SOC 1277: PITTSBURGH AREA STUDY

COURSE MEETS: TUES.-THURS. 4:00 – 5:15 P.M. FALL TERM 2005
ROOM: 2200 POSVAR HALL
PROFESSOR: DR. LISA D. BRUSH
OFFICE LOCATION: 2425 W.W. POSVAR HALL
OFFICE HOURS: TUESDAYS & THURSDAYS 2:00-3:00 P.M. AND BY APPOINTMENT
OFFICE PHONE: 412-648-7595
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Pittsburgh Area Study is an upper-division sociology course about Pittsburgh. This semester, it is offered as a research practicum. It is intended to provide students with hands-on experience with the sociological research endeavor. Class members will contribute to research on inequality in Pittsburgh. Over the course of the semester, you will make and report on informed decisions about data collection and analysis, analyze data, and contribute to verbal and written presentations of findings and recommendations.

LEARNING GOALS

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Contribute to conducting and presenting a significant piece of research on Pittsburgh.
- Review (gather, assess, and strategically present) theories and methods relevant to a research project.
- Articulate criteria for and make informed choices about ethical, theoretical, and methodological strategies for research and presentation.
- Formulate and explain theoretical concepts and frameworks, hypotheses, research questions, analytic strategies, and conclusions and recommendations.
- Collect and prepare data, conduct analyses, summarize empirical findings, draw conclusions, and debate recommendations.
• Contribute to and present reports on background, progress, findings, and conclusions and recommendations based on empirical research.

• Prepare and submit a portfolio of materials to document your meeting these learning goals, including a reflective cover letter that refers to portfolio materials as evidence.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

You are expected to contribute your questions and insights to the class. The culture of the class will, I hope, be a congenial one. We will develop criteria for collegial and productive contributions and measures for participation, which will contribute significantly to your final grade.

Attendance is mandatory. Over the course of the semester, you are allowed three free passes. That is, you may skip class or decline to answer when I call on you three times over the course of the semester without penalty. (Of course, if you are not present, you cannot participate; consistent presence is its own reward, sabotaged by repeated absence.) If you have more than three classes for which I have no recorded question or written assignment (either because you passed or because you were physically absent), you will lose two (2) points from your accumulated total toward your final grade for each additional absence. I do not care why you miss class or choose to pass. Being bedridden with the flu, caring for a child or friend, working mandatory overtime, missing the bus, putting time and energy into an assignment for another class, attending a wedding or bar mitzvah or funeral, or taking a mental health day to sit in the sun are all your business. I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. Use your passes wisely, especially if you are a scholar-athlete and know you will miss some classes in order to travel or compete or a parent and know you are likely to miss some classes to fulfill your familial responsibilities.

Participation will contribute 20% of your total grade. Perfect attendance without active, verbal participation will NOT earn you full participation points. If you attend faithfully but sleep through class, or virtually never contribute verbally, you will only earn partial credit for attendance and participation.

RESEARCH PROJECT

We will meet the learning goals in this course primarily by fulfilling a research consultancy contract. This will involve designing, executing, and reporting on our research, and presenting to our client our findings, conclusions, and recommendations. You will need to complete the University’s web-based training in research ethics (http://rpf.health.pitt.edu/rpf/index.cfm) as soon as possible. At
each step in the process, you will contribute to written reports, oral presentations, and presentation materials.

**Background Reports**

In this phase of the research, you will frame the research problem and process by:

- Reviewing research literature on theories and methods relevant to the research project.
- Articulating criteria for, making, and justifying informed theoretical and methodological choices.
- Formulating and explaining theoretical concepts and frameworks, hypotheses, research questions, and analytic strategies.

**Progress Reports**

In this phase of the research, you will contribute to and report on progress toward fulfilling our research consultancy contract by:

- Collecting and preparing data.
- Conducting analyses.
- Contributing to and sharing problem-solving, trouble-shooting, and other strategies.

**Findings Reports**

In this phase of the research, you will:

- Summarize empirical findings.
- Account for trends, counter-trends, and outliers.
- Assess and report on the degree to which the findings of different data analysts are consistent and reliable.
- Determine the extent to which findings match/fulfill predictions or hypotheses from the background review.
Conclusions and Recommendations Reports

In this phase of the research, you will:

- Formulate and explain conclusions.
- Debate and make recommendations based on empirical findings.
- Contribute materials to and help prepare final reports and presentations for our client.

Portfolio

In this phase of the research, you will:

- Select, revise, and submit a collection of materials constituting a portfolio of your contributions to the research project.
- Present evidence of your meeting the learning goals of the course, documented in a reflective letter that refers to materials in your portfolio.

EVALUATION

Grades for this course are based on a point system. A total of 100 points are possible. Your final grade will be based on the total points you earn out of the possible 100. You will earn points based on how well you can demonstrate, by meeting the course requirements, having learned and understood the material. Grading will be criteria-based, not norm-based, and there will be no curve. That is, if you demonstrate (through your accumulated points on the essays and participation in discussions) mastery of 90 percent or more of the material (that is, accumulate 90 or more points), you will earn an "A."

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<th>Accumulated points</th>
<th>Letter grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>90 or more</td>
<td>A</td>
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<td>87-89</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<td>80-86</td>
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<td>55-66</td>
<td>D</td>
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<td>Below 55</td>
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Attendance and participation = 20%

Background, progress, and findings reports and presentations = 3 @ 15% = 45%

Contribution to final report and presentation = 15%

Final Portfolio= 20%

Remember, after your three (3) “free” absences or passes, each time you miss class or withdraw from participation you will lose two (2) points. You can easily turn a passing grade into a failing grade by failing to attend. I can’t tell you how cranky this will make me – I dislike failing students, especially when it is so clearly avoidable.

Note: You may accumulate up to 5 bonus points for significantly contributing to the learning community. This includes consistently making exceptionally courageous or intelligent contributions to class discussions, organizing study groups, sharing strategies for enhancing participation and successful learning, and the like.

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

Because this is a research practicum, there is no schedule of required readings or presentations. We will construct our agenda as we work to fulfill our consultancy contract. During the first several weeks of the term, we will discuss substantive, theoretical, methodological, and research ethics background issues. We will work on data collection and analysis in the middle part of the term, and will spend the final portion of the semester preparing final reports and presentations.

- 30 August
- 1 September
- 6 September
- 8 September
- 13 September
- 15 September
- 20 September
- 22 September
- 27 September
- 29 September
- 4 October – Rosh Hashana. Class cancelled. A sweet and healthy 5766 and Ṭshana tovā to all.
- 6 October
• 11 October
• 13 October – Yom Kippur. Class cancelled.
• 18 October
• 20 October
• 25 October
• 27 October
• 1 November
• 3 November
• 8 November
• 10 November
• 15 November
• 17 November
• 22 November
• 24 November – Thanksgiving Holiday. Be thankful you are not a turkey.
• 29 November
• 1 December
• 6 December
• 8 December – Debrief on final presentations
• Final Portfolio due by the start of the scheduled final exam period.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Enrollment in this course makes you a member of an academic community. The University of Pittsburgh enforces expectations for the members of its academic communities. These standards are designed to ensure the integrity of your education and of the evaluation process. Read the Guidelines on Academic Integrity: Student and Faculty Obligations and Hearing Procedures with great care. The expectations of academic integrity are central to the intellectual liveliness and standards of this academic community. As a student, you have a responsibility to be honest and to respect the ethical standards of your chosen field of study. You will have violated these standards if you:

• Refer to unauthorized materials (in other words, don't cheat).
• Provide unauthorized assistance (in other words, don't help someone else cheat).
• Receive unauthorized assistance (in other words, don't cheat).
• Possess, buy, sell, copy, or use unauthorized materials (in other words, don’t buy a draft of your assignments from a “paper mill”).
• Act as or use a substitute in an evaluation setting (in other words, although you may work in pairs or small groups, don't write an assignment for someone else, or have someone write an assignment for you).
• Present as your own, for academic evaluation, the ideas or words of another person without proper acknowledgement and citation of sources (in other words, don't plagiarize).

Academic integrity is not limited to these points, but these are the most important elements. They will be enforced without fail in this course. Do your own work. Figure out what you want to say and say it in your own words. Cite your sources when you quote or paraphrase. Violate these community standards and you will flunk so fast your head will spin.

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

If you have a disability that makes it impossible for you to complete the requirements for this course in the manner specified in the syllabus, please see me with documentation from the Office of Disability Resources and Services (216 William Pitt Union; x8-7890) and we will make appropriate arrangements.