

Sociology 543 Collective Behavior

Spring 2010

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Lectures: TR 9:30a.m.-10:45a.m.
1313 Sterling
Office Hours: TR. 10:45a.m.-12:00p.m.
and by appointment

Overview

This course examines how various forms of collective behavior (e.g., fads, panics, riots, and social movements) emerge from interaction of individuals. We approach this question using theoretical and analytic tools developed in diverse fields of social science, including sociology (social movements, organizational behavior, social networks), economics (game theory), and political science (voting behavior, civic engagement). In particular, this course relies heavily on the insights from network analysis to explain the emergence of collective behavior. Network analysis, which has developed rapidly in recent decades, takes seriously the proposition that behaviors of individual units or actors are to be understood in social context, and tries to depict that context with some specificity. Recently network analysis has been applied to a wide range of phenomenon from power failure to the spread of obesity. While the main objective of the course is to help you to form an understanding of how collective behaviors arise, we also try to introduce basic concepts and some analytic tools of network analysis.

Format

Classes consist of my lectures and discussions about the issues raised in the reading assignments. I will come to each meeting with a prepared presentation on each week's material to use as a point of departure. *I encourage questions, commentary, and discussion at all times*, and will invite such at the beginning of each session—as well in the course of my presentation. In addition, we will spend at least a part of Thursday's session for discussion that will relate course readings to themes covered in the lectures. The goal is for participants to leave room with a good sense of the content of the body of literature covered during that week, as well as some appreciation for open issues that surround it.

Readings

Students are required to read about 50 to 100 pages (sometimes more than 100 pages) per week. Some readings are noted as 'optional' but I strongly advise you to read them as well because we will use them in our class discussion. And you may often find them more interesting than the required readings. If you are unable or unwilling to do this much reading consistently, you should drop the course now. Please read each week's assignment before Tuesday's class. All

book chapters and journal articles are available online at the *learn@uw* course website. There is no required textbook for this class.

Requirements

Attendance (10%) & quality of contribution to class discussions (5%)

- I expect you will do the assigned readings, attend class, and actively participate in class discussion.
- Discussion participation will be evaluated “qualitatively” by the instructor.

Six reading responses. (30%)

- These are brief (2-4 pages, double-spaced) essays that both summarize assigned readings and provide comments, questions, analysis, and criticisms in response to them. They are designed to insure that you not only complete the reading but reflect on how themes from the texts related to themes in the lectures. Your written reactions will, in return, serve as the basis for our class discussions. You can choose any six weeks but week 1, 8, 11, 16. Your responses will be graded on a “+,” “✓,” “-” system. “+” will be given for exceptionally thoughtful responses. “-” will be given for poor or incomplete assignments. If you miss a week or turn in an exceptionally poor assignment, you will receive a “0.” Reading responses are due on Tuesday in class.

Exams (35%)

- There will be one in-class exam (15%) and one take-home essay exam (20%). The in-class exam will take place on March 11. The take-home exam will be distributed on May 6 and due at 5pm on May 7.

A short paper analyzing a collective behavior episode (20%)

- Before the spring recess, you need to turn in a newspaper or magazine article that focuses on some type of recent collective behavior activity. While I am not picky over the length of the article, the article must have enough information to allow you to analyze it. A short blurb will not be very effective. Alternatively you can submit a short description of a collective behavior event you personally observed or participated.
- Later in the semester, you will write a short paper (5-10 pages, double spaced) that analyzes the episode. In your paper, you will try to explain why the episode happened, using the conceptual and analytic tools we have discussed in the class. In the final week of the semester you will present your findings. The paper itself is due on May 6th in class.
- You may work together in teams on this assignment. Teams may not be larger than four people.

Comments

Submission of work. Please submit paper copies of all your written assignments. I do not accept written assignments in electronic format.

Special Needs Arrangement:

To make special arrangements for testing, assignments, or other aspects of the course you must qualify for disability services through the McBurney Center. Their website has detailed instructions on how to qualify: <http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu/>. Please notify me within the first 2 weeks of class if you have or anticipate having authorization from the Center and we will be happy to make the necessary arrangement.

Academic Honesty:

As with all courses at the University of Wisconsin, you are expected to follow the University's rules and regulations pertaining to academic honesty and integrity. Students are expected to know and follow the standards outlined by the Offices of the Dean of Students. See their website (<http://www.wisc.edu/students/conduct/uws14.htm>) for a complete description of behaviors that violate the University's standards as well the disciplinary penalties and procedures.

Department Notice:

The Department of Sociology regularly conducts student evaluations of all professors and teaching assistant near the end of the semester. Students have more immediate comments, complaints, or concerns about the course should report them to me or to the Chair, or else to Professor Ivan Ermakoff, Associate Chair, 8116a Social Science (ermakoff@ssc.wisc.edu) or to Professor Doug Maynard, Chair, 8101 Social Science (maynard@ssc.wisc.edu).

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

NOTE: The schedule below may change. All announcements regarding schedule changes will be emailed to you or announced in lecture. You are responsible for keeping up to date on these changes.

Part I. Backgrounds

Week 1. Introduction (1/19&1/21)

Course logistics

What do we study? What is collective behavior?

“Classical models” of collective behavior

Readings:

No reading for week 1

Week 2 The logic of collective action and how do we save the earth? (1/26&1/28)

Is collective action irrational?

But why does collective action do happen?

Readings:

Olson, The Logic of Collective Action, Chapter 1

Chong, Collective Action and the Civil Rights Movement, p1-7

Levitt & Dubner, Super-Freakonomics Chapter 5 (optional)

Kolbert, Hosed (optional)

Week 3 The Art of strategy: a crash course on game theory (2/2&2/4)

What is ‘game’?

What are the assumptions the game theory makes?

Is the game theory useful to understand collective behavior? Why or why not?

Readings:

Dixit and Nalebuff, The Art of Strategy, Chapter 3 and 4

Christakis and Fowler, Connected, p210-232 (optional)

Week 4 Everything is connected: a crash course on network analysis (2/9&2/11)

What are networks?

What are the basic components of social networks?

Why and how are networks useful for studying collective behavior?

Readings:

Watts, Six Degrees Chapter 1-2

Christakis and Fowler, Connected, Chapter 1 (optional)

Part 2. Micro-motives and Macro-behaviors

Week 5 We are all little bit of racists? (2/16&2/18)

Is crowd/herd behavior really irrational?

How does individual behavior aggregate to collective behavior?

How (and when) is individual behavior influenced by what others do?

Readings:

Granovetter, Threshold Models of Collective Behavior

Schelling, Sorting and Mixing: Race and Sex

Week 6 How do the rich get richer? (2/23&2/25)

How do some songs/movies/books become a hit?

Why do we still use QWERTY keyboard and drive gasoline car?

How (and when) is individual behavior influenced by what others do?

Readings:

Salganik, Dodds, and Watts, Experimental Study of Inequality and Unpredictability in an Artificial Cultural Market

Salganik and Watts, Leading the Herd Astray

Arthur, Increasing Returns and the New Worlds of Business

Week 7 Spreading germs and (maybe) happiness?: Networks and Epidemics (3/2&3/4)

How does an epidemic happen?

How does a disease spread out on social networks?

Is everything (e.g., acne and headache) contagious?

Readings:

Laumann and Youm, Racial/Ethnic group differences in the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases in the United States: A Network Explanation.

Bearman et al., Chains of Affection: The structure of Adolescent Romantic and Sexual Networks

Christakis and Fowler, The Spread of Obesity in a Large Social Network Over 32 Years

Week 8 Review and Exam (3/9&3/11)

The first exam on 3/11

Part 3. Networks and Social Influence

Week 9 That's what friends are for: Mechanisms of Interpersonal Influence (3/16&3/18)

How and why do our social ties influence our behaviors, attitudes, and decisions?

What are the different bases of social influence?

Readings:

Festinger, A Theory of Social Comparison Processes

Bearman and Bruckner, Promising the Future: Virginity Pledges and First Intercourse

Burt, Contagion and Innovation (p1287-1294 & p1326-1328)

Week 10 My kidney? Well, since you asked... (3/23&3/25)

Why do people protest, vote, and donate organs?

Are people more likely to do these things when somebody asks them?

Reading:

Oliver & Marwell, Mobilizing Technologies for Collective Action

Kieran Healy, Altruism as an Organizational Problem: The Case of Organ Procurement

Christakis and Fowler, Politically Connected

Week 11 Spring Recess (3/30&4/1)

Week 12 Social Capital and making of a good citizen (4/6&4/8)

What is social capital?

What does social capital do?

Is social capital in decline in the US?

Readings:

Coleman, Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital

Putnam, Social Capital and Institutional Success

Putnam, Turning in, Turning out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America

Part 3. Networks, Habits, Emotion, and Collective Behavior

Week 13 V for Vendetta: Networks, Status, and Violence (4/13&4/15)

Why do violent group conflicts occur?

Why are we more likely to kill our friends than strangers?

Readings:

Gould, Collision of Wills, Chapter 3 and 4

Week 14 Habits of Heart: Three Reasons Why Organizations All Look Alike (4/20&4/22)

When do we act purposively and when do we act out of habit?

Why are all organizations look alike (or do they)?

Readings:

Simon, Administrative Behavior (Chapter 4)

DiMaggio and Powell, Iron Cage Revisited

Week 15 Sentimental Citizens: Emotions and Collective Action (4/27&4/29)

Is emotion important to understand collective action?

Readings:

Goodwin and Jasper, The Return of the Repressed: The Fall and Rise of Emotions in Social Movement Theory

Marcus, The Sentimental Citizen in Democratic Politics, Chapter 4 and 5

Drew Western, The Political Brain, Chapter 7 (optional)

Week 16 Student presentation (5/4&5/6)