

Wednesday, September 6, 2006
LECTURE 1 OUTLINE: INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

1. STUDYING AMERICAN SOCIETY

2. THREE OVERARCHING QUESTIONS:

- What *kind* of society is this?
- How does it really *work*?
- In what ways does it *need changing* and how can those changes be brought about?

3. THE VALUES AND PERSPECTIVE BEHIND THE COURSE

3.1 Three core values

- *Economic efficiency*
- *Fairness*
- *Democracy*

3.2 Four Kinds of Disagreements

1. people disagree about precisely what is meant by each of these values.
2. people disagree in their assessment about the actual performance of our institutions.
3. people disagree about the relative priority of different value
4. people disagree about how much things could really be improved.

3.3 My views about realization of these values in contemporary America

4. THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY ABOUT AMERICAN SOCIETY

4.1 Pivotal Idea: *rules govern action*

The myriad of actions in which we as conscious, choosing persons engage are *governed by rules* but, unlike the rules of nature which govern the motions of the planets, these are rules which are changed by the actions they regulate. Our activities are rule-governed, but also our activities produce and transform the rules that govern the activities.

4.2 Six Basic Sociological Ideas about Social Rules

1. Rules are enforced
2. Rules come in many diverse forms
3. Rules are not neutral – they benefit some people and harm others
4. Rules are backed by power
5. Rules are often inconsistent
6. Rules change over time