

SYA 4930: “Special Study” in Economic Sociology

Fall 2023

Monday, Wednesday & Friday at
10:40 – 11:30 am

Class Location:
Turlington Hall 2322

Professor Edo Navot
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Office: Turlington Hall, Room 3356
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Office hours:
Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:45 – 2:45 pm
or by appointment

INCLUDE “SYO 4930” IN SUBJECT OF ALL EMAILS

Required Readings:

Polanyi, Karl. *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of our Times*. Beacon Press, 2nd Ed., 2001.

Heilbroner, Robert. *The Worldly Philosophers: The Lives, Times And Ideas Of The Great Economic Thinkers*. Touchstone, 7th Ed. 1999.

Meiksins Wood, Ellen. *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View*. Verso, revised ed. 2016.

All other readings available on Canvas.

Course Description:

This SYA 4930 “Special Topics” class will be an introduction to economic sociology. Whereas the economics discipline narrowly focuses on matters like how markets function, the allocation of resources, and how agents respond to incentives (among other things) economic sociology tends to take a broader view by emphasizing the “social” within the economy. However, the field of economic sociology is very diverse, and we won’t be able to cover it all.

Because of the breadth of economic sociology, this course will focus on the **sociology of capitalism and economic institutions**.

There are (very roughly) three main sub-fields within economic sociology. The first is micro-level, which focuses on individuals by studying things like networks, people's performance of roles as economic agents, and how people feel about and behave in economic contexts. The second is meso-level economic sociology which focuses on the formation and governance of markets as well as organizational behavior. Third is macro-level economic sociology, which examines capitalism as a social system, studies its historical roots, and emphasizes the ways in which markets and economies are embedded within greater social relations. This course will emphasize the third (macro) perspective.

We will begin by studying the historical advent of capitalism. We then examine the subsequent evolution of capitalism in the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. Over the course of this class we will seek to answer big questions like "How can we define capitalism and how is it distinct from other types of socio-economic systems?", "How did capitalism first emerge?", "What is the role of the state within capitalism?", "How are markets shaped by, and in turn shape, different societies?", "How and why does capitalism generate inequality on the basis of income and class?" and other questions. We begin by reading classical political economy, which focuses on class relations rather than the behavior of individual economic agents. We will engage with the literature on 'racial capitalism', which critically asks how race, slavery and colonialism are related to capitalism and how they impacted its development. Finally, we will study how capitalism changed in the 20th and 21st centuries with the rise and fall of Keynesian policy, the subsequent advent of neoliberalism (which brought with it a growth of inequality and social divisions), and the financialization of the world economy.

Class format

This class will be conducted as a combination of lecture, discussion, and other in-class activities. However, this class will heavily emphasize in-class discussion and participation as we engage with sometimes challenging readings. We will talk through and help each understand and interpret readings rather than me conducting lectures *telling* you what the readings mean (I will do some lecturing). Students are expected to fully complete all readings *BEFORE CLASS* and demonstrate understanding and engagement with the class topics. Class participation is essential for successfully completing this course (and for the learning process in general). This class covers a broad array of issues in economic sociology, including economic history and readings from centuries ago that make up the foundation of contemporary social science. Some of these will be challenging and we will work through together.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

By the end of this semester, students in this course will be able to:

- Understand the historical foundations of political economy, the origins of economic and social science, and the contemporary streams of thought that flow from these origins.
- The historical advent and evolution of capitalism, in broad strokes, from the 17th to the 21st century.

- Various theories and social perspectives that explain the causes and nature of socio-economic change over the development of the world economy in the common era.
- Identify and comprehend various perspectives and milieus within economic sociology.
- Critically think about socio-economic phenomenon, critically evaluate different perspectives, and synthesize and compare various perspectives.

Policy on AI writing aids: ChatGPT, Bard, and other LLMs

Generative AI tools that utilize “Large Language Models” (LLMs) to produce coherent text output were made public last year. These tools include ChatGPT, Google’s Bard, Microsoft Bing, and others. These tools are powerful and I acknowledge that you will likely use them. Below I describe my view of LLMs as they pertain to learning and education so that you understand my perspective. I then describe things you should know about LLMs. Finally, taking everything into account, I describe the LLM/AI policy for this class.

Generative AI in Education and Learning

AI is a *tool* and, like all tools, has certain strengths and limitations, which I describe below. My primary concern with LLMs is how they will impact your ability to learn. It is very easy to lean on these tools as a crutch and allow them to do your thinking for you. The advent of pocket calculators meant that many people stopped doing simple math calculations in their heads. The advent of GPS-aided navigation meant that people stopped memorizing maps and roads. Our brains welcome most opportunities to offload and outsource tough cognitive tasks and we very quickly become *reliant* on tools, reducing our brains’ capacity to do certain tasks. In many cases, this is a bit of a shame but also not the end of the world; it’s part of life and the human condition.

The most important goal in this class is to teach you to think critically. The study of inequality is inherently political and requires you to judge different perspectives. Almost all of these perspectives have some ideology; some are not made in good faith. Learning to think critically takes a long time, requires exposure to many facts and multiples views on a single subject. The writing process is also an essential part of the learnings process, and the process of learning to think critically. (That’s why most of the class assignments are written essays, not tests.)

My view of LLMs is that if you use them to do ALL your writing and thinking you are robbing yourself of opportunities to build an enormously important life skill. I also think its possible to use LLMs in a thoughtful and conscientious way so that you are still learning to think critically. I will encourage you all to think about *how* you use LLMs. Whatever decision you make, I want it to be a conscientious and intentional decision, based on your own personal goals, ethics, and perspective.

Strengths and Limitations of LLMs

LLMs can produce text output on an enormous variety of topics. The tool can help you find sources, give you helpful summaries on topics and theories. They can shorten the research cycle and help you discover new sources or perspectives.

However, LLMs can be overly confident while making mistakes and provides inaccurate information. The output produced by LLMs is probabilistically generated, not guaranteed to be correct. Recent changes in LLMs have also made it more difficult to get citations. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, LLMs have been programmed to emphasize neutrality, presenting multiple sides of an argument as balanced, even when a preponderance of evidence supports certain positions. LLM's can't synthesize perspectives, will be unlikely to take a position on a debate, and can't produce new ideas.

Class Policy on AI/LLMs

I expect that many of you will utilize an LLM when composing written assignments for this class. I strongly encourage you to use LLMs to spark your writing or help your research but NOT to actually produce the written material you hand in. First, you are responsible for the accuracy of your writing. If ChatGPT or another LLM produces incorrect information and you hand it in, you are responsible. Check what LLMs say, don't assume it is true or accurate.

I will be checking your assignments against software created to detect text written by LLMs.

Course assignments, requirements and grading

Students will be evaluated on the basis of class participation, in-class quizzes on the readings, and two research essays.

Class participation & attendance (25% of overall grade)

There are three components to class participation; you will be evaluated on each component separately.

1. Actual attendance of class (10%). Showing up is important and for this component, that's all you have to do! Physical presence in the classroom is necessary for success and a requirement of the university. If there are specific challenges for you in this regard, please see me immediately after the first class.
2. In-class participation (15%). In addition to attending class, you are expected to actively participate in class discussions. If this will pose a significant challenge or hardship for you, please discuss it with me immediately after the first class.

In-class quizzes (20% of overall grade)

In-class quizzes will be conducted towards the end of the class session and test you on the readings and in-class discussion. Quizzes will be constructed in such a ways that, if you have done the readings, they will be easy. The main purpose of the quizzes to give you a strong graded incentive to complete the readings, not to challenge your test-taking abilities. I will not announce quizzes in advance and I will not announce *how many* quizzes will be given over the course of the semester.

Mid-term essay (20% of overall grade)

Your midterm essay topic will be provided to you and will draw from the readings in the first half of the semester. The essay will be 8-10 pages long, double-spaced, Times New Roman size 12 font, 1-inch margins – but I'll live with it if you fudge a *little tiny bit*). Additional details and deadlines will be provided in class and on Canvas.

Final research essay (35% of overall grade)

Your final research essay will be on a topic of your choosing and will have multiple components. First, you will hand in a topic proposal, which I will give you feedback on. You will then hand in a proposed reference list. Finally, your research essay will be due at the end of the semester. All of these components will add up to 35% of your final grade.

The research paper will take the style of an academic research paper, with citations and references at the end. (Once again, standard formatting.) The research paper will have some flexibility in length to allow you room to explore the topic of your choice but should be between 10-20 pages in total. A longer paper is not necessarily a better paper. The general guideline for the final research paper is that it must engage with at least some of the materials or topics we touch upon in class but also build upon them, digging deeper and using new reference materials not covered in class.

We will discuss the final research paper extensively in class. Additional details and deadlines will be provided in class and on Canvas.

Grading Rubrics: How you will be evaluated

Successful mid-term and final papers will do two main things: First, you should demonstrate comprehension of the relevant materials, their main arguments and perspectives. Being able to clearly and concisely summarize the arguments of others is an important skill and you will be evaluated on your ability to demonstrate this skill.

Second, critical engagement with the literature. This is an opportunity to voice your perspective on a topic. What are the strengths and weaknesses of different arguments and perspectives we reviewed? Which author or perspective on the relevant topic is incorrect, how and why are they incorrect? Which authors/perspectives do you appreciate or agree with and *why*? When evaluating this portion of your essays, I will be looking for demonstration of critical engagement, thoughtful discussion, and ability to synthesize complex issues clearly.

In all your written contributions to this class, you will be evaluated on 1. Demonstration of understanding the material by clearly and concisely being able to summarize it in your own words, 2. Demonstration of thoughtful engagement and evaluation of the material as shown by informed, critical views of the material, 3. Ability to synthesize disparate perspectives and topics, to bring them into discussion with each other, and 4. offer your own perspective as informed by facts and backed up with explanations of WHY you argue what you argue and on what basis you take your position.

Due dates for all assignments will be posted on Canvas.

Office Hours

Office hours are your chance to speak to me individually and I strongly encourage you to take advantage of my office hours. If your schedule does not permit you to visit my office during the scheduled hours for this class, we can set another time for individual discussion. To ask for an appointment outside office hours, please email me!

Accommodation for students with disabilities

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Attendance

Class attendance is required. Please be aware of the [university attendance policy](#) (link).

In response to COVID-19, the following recommendations are in place to maintain your learning environment, to enhance the safety of our in-classroom interactions, and to further the health and safety of ourselves, our neighbors, and our loved ones.

- If you are not vaccinated, get vaccinated. Vaccines are readily available and have been demonstrated to be safe and effective against the COVID-19 virus. Visit one.ufl.edu for screening / testing and vaccination opportunities.
- If you are sick, stay home. Please call your primary care provider if you are ill and need immediate care or the UF Student Health Care Center at 352-392-1161 to be evaluated.
- As with any excused absence, you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up missed work.

Grading

The University of Florida has a set system of grading and which grades corresponding to the number of points you have (i.e. percentages of 100). Please familiarize yourself with the [University grading policy](#).

Academic Ethics

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [Click here to read the Conduct Code](#). If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor of this class.

Recording Class

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040.

Campus Resources

Health and Wellness

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit [U Matter, We Care website](#) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

Counseling and Wellness Center: [Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website](#) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or [visit the Student Health Care Center website](#).

University Police Department: [Visit UF Police Department website](#) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; [Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website](#).

GatorWell Health Promotion Services: For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the [GatorWell website](#) or call 352-273-4450.

Academic Resources

E-learning technical support: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at 352-392-4357 or

via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

Career Connections Center: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.

Library Support: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.

Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

Student Complaints On-Campus: [Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information](#).

On-Line Students Complaints: [View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process](#).