

Economic Sociology¹
Spring 2018
SOC 229a

Department of Sociology
Brandeis University

Instructor: Michael Strand

Class Location: 122 Shiffman Center
Class Time: Mondays, 2:00-4:50pm

Office: 107 Pearlman Hall
Office Hours: Mondays, 12:30-2:00pm (drop by anytime!)

Phone: 617-301-1947

Email: mstrand@brandeis.edu (best way)

1 Course introduction; or, economic sociology reborn

Economic sociology is a (re)emerging subfield in sociology today. What does that mean? It means it once existed, it (sort of) went away, and now (for various reasons) it has returned. Indeed, so much has it returned that you are now taking a graduate seminar (good bellwether that) on economic sociology (first one ever at Brandeis). But what is economic sociology? What does this (re)emerged part of sociology look like?

One reading might be that it tries to make sociology more like economics (e.g. like how environmental sociology gives emphasis to the first word in order to influence the second word). Not true, in fact the

¹ This document serves as a general plan for the course and will likely change throughout the semester. Any changes will be announced in class and on the course website.

reverse is true (e.g. try to make economics more like sociology, sorry Friedman, Becker et al). The history of the subfield involves a disciplinary battle royale (of sorts) between sociology and economics. But what else the subfield means or could be—beyond “we’re not economists ... you’ll thank us later”—is a bit of a mystery. A big “coming soon” sign hangs over it. There are several answers.

Maybe economic sociology is “the application of the frames of reference, variables, and explanatory models of sociology to that complex of activities which is concerned with the production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of scarce goods and services.” That could be, but then what is “sociological” about frames of reference, variables and explanatory models? As we’ll see, economic sociology is pretty good at challenging the conventions of the sociological imagination.

Maybe economic sociology is “we are what policy would look like if councils of *social* advisors existed instead of councils of economic advisors.” But what would those social advisors do? Wait a tick, doesn’t the economy exist as a natural phenomenon that we need economists (and them alone) to speak for and protect us against? How would social advisors do that? Unless...

Maybe economic sociology is “a substantive understanding of empirical economies past and present.” But what is substantivist about economic sociology? How is not merely “formal”? How is the economy an instituted process and not simply there? And are you saying that economies past and present come in different forms? Surely that couldn’t be. “There is no alternative” right? Easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism?

Maybe economic sociology is the study of “capital ... a total connected process ... that produces and reproduces the capital-relation ... [and] acquires a power of expansion that permits it to augment elements of its own accumulation beyond the limits apparently fixed by its own magnitude.” What do these words mean? If they mean something, is

there more to it than that? Quick answer “capitalism” long answer “everything in between”?

Maybe (finally) economic sociology is the study of “unbounded hope and limitless despair looking toward regions of human possibilities yet unexplored,” economically speaking. What that means I couldn’t tell you. What I can tell you is that whatever it seems intellectually exciting (and somehow important too).

So [long-winded intro now over] we are not quite sure what economic sociology is or is about. We are quite sure that it has (re)emerged as a subfield in sociology, that it even has its own ASA section (hurrah!) and that you are now taking this seminar.

You are clearly more concerned with the latter, so what this seminar will try to do for you is something like the following:

2 Learning goals

- (1) Introduce you to the (re)emerging field of economic sociology
- (2) Help you further their research interests and projects
- (3) Help you develop research topics related to (or not) economic sociology and develop novel approaches/points of view on research topics seemingly unrelated to economic sociology (but secretly related to it)

3 Course requirements

- (1) Active participation and attendance (at every *seminar!*):**

² Nice definition of “seminar” provided by Richard Gale, head honcho, Carnegie Academy of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: “Many define seminars by size (between five and twenty) or configuration (a circle around a central table), by focus (the centrality of a shared text) or professorial function (facilitator or conductor). But beneath these aspects is a pedagogy wherein everyone has a voice and each person’s ideas are valued, a venue for

This means (a) coming prepared (doing “all” the reading) to every class; (b) discussing the readings in class as part of a collective discussion. This active participation expectation holds even when (i) you don’t think you understand the readings; (ii) you hate them; (iii) you are hung over; (iv) you are filled with rage at capitalism and/or at its critics and/or at the state of the world.

Keep in mind that talking (relatively coherently) in front of people about intellectual stuff is (surprise!) a requirement of academics. If you have a seriously hard time doing this I recommend either (1) talking in front of a mirror or (2) watching YouTube clips of Malcolm X for inspiration.

As part of your participation grade, and in lieu of subjecting you to discussion leading, you are *required* to submit at least **two discussion questions to me every week**. These are due by **Monday at noon**. These questions have to be related to the readings for that week, and they should be intelligently stated enough that they show some demonstrable grasp of at least some of the readings for that week. This is important (seriously). We will try to answer these questions during the seminar.

(2) Two in-class presentations

One presentation as part of four (or five) person book panel
Details TBA

One presentation on a proposed research paper / topic
Details TBA

(3) One research proposal (3-5 pages double-spaced) ... due April 23

exploring varied perspectives, an opportunity to experiment, a way to flesh-out skeletal ideas through the challenge of friendly critics. The seminar is a community working on the principle that if many hands make light work then many minds make deep meaning. Participation is vital, responsibility is shared, and ownership is produced students who take learning into their own hands and make something meaningful out it.”

Details TBA

(4) One research paper (15-20 pages double-spaced) ... due **May 8**

The gist: I want you to submit a 15-20 page (double-spaced... whew!) paper for the course. *However...* Keep in mind that the larger goal of this requirement is to help you write a paper that you intend to publish—I don't want you to look at what you submit as merely a "course paper." Publishing is an essential part of being an academic. Perhaps most indicative of this (in sociology and nearly every other field) is the fact that it is quickly becoming necessary to publish *as a graduate student* even to be considered for a tenure-track job in the discipline.

I want this class to be as *helpful for you as possible* in this (very important) regard. So, when picking a paper topic, keep in mind this long-term perspective. What you write about is up to you, and I don't have a hard requirement that it *fully* engage with the course material, but that it somehow *relate* to the course content in a way that you believe is fruitful and productive.

Having said that, the paper you submit is not meant to be a final or polished product. It will ultimately be a *draft* (even the final version you turn in, though keep in mind that it should be a *complete paper*) that, hopefully, you will continue to work on in the future

You should be prepared to spend **9 hours a week** (outside of class) on this class. The Brandeis administration wants you to know that, more than anything.

4. Grading policy

First rule of grad school: *grades don't matter*. Someone once said: "The issue of grades should not take a single metaphorical inch of cognitive space in your head." I pass this advice along to you.

However, your reputation among the faculty does matter—a *lot*. The easiest way to get a good reputation among the faculty is to do well in seminars (i.e. do the assignments, participate, at least give a *performance* of caring). Keep this formula in mind when it comes to the grading policy and your participation in this course.

What does this mean for the course requirements? The way that grading will work is if you do well on all course requirements (contribute to class, send in your reaction papers, write a good paper or good working papers) you will get an A. If, on the contrary, you take a vow of silence in class and/or do not submit reaction papers, you will not get an A, regardless of how great your paper is. It should go without saying that talking a lot in class and submitting all of your reaction papers, but not turning in a final paper or not turning in all of your working papers will not get you an A (and in this instance, you will fail the class). The point, basically, is make sure to complete all the required assignments.

For those of you who like the security of numbers, here is the grading rubric:

Assignment	Percent of Final Grade
Attendance and Participation	50%
Book Panel Presentation	
Research Paper	20%
Research Proposal/ Present	20%

The more general point to emphasize is that if you make an *effort* to be a productive member of this class, doing what is asked of you and making the most of your (and my) time over the course of the semester, you will get an A in the class (though that might not actually mean much in the larger scope of things). You should expect to spend, at barest minimum, 9 *hours of work* (reading, rereading, re-rereading, writing, puzzling) per week on this class.

Three caveats to mention about this: I know the material we deal with in this class may be intimidating for you, and that there is a lot of required

reading. I also know the first semester of grad school is extremely busy, time-consuming and often overwhelming. Finally, I don't expect you to become an expert in social theory by the end of this course. What I do expect is that you to *try* to make this class as beneficial for your future career as a sociologist as I, and others in the field (particularly the directors of graduate study who all seem to agree that classical social theory should be required of first-year graduate students) know that it can be.³

I think I've organized the course in such a way that satisfying the assignments will not only mean getting an A in the class, but it will also *not waste your time* because it will involve you doing things that you will otherwise have to do in order to become a sociologist (I presume this is what you want to be?). Your participation in this course should ultimately be viewed in terms of how it furthers *that* goal.

4 Required texts (tentative)

Pierre Bourdieu. (2005). *The Social Structures of the Economy*.

Kimberly Hoang. (2015). *Dealing in Desire*.

Natasha Schull. (2012). *Addiction by Design*.

5 Other course policies

1. Code of Academic Conduct

All students are responsible for compliance with the Brandeis Student Rights and Responsibilities circa 2017-18. You can access that here:

<http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/srcs/rightsresponsibilities/2017-18%20RR.pdf>

Academic honesty violations include cheating, forgery, bribery or threats, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating academic dishonesty.

³ Please recall the course objectives given above.

2. Academic Honesty

Let's spend a little time with this since you will be writing so much for this class... All of the work you submit for a grade must be your own. Claiming someone else's work as your own is a violation of academic honesty. Duh. We all know this. Please *do not do it*. The penalties for this (at the university level) are not good. If I suspect academic dishonesty, you will automatically fail the assignment. If it happens again, you will fail the course.

3. Laptop computers, cell phones, tablets and other tech stuff in class

You can use them. If they become a problem, you cannot use them. Simple, elegant.

4. Disability Statement

If you are a student who needs academic accommodations because of a disability, please contact me as soon as possible. We'll make any and every accommodation. If you have questions please contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in Academic Services (brodgers@brandeis.edu).

6 Course schedule

Jan 18 – What is economic sociology?

Hirschman, "Rival Views of Market Society"

Fourcade and Healy, "Moral Views of Market Society"

Smelser and Sweberg, "What is Economic Sociology?"

Jan 22 – Good markets

Coase, The Problem of Social Cost

Hayek, Use of Knowledge in Society

Friedman selections from Capitalism and Freedom

Becker, Economic Way of Looking at Behavior

Foucault, selection from Birth of Biopolitics

Jan 29 – Bad markets

Marx, Fetishism of Commodities

Polanyi, Our Obsolete Market Mentality

Barnard, History of a Tomato

Robertson, Measurement and Alienation

Somers, How Grandpa Became a Welfare Queen

Feb 5 – Capital

Levy, Accounting for Profit and the History of Capital

Malm, Origins of Fossil Capital

Arrighi, Three Hegemonies of Historical Capitalism

Block, Stop Using Capitalism

Streeck, Response to Block

Streeck, How Will Capitalism End?

Feb 12 – Governmentality

Polanyi, Speenhamland, 1795

Fligstein, Markets as Politics

Mitchell, State, Economy and the State-Effect

Dardot and Laval, Manufacturing the Neoliberal Subject

Fourcade and Healy, Classification Situations

Fraser, Can Society Be Commodities All the Way Down?

Feb 19 – No class (midterm break)

Read for next week??

Feb 26 – Book Week I: Studying a Market

Bourdieu, *Social Structures of the Economy*

Bourdieu, "Making the Economic Habitus"

Mar 5 – Debt

Streeck, Politics of Public Debt

Krippner, Democracy of Credit

Trunball, Credit Access and Social Welfare

Live, Performing Neoliberal Governmentality

Graeber, The Moral Grounds of Economic Relations

Mar 12 – Taboo

Zelizer, *Morals and Markets. The Development of Life Insurance in the United States. Selections*

Anteby, *Jurisdictional Dispute in the US Commerce in Cadavers*

Cheris, *Creating a Market in the Presence of Cultural Resistance: The Case of Life Insurance in China.*

Healy. *Last Best Gifts, selections*

Almeling, *Selling Genes, Selling Gender*

Livne, *Economies of Dying: The Moralization of Economic Scarcity in U.S. Hospice Care.*

Mar 19 – Book Week II: Desire

Hoang, *Dealing in Desire*

Salzinger, “Masculinity as a Terrain of Neoliberal Economy”

Mar 26 – Valuation

Boltanski and Thevenot, *On Justification selections*

Fourcade, *Ordinalization*

Biernacki, *Labor as an Imagined Commodity.*

Fourcade, *Cents and Sensibility: Economic Valuation and the Nature of Nature*

Mears, *Working for Free in the VIP*

Apr 2 – No class (Passover Break)

Read for next week??

Apr 9 – Book Week III: Cyborgs

Schull, *Addiction by Design*

Apr 16 – Machines

Fourcade and Healy, *Seeing like a Market*

Citron and Pasquale, *The Scored Society*

Callon, *The Embeddedness of Economies in Economics*

Burrell, *How the Machine Thinks*

Knorr-Cetina and Bruegger, *The Virtual Societies of Financial Markets*

Mason, *Post-Capitalism*

Apr 23 – Paper Proposal Presentations

What's not included (but could be)

Networks, Granovetter

Institutions, Population Ecology, Organizations Stuff ... DiMaggio and Powell

Transaction costs, firms

More on capitalism