SENIOR SEMINAR
HUMAN SOCIALITY: ORIGINS, MEANINGS, EFFECTS

Why are humans so socially oriented? How did our capacity for orientation to others emerge in the course of the evolution of Homo sapiens? What are the implications of our sociality for the problems of and prospects for social organizations and human society? Are we naturally selfish or altruistic toward others? What role should an understanding of human evolution and human biology play in sociology? These are some of the questions that we will consider throughout the semester.

Class sessions will include lecture, discussion, online exploration, and writing. Because this is a capstone course, coursework and grading will focus on a final paper that develops and demonstrates your ability to write a research paper and that integrates and focuses your knowledge of sociology. Success in the class will require your active engagement and consistent effort throughout the semester!

Course goals:

1) To understand the controversy about evolution and biology in sociology;
2) To learn the dynamics of evolutionary change and biological influence in relation to social processes and possibilities;
3) To master the process of literature searching and reviewing;
4) To improve skills of argumentation and writing.

REQUIRED READINGS

Sociologist Nick Christakis’s “brilliant, beautiful, and sweeping” new book on human sociality will guide us throughout the course. We will use it as a foundation for exploration of issues in community processes, family dynamics, social connections, and cultural differences. It will also introduce us to relevant research on animals and on human genetics. Some of my articles on the controversy over evolutionary biology in sociology will introduce our discussion of the history of the discipline of sociology and a chapter by Pat Sharkey and Rob Sampson in Social Neuroscience: Brain, Mind, and Society will supplement our examination of the brain’s role in human sociality.

Other books listed in the course bibliography are on reserve in the library and provide additional resources that may be useful in class discussion and for the final paper.


**ACTIVITIES AND GRADING**

Plan to read the required chapter(s) and/or article(s) before we start each new topic on a Monday. On most Mondays I will review and extend the material in the required readings to enrich your understanding of that material and to encourage discussion about it. Wednesday classes will include more time for discussion and some Friday classes will include work related to developing your final paper. You need to participate actively throughout the course and to attend each class. Additional readings in the course bibliography will help you explore topics of interest in more depth.

Discussion in class will be extended with material that you share with the class on Blackboard. In weeks when they are assigned, statements and opinion pieces must be posted in the corresponding discussion thread in Blackboard before Friday’s class, so that we can refer to them in class discussion. Selecting bibliographic references and writing short essays during the course will help you to develop your final paper. These must be submitted by the due date in Blackboard and grades and feedback will be posted in Blackboard. You will present highlights from your work on the final paper to the class and I will give you feedback on the presentation before your final paper is due. A separate handout provides more details on the final paper.

Course grades will be computed as follows:

- Posted statements (6): 10%
- Engaged attendance (daily): 10%
- Reference posts (3-4): 10%
- 2-page papers (3-4): 30%
- Presentation: 5%
- Final paper (aprx. 15 pp.): 35%

100%
The “engaged attendance” grade will be based on the number of class sessions you attend, with an extra point each week that you contribute in class discussion. You can miss up to two classes without penalty or explanation, but any more absences will result in lost points. You can submit 3 or 4 of the 2-page papers indicated in the course outline. Your “2-page paper” grade (30% of the final grade) and your “reference posts” grade (10% of the final grade) will be based on your three highest paper grades and your three highest reference post grades, respectively. Your final paper will build on your work in one or more of the 2-page papers, but it must be focused on one research question and present a coherent answer to that question that builds on appropriate literature. You can think of the 2-page papers as explorations of different issues from which you will choose one for your final paper’s focus. If you like, you can plan a joint presentation for your final presentation with up to 3 other students (and you will then have up to 4x more time).

Throughout the course, you should feel free to speak with me and/or Elizabeth about the course material in general and about specific issues pertaining to required work. I will be available during my regularly scheduled office hours (see above) and at other times by appointment or when it is mutually convenient (as will Elizabeth, but be sure to touch bases with her first by email). You also can communicate with us by email (addresses above).

It is important to attend each session and to keep up in the coursework. I will not give a grade of "Incomplete" in other than the most extreme—and documented—circumstances, and when we have developed a plan; receiving an incomplete will hinder your progress toward your degree.

The Blackboard site for the course includes additional resources and web links.

If you have a disability that requires accommodations in order to complete course requirements, please contact the Ross Center for Disability Services (CC-UL-211) at (617) 287-7430 within the first week or two of the semester to request an accommodation plan: http://www.umb.edu/academics/vpass/disability.

Of course, academic honesty is an absolute requirement for all coursework. Your final capstone paper must be your own work and must be submitted in Blackboard through the SafeAssign system to be sure that appropriate citations have been included. See the Code of Student Conduct’s definition of academic dishonesty and description of procedures and penalties for violations: http://www.umb.edu/life_on_campus/policies/code.
COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1, INTRODUCTION: THE SOCIAL SUITE (September 4, 6)

*Course structure and process; introduction to the course theme*

Reading: Christakis, Chapter 1

Activities: Post 50-word comment on the “social suite” in BB by 9/9, 9am.

Week 2, DARWIN, EARLY SOCIOLOGY, AND EVOLUTION (September 9, 11, 13)

*Introduction to Darwinian theory of natural selection, history of evolutionary thinking in founding period of sociology.*


Schutt 2016b: [https://evolution-institute.org/commentary/developing-the-field-site-concept-for-the-study-of-cultural-evolution-a-sociologists-perspective/](https://evolution-institute.org/commentary/developing-the-field-site-concept-for-the-study-of-cultural-evolution-a-sociologists-perspective/)

Activities: Post 150-word opinion piece on biology, evolution, sociology, 9/13, noon

ADD/DROP ENDS, 9/10

Week 3, MODERN PERSPECTIVES: OPPOSING VIEWS (September 16, 18, 20)

*Current controversy between “selfish gene theory” and “multi-level selection theory” and its relevance for understanding society.*

Reading: Schutt and Turner (2019)

Activities: Post 200-word statement on a theoretical alternative by 9/20, noon

Week 4, EXPLAINING COMMUNITY SUCCESS (September 23, 25, 27)

*Evidence of “social suite’s” influence on community success*

Reading: Christakis, Chapters 2, 3

Activities: Library Session (literature searching) 9/27 (CALLI, Healey Library 3)

Week 5, ONLINE COMMUNITIES (Sep. 30, October 2, 4)

*Impact of internet on social relations.*

Reading: Christakis, Chapter 4
Activities: Post 2 sources on communities with full references, 10/2
Assignment: Submit 2 pp. paper on communities and sociality (citations, 2 references)
Due: 10/6

Week 6, ANIMALS: ATTRACTION, FRIENDS, EMOTIONS (October 7, 9, 11)

Pair bonding & social monogamy; monogamy, male and female strategies; voles & oxytocin; pets; animal friendship; societies.

Reading: Christakis, Chapter 6, 7
Activities: Post 200-word statement on animals and sociality by 10/11, noon

COLUMBUS DAY HOLIDAY (10/14)

Week 7, PARTNERS AND ATTACHMENT (October 16, 18)

Social bonds in families

Reading: Christakis, Chapter 5
Activities: Post 2 sources on attachment or social support with full references, 10/23

Week 8, FRIENDSHIP: SOCIAL SUPPORT & SOCIAL NETWORKS (October 21, 23, 25)

The importance of friendship, social support research, social networks

Reading: Christakis, Chapter 8
Assignment: Submit 2 pp. paper on social connection (citations, references)
Due: 10/27

Week 9, HUMAN SOCIALITY IN OTHER DIMENSIONS (October 28, 30, November 1)

Identity, cooperation, egalitarianism, social learning and teaching

Reading: Christakis, Chapter 9
Activities: Post 2 sources on sociality dimension with full references, 10/30
Assignment: Submit 2 pp. paper on sociality dimension, with citations, 2 references
Due: 11/3


**Week 10, GENES AND PHENOTYPES (November 4, 6, 8)**

*The “modern synthesis,” epigenetics, gene-environment interaction*

Reading: Christakis, Chapter 10

Activities: Post 200-word summary or question (with explanation) by 11/8, noon

**VETERANS DAY HOLIDAY (11/11)**

**Week 11, CULTURE AND GENE-CULTURE COEVOLUTION (November 13, 15)**

*Role of culture and the anthropological evidence*

Reading: Christakis, Chapter 11

Activities: Submit 2 pp. paper on culture and social suite, with citations, references

Due: 11/20

**Week 12, SOCIAL NEUROSCIENCE (November 18, 20, 22)**

*How the evolved human brain supports and responds to social ties.*

Reading: Sharkey and Sampson (2015)

Activities: Submit research question for final paper.

Due: 11/27

**PASS/FAIL & COURSE WITHDRAWAL DEADLINE**

**Week 13, PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE, MORALITY (November 25, 27)**

*Implications of the social suite for philosophy and morality*

Reading: Christakis, Chapter 12

Activities: Writing workshop. Submit annotated reference list of 8-10 sources for final paper.

Due: 12/6

**THANKSGIVING RECESS (11/28-12/1)**

**Week 14, STUDENT PRESENTATIONS I (December 2, 4, 6)**

**Week 15, STUDENT PRESENTATIONS II (December 9, 11, 13)**

**FINAL PAPER DUE DATE: FRIDAY, DECEMBER 20 (GRADES DUE 12/27)**
**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


*On Reserve, Healey Library.*