines it, or has no effect. The literature review section of this article is worth reading. Other optional readings examine the spread of culture through stronger ties. Pachuki et al. shows that people influence the eating choices of those close to them, with different kinds of ties affecting different kinds of eating. McDermott, Fowler, and Christakis show that divorce can diffuse. There are many other recent pieces tracking the diffusion of having children, obesity, depression, suicidal thoughts, adoption of new technologies, and so on.

READINGS

- Centola, Damon and Michael Macy. 2007. "Complex Contagion and the Weakness of Long Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 113: 702-34.
- Childress, C. Clayton and Noah E. Friedkin. 2012. "Cultural Reception and Production: The Social Construction of Meaning in Book Clubs." *American Sociological Review* 77:45-68.

Optional Extra Readings

- Guilbeault, Douglas, Joshua Becker, and Damon Centola. 2018. "Complex Contagion: A Decade in Review." Pp. 3-25 in Sune Lehmann and Yong-Yeol. Ahn (eds.), *Complex Spreading Phenomena in Social Systems*. Springer, 2018.

- Gondal, Neha. 2015. "Inequality Preservation through Uneven Diffusion of Cultural Materials across Stratified Groups." *Social Forces* 93: 1109-1137.
- McDermott, Rose, James H. Fowler, and Nicholas A. Christakis. 2013. "Breaking Up is Hard to Do, Unless Everyone Else is Doing it Too: Social Network Effects on Divorce in a Longitudinal Sample." *Social Forces* 92: 491-520.
- Pachuki, Mark A., Paul F. Jacques, and Nicholas Christakis. 2011. "Social Concordance in Food Choices Among Spouses, Friends, and Siblings." *American Journal of Public Health* 101: 2170-2177.

February 19: *Reading week*, no class

February 26: Network Centrality and Culture; SECOND DRAFT OF YOUR ESSAY DUE

Bail (2012) and Wang and Soule (2012) are interesting examples of networks in which organizations, not people are the actors. Both have an important role for the centrality of an organization within its inter-organizational network and show that centrality affects culture AND culture affects centrality. Bail (2012) shows how displays of hostile attitudes can increase an organization's centrality over time. Wang and Soule (2012) show how centrality in networks of social movement organizations affects the spread of new political tactics. Both of these are rather long, so read for the key ideas and findings not for every little detail.

READINGS

- Bail, Christopher A. 2012. "The Fringe Effect: Civil Society Organizations and the Evolution of Media Discourse about Islam since the September 11th Attacks." *American Sociological Review* 77: 855-879.
- Wang, Dan J. and Sarah A. Soule. 2012. "Social Movement Organization Collaboration." *American Journal of Sociology* 117: 1674-1722.

March 5: Fields of Cultural Production

Writers, musicians and other culture producers do not work alone – they work in communities. The network structure of such communities is critical. Becker and Bourdieu are the two most important general thinkers about what such communities are like. Bottero and Crossley argue that both Becker and Bourdieu needed more attention to networks, and give two examples of networks in UK music scenes.

READINGS

- Becker, Howard S. 1974. "Art as Collective Action." *American Sociological Review* 39:767-776.
- Bottero, Wendy and Nick Crossley. 2011. "Worlds, Fields and Networks: Becker, Bourdieu and the Structures of Social Relations." *Cultural Sociology* 5:99-119.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1983. "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed." *Poetics* 12:311-356.

March 12: A Model Analysis of a Literary Field

Here we consider the overall structure of a literary field and the links between field position and culture. Anheier et al. map the social structure of a set of German writers, and

connect their work to Bourdieu's theories.

READING

Anheier, Helmut K. Jurgen Gerhards, and Frank P. Romo. 1995. "Forms of Capital and Social Structure in Cultural Fields: Examining Bourdieu's Social Topography." *American Journal of Sociology* 100:859-903.

March 19: Personal Networks within Fields

An artist's career success depends on having a good location in the field's network structure (Guiffre, Scott.). Gatekeepers in different subfields need different kinds of networks to work effectively (Foster et al.).

READINGS

Foster, Pacey, Stephen P. Borgatti, and Candace Jones. 2011. "Gatekeeper search and selection strategies: Relational and network governance in a cultural market." *Poetics* 39:247-265.

Guiffre, Katherine. 1999. "Sandpiles of Opportunity: Success in the Art World." *Social Forces* 77:815-32.

Scott, Michael. 2012. "Cultural entrepreneurs, cultural entrepreneurship: Music producers mobilising and converting Bourdieu's alternative capitals." *Poetics* 40:237-255.

March 26: Field Structures and Innovation

READING

De Vaan, Mathijs, David Stark, and Balazs Vedres. 2015. Game Changer: The Topology of Creativity." *American Journal of Sociology* 120: 1144-94.

Uzzi, Brian and Jarrett Spiro. 2005. "Collaboration and Creativity: The Small World Problem." *American Journal of Sociology* 111: 447-504 (read 447-465).

April 2: Student presentations

Students will give short summaries of their essays. This is a great opportunity for you to learn more about each other's work. To avoid any extra pressure at this busy time of the academic year, the presentations will not be graded. If you are missing any attendance or participation points, you can get some here.

EVALUATION

Forms of evaluation and their contributions to your final grade:

1) Analytic Comments, 10%

For each of 10 weeks, January 15 to March 26, read the week's readings well ahead of time. Construct at least two analytic comments on the readings. Each comment should be one

paragraph about half a page long. Submit your comments to the entire class via Quercus at least two days before the class (that is, on or before the Sunday before the class). You will receive one percentage point towards your final grade for each set of analytic comments submitted on time. Since the point of this is to prepare you for good class discussion, late submissions do not count.

Analytic comments address key issues, not picky little matters. Possible topics include key concepts (are they clear? Do they make sense in the context of the central argument of the paper? Would a different conceptualization be better?), measurement (is a key variable measured appropriately?), arguments (does the argument in a reading make sense? Does it leave out something important? Could the argument be generalized to other topics or settings?), and comparison and contrast of different arguments about the same thing.

Your first three readings include advanced examples of such questions: Erickson comments on and criticizes Bourdieu, Holt comments on and criticizes Erickson.

2) Leading discussions, 15%

Each student will help to lead off discussion in two of the weeks January 15-March 26. Students will be assigned to weeks during the first class. There will be 2-3 students leading discussion in each week, so students leading discussion for the same week should meet ahead of time to divide up their work. Students are strongly encouraged to meet with Professor Erickson to discuss their plans ahead of time.

Each discussion leading group will prepare a written set of discussion notes for the class. This will include a short (half page) summary of one important aspect of a reading or readings, some kind of analytic commentary, and questions for class discussion. Students will submit these notes to the whole class via Quercus ahead of time **IN PLACE OF** the analytic questions you all submit the Sunday before class. Discussion leaders for the week do not need to submit both analytic questions and discussion notes. Each student will make a **SHORT** presentation based on the discussion notes (5 minutes maximum) and then raise issues for discussion. Other students (the ones not involved in leading that week) should raise related questions and comments of their own. After the discussion leaders have finished, we will move on to any remaining questions and issues contributed by others.

Each group of discussion leaders will get a group grade. The instructor will rate the overall quality of the group contributions and give the same grade to each group member.

3) Class attendance, 10%

You will receive 1% towards your final grade, to a maximum of 10%, for each class which you attend.

4) Class participation, 10%

You will receive 1% towards your final grade, to a maximum of 10%, for each class in which you make contributions to class discussions. Make it easy for your instructor to keep track – before your first contribution to a class meeting, announce your name.

Your contributions to class discussion should be respectful of other students. Engage in civilized debate, working towards a common goal of deeper understanding and learning. Do not hog all the air time – everyone needs to contribute.

5) Essay proposal, 10%. Due January 29 in class.

Write a short (1-3 pages) description of the topic you would like to write on for your essay. To this, add a starting reading list of scholarly books or articles you are thinking of using. The reading list is not part of the 1-3 page limit, that is just for your text. The proposal is an important way to make sure your topic is suitable for our course, and, to get some initial feedback from me.

When thinking about possible topics, do not limit yourself to the topics in the first few weeks! There is lots of fun stuff in the second half of the course. Skim readings for topics that seem interesting to you, and if they appeal, read them more seriously and start thinking about possible related topics for your essay.

Consulting with me before you write your proposal is highly recommended.

6) Second draft of essay, 20%. Due February 26 in class.

Write a half-length version of your essay (no more than 8 pages of text). Use this opportunity to develop and/or modify the ideas in your proposal and get more feedback.

You must hand in a hard copy of your draft essay AND you must submit it to Turnitin.com, on or before February 26.

7) Essay, 25%. Due April 2 in class.

PROCEDURES

There is a strict page limit of no more than 15 pages for the essay, double spaced, with font size 12 points or larger and margins at least 1". References, figures and tables are not included in the page limit.

Please use ASA referencing style. Include a cover page with your name and student number, course information, and essay title. Please number your pages, starting with 1 for the first page of your text (not the cover page).

You must hand in a hard copy of your essay AND you must submit it to Turnitin.com, on or before April 2.

NO FAX OR E-MAIL SUBMISSIONS WILL BE ACCEPTED.

Submitting your paper to Turnitin.com: Detailed instructions will be provided. Please note the following paragraph:

"Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com web site."

Assignments not submitted through *Turnitin* will receive a grade of zero (0 %), unless a student instead provides sufficient secondary material (e.g., reading notes, outlines of the paper, rough drafts of the final draft, etc.) to establish that the paper they submit is truly their own. Students wishing to use this option must declare their intention to Professor Erickson and meet

with her to set up a schedule for submission of work in progress, at least one week before the essay proposal is due.

TOPICS

Most students will pick a course topic that interests them and pursue it in greater depth by finding more scholarly work on the topic and developing an argument based on this richer set of materials.

Students who have completed both SOC 200 (methods) and SOC 300 (multivariate statistics) may consider doing a research paper using publicly available data sets. There are two kinds of good Canadian data sets that include network data similar to that in Erickson (1996): the Canadian Federal Election studies, 2004 onwards, and the General Social Survey of Canada, 2008. These data sets include variables that can be read as forms of culture. The election studies include a variety of questions about politics. The GSS includes questions about internet use, trust, political participation, volunteering, and religiosity. This is a challenging option, so if you are thinking about it, talk to me SOON.

DO NOT PLAGIARIZE

Be careful to avoid plagiarism. That is, do not copy words from someone else's writings and present them as your own. If you include someone else's words, use quotation marks and give proper references. It is NOT enough to just include your source in your list of references. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense with very heavy penalties (see the Academic Handbook).

See also the section on ACADEMIC INTEGRITY below.

LATE ESSAYS

If your essay proposal, second draft of the essay, or final essay is handed in late, I will deduct 10% of the maximum possible grade for *each weekday* the work is late. The maximum penalty is 100% of your grade, for papers 10 or more days late.

PERMISSION FOR LATE SUBMISSIONS OF ESSAY PROPOSALS AND ESSAYS

If you have acceptable reasons concerning things beyond your control, you may apply for permission to hand in your essay late. You must have a very good reason, and you must be able to document it.

The most common reason is ill health that makes it impossible to write the test at the scheduled time, or a period of ill health that makes it impossible to complete your essay on time. You must supply a duly completed Verification of Student Illness or Injury form (available at www.illnessverification.utoroto.ca). This form may only be completed by a physician, surgeon, nurse practitioner, dentist or clinical psychologist. NO other medical documentation will be accepted. A doctor's note is NOT sufficient. Submit the form to the instructor in a sealed envelope addressed to the instructor, in class or during the instructor's office hours. Please note that it is your responsibility to work ahead on your essay, so a minor short illness days before the due date is not an excuse for lateness.

In case of personal or family crisis, get a letter from your registrar. College registrars are very experienced, very discreet, and there to help you. A letter from your registrar should also be submitted to your instructor in a sealed envelope addressed to the instructor, during class or during the instructor's office hours.

Submit your documentation to your professor only, not the Sociology Department.

Please note that it is your responsibility to work ahead on your essay, so a minor short illness days before the due date is not an excuse for lateness.

Unacceptable reasons include: (1) "It is the end of term and I have so many tests and assignments." So does every other student! And you knew this was coming; it is your responsibility to work ahead. (2) "My family has booked me in for a vacation/my sister's wedding in a foreign country/ other trips or occasions." It is your responsibility to show up for your academic work, including lectures, tests, and handing in essays. (3) "My computer crashed." It is your responsibility to work ahead and to back up your work. (4) "I got stuck in traffic, my car broke down, etc." It is your responsibility to show up on time.

STUDENTS WHO NEED ACCOMMODATIONS

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please approach Accessibility Services at (416) 978 8060; accessibility.utoronto.ca.

Do not approach your professor about accommodations. The people at Accessibility Services have the necessary expertise, and they provide full confidentiality, so your privacy is protected.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The University of Toronto treats cases of academic misconduct very seriously. Academic integrity is a fundamental value of learning and scholarship at the University of Toronto. Participating honestly, respectfully, responsibly, and fairly in this academic community ensures that your University of Toronto degree is valued and respected as a true signifier of your individual academic achievement.

The University of Toronto's Code of Behavior on Academic Matters outlines the behaviors that constitute academic misconduct, the processes for addressing academic offences, and the penalties that may be imposed. You are expected to be familiar with the contents of this document. Potential offences include, but are not limited to:

In papers and assignments:

- Using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgment.
- Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor.
- Making up sources or facts.
- Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment (this includes working in groups on assignments that are supposed to be individual work).

On tests and exams:

- Using or possessing any unauthorized aid, including a cell phone.
- Looking at someone else's answers.

- Letting someone else look at your answers.
- Misrepresenting your identity.
- Submitting an altered test for re-grading.

Misrepresentation:

- Falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University, including (but not limited to) doctor's notes.
- Falsifying institutional documents or grades.

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following the procedures outlined in the *Code of Behavior on Academic Matters*. If you have any questions about what is or is not permitted in this course, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you have questions about appropriate research and citation methods, you are expected to seek out additional information from me or other available campus resources like the College Writing Centers, the Academic Success Centre, or the U of T Writing Website.