

**SOC 315**  
**Economic Sociology**  
WINTER 2016

**Instructor:** Dan Hirschman

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**Time and Location:** 11:40am-1:00pm MW, 1360 EH

**Office Hours:** 2:00pm-4:00pm Tu, 4209 LSA

**GSI:** Jessica Garrick

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**Office Hours:** 4:00pm-6:00pm M, 4247 LSA

## Overview & Objectives

This course explores perspectives on contemporary economic life that emphasize the role of politics, culture, history, and institutions. We will ask questions like, “Why do firms exist?”, “What is a market, really?”, and “Who decides where the state stops and the economy begins?” We will explore different ways that societies organize economic life, and what goes wrong (or right) as we come to rely more heavily on markets. The final portion of the course will examine the rise of inequality and how it connects to the changing nature of corporations, the rise of finance, and the changing labor market.

## Requirements

*Attendance & Lateness:* You are required to attend lecture and section. We will circulate a sign-in sheet before every lecture. Every unexcused absence beyond the first will affect your participation grade. Unexcused excessive lateness will be counted as an absence. Absences for religious observances are excused, as long as you notify your GSI in advance.

*Readings:* This course is an upper-level elective. As such, it carries a substantial reading load. You are expected to read all assigned material before coming to class. Lectures, discussions in section, and assignments will engage deeply with the readings.

*Respect:* There are many ways to interpret the course readings and many competing views on the topics we will discuss, and I hope we will debate many contrasting viewpoints during the course of the semester. To facilitate good discussion, please keep in mind that we are debating ideas, not each other as individuals. This type of debate might take the form of

“I disagree” instead of “you are wrong.” Please keep the difference in mind so that we can engage in useful and vigorous discussion!

*Major Assignments:* The course has three major assignments: two short (five-page) papers and an end-of-term exam. The papers are designed to give you an opportunity to demonstrate your mastery of the material taught in class; you will not be required to do significant outside reading or research to complete them. The papers will be due in lecture one week after the assignment is distributed (see dates below). The exam will take place during the final lecture of the term (Monday, April 18). It will contain a mix of question types, including multiple choice, and will cover all of the material in the course.

## Grading

Your grade has three components.

*Lecture Attendance: 10%*

Perfect attendance is worth 10% towards your final grade. For each unexcused lecture absence beyond the first, you receive 1% less towards your final grade.

*Section Attendance & Participation: 15%*

For details of section grading, see your section syllabus.

*Major Assignments: 75%*

There are three major assignments. In order to prevent a single bad paper or exam from dramatically influencing your grade, we will “half-drop” your lowest grade. In practice, this means that two of the assignments will be worth 30% each, while the last assignment will be worth 15%. So, for example, if you received 100 on both papers, and a 40 on the exam, you would receive 66% towards your final grade ( $100*30\%+100*30\%+40*15\%=66\%$ ).

*Grade Appeals*

Your papers and exam will be graded by your GSI following standards determined jointly by myself and your GSI. If you have a question about your grade, please consult one of us during office hours and we will be happy to provide a more detailed explanation and feedback to help you improve your work for future assignments or classes.

If you feel that an *error* has been made, you may appeal your grade to me within *one week* of receiving your grade. To appeal your grade, you must provide a written explanation of the error you believe has been made, and I will re-grade the assignment in consultation with your GSI. Please be advised that there is no guarantee that I will raise your grade; in fact, it is possible that I may lower it. For this reason, you should appeal a grade as a last resort when you feel *certain* that you have been graded unfairly.

## Administrative Issues

*Academic Integrity:* Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct are unacceptable. Information on the University's academic integrity policy is available [here](#). Any student who plagiarizes will fail the course and may face other sanctions imposed by the University.

*Accommodations for Learning:* If you feel that your attendance or participation in section may be affected by a disability or medical need, please let me or your GSI know within the first two weeks of class. For details on the University's policies and available resources, see the Services for Students with Disabilities [website](#).

*Email Policy:* All course emails must contain "315" in the subject line. Any email that does not contain 315 in the subject may be marked as spam and deleted. Emails marked 315 will be filtered properly. I will try to respond to email within 24 hours during the week. If you do not receive a response within 48 hours, please send a follow-up email. Emails sent on Friday or during the weekend will be answered on the following Monday or Tuesday. I expect emails to be polite and professional.

*Cell Phones and Laptops:* Turn off your cell phone and store it during lecture. If you might need to receive a call during class for some reason, put your phone on vibrate and step out quietly as needed. Similarly, please store your laptop during class. Research shows that using a laptop during class impedes both your learning *and* the learning of students around you ([Sana et al. 2013](#)). There will be pauses during each lecture where I will encourage you to check your devices. Otherwise, please refrain from using them. If for any reason you feel you need to use a laptop to take notes, please talk with me after the first class. Students misusing devices in class will be asked to leave and be counted as absent for the class.

## Required Texts

All of the readings will be available as pdfs on the course website. The list of readings is subject to change. In particular, I may assign topical short articles from newspapers, magazines, etc. to complement the more scholarly texts on the syllabus. I will give you at least one week's warning before altering or adding any required readings. We will discuss the required readings in both lecture and section. I recommend trying to read articles *before* the lecture with which they are associated, but you may find it useful to skim the articles before lecture and then read them more deeply before section on Friday. Some readings, or portions of readings, are marked as recommended.

## Course Outline

### Lecture 1: What is economy sociology? (1/6)

- Hirsch, Paul, Stuart Michaels, and Ray Friedman. 1987. “‘Dirty hands’ versus ‘clean models.’” *Theory and Society* 16(3):317-36.

### Lectures 2 & 3: Four ways to organize economic life (1/11, 1/13)

- Polanyi, Karl. 1957. “The Economy as Instituted Process.” Pp. 243-250 (required), 250-270 (recommended) in *Trade and Market in the Early Empires*.
- Polanyi, Karl. 1944. “Societies and Economic Systems.” Pp. 45-58 in *The Great Transformation*.
- Lindblom, Charles. 2001. “Market System Ascendant.” Pp. 1-15 in *The Market System*.
- Graeber, David. 2011. “A Brief Treatise on the Moral Grounds of Economic Relations.” Pp. 89-126 in *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*.

### Lecture 4: The state vs. the economy (1/20, no class on 1/18 for MLK Day)

- Lindblom, Charles. 2001. “Alternative Market Systems.” Pp. 253-264 in *The Market System*.
- Ciepley, David. 2013. “Beyond Public and Private: Toward a Political Theory of the Corporation.” *American Political Science Review* 107(1):139-58.

### Lecture 5: Where is the state? (1/25)

- Zelenak, Lawrence. 2003. “The Myth of Pretax Income.” *Michigan Law Review* 101(6):2261-74.
- Mettler, Suzanne. 2011. “Governance Unseen.” Pp. 8-30 in *The Submerged State*.

### Lecture 6: The welfare state and the market (1/27)

- Hacker, Jacob. 2006. *The Great Risk Shift*. Pp. 11-60.

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***First Paper Assignment Distributed February 1, Due February 8.***

**Lecture 7: Organizations vs. markets (2/1)**

- Simon, Herbert A. 1991. “Organizations and Markets.” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 5(2):25-29 (required), 29-44 (recommended).
- Perrow, Charles. 1991. “A society of organizations.” *Theory and Society* 20(6):725-62.

**Lecture 8: Why do firms exist? (2/3)**

- Coase, Ronald. 1937. “The Nature of the Firm.” *Economica* 4:386-405.
- Chandler, Alfred. 1977. “Introduction.” Pp. 1-12 in *The Visible Hand*.

**Lectures 9 & 10: Who do firms work for? (2/8, 2/10)**

- Friedman, Milton. 1970. “The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits.” *New York Times Magazine*.
- Stout, Lynn. 2012. *The Shareholder Value Myth*. Pp. 1-60.
- Dobbin, Frank, and Dirk Zorn. 2005. “Corporate Malfeasance and the Myth of Shareholder Value.” Pp. 179-98 in *Political Power and Social Theory*, vol. 17.

**Lecture 11: The death of the corporation? (2/15)**

- Powell, Walter W. 1990. “Neither Market nor Hierarchy: Network Forms of Organization.” *Research in Organizational Behavior* 12:295-336.
- Davis, Gerald F. 2013. “After the Corporation.” *Politics & Society* 41(2):283-308.

**Lecture 12: Who counts as an employee? (2/17)**

- Vinel, Jean-Christian. 2013. “A Man Can’t Serve Two Masters.” Pp. 1-9 in *The Employee: A Political History*.
- Greenhouse, Steven. 2015. “Uber: On the Road to Nowhere.” *The American Prospect*.
- Scheiber, Noam. 2015. “A Middle Ground Between Contract Worker and Employee.” *The New York Times*.
- Rosenblat, Alex, and Luke Stark. 2015. “Uber’s Drivers: Information Asymmetries and Control in Dynamic Work.” (recommended)

**Lectures 13 & 14: Getting a job** (2/22, 2/24)

- Granovetter, Mark. 1995. "Introduction." Pp. 3-22 in *Getting a Job*.
- Sharone, Ofer. 2007. "Constructing Unemployed Job Seekers as Professional Workers: The Depoliticizing Work-Game of Job Searching." *Qualitative Sociology* 30(4):403-16.
- Pager, Devah, Bruce Western, and Bart Bonikowski. 2009. "Discrimination in a Low-Wage Labor Market: A Field Experiment." *American Sociological Review* 74(5):777-99.
- Rivera, Lauren A. 2012. "Hiring as Cultural Matching: The Case of Elite Professional Service Firms." *American Sociological Review* 77(6):999-1022.

**Spring Break** (no class on 2/29, 3/2)**Lectures 15 & 16: Intimate economies and relational work** (3/7, 3/9)

- Zelizer, Viviana A. 2000. "The Purchase of Intimacy." *Law & Social Inquiry* 25(3):817-48.
- Mears, Ashley. 2015. "Working for Free in the VIP: Relational Work and the Production of Consent." *American Sociological Review* 80(6):1099-1122.
- Rossman, Gabriel. 2014. "Obfuscatory Relational Work and Disreputable Exchange." *Sociological Theory* 32(1):43-63.
- Almeling, Rene. 2007. "Selling Genes, Selling Gender: Egg Agencies, Sperm Banks, and the Medical Market in Genetic Material." *American Sociological Review* 72(3):319-40 (recommended).

***Second Paper Assignment Distributed March 14, Due March 21.*****Lecture 17 : The rise of finance** (3/14)

- Konczal, Mike and Nell Abernathy. 2015. *Defining Financialization*. Roosevelt Institute.
- Davis, Gerald. 2009. "From Employee and Citizen to Investor." Pp. 191-234 in *Managed by the Markets*.

**Lecture 18 : The crash of finance** (3/16)

- *Inside Job* (shown in-class).

## Lectures 19-20: Inequality in the United States (3/21, 3/23)

- Morris, Martina, and Bruce Western. 1999. "Inequality in Earnings at the Close of the Twentieth Century." *Annual Review of Sociology* 25:623-57.
- Krugman, Paul. 2002. "For Richer." *The New York Times Magazine*.
- Kim, Jerry W., Bruce Kogut, and Jae-Suk Yang. 2015. "Executive Compensation, Fat Cats, and Best Athletes." *American Sociological Review* 80(2):299-328.
- Tomaskovic-Devey, Donald, and Ken-Hou Lin. 2011. "Income Dynamics, Economic Rents, and the Financialization of the U.S. Economy." *American Sociological Review* 76(4):538-59.

## Lecture 21: Global inequality (3/28)

- Milanovic, Branko. 2013. "Global Income Inequality in Numbers: in History and Now." *Global Policy* 4(2):198-208.
- Milanovic, Branko. 2010. "Unequal Nations." Pp. 95-140 in *The Haves and the Have-Nots*.

## Lecture 22: Catch-up (3/30)

## Lectures 23-24: Democracy in the classroom (4/4, 4/6)

Topics to be determined by popular vote. Possibilities include:

- The rise and fall of unions.
- Climate change as an economic issue.
- Credit markets and credit scores.
- Regulation and lobbying.
- Housing markets, race, and the state.

## Lecture 25: Economic alternatives (4/11)

- Wright, Erik Olin. 2013. "Transforming Capitalism through Real Utopias." *American Sociological Review* 78(1):1-25.
- Frase, Peter. 2011. "Four Futures." *Jacobin*.

**Lecture 26: Exam review** (4/13)

**Lecture 27: In-class exam** (4/18)