Sociology 652

Economic Sociology and Economic Institutions

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This course is intended to serve as an introduction to sociological analyses of the economy, economic processes, and economic institutions. The central focus is to understand how economic activities are shaped, facilitated, altered, and impeded by social relations and social institutions. The course is divided into three parts. The first focuses on the general notion of the “social embeddedness” of economic activity. The concept of embeddedness originated with Polanyi and came to the forefront of modern economic sociology through the work of Granovetter. It implicitly or explicitly permeates much of the work in this area that has been done over the last twenty years. The basic aim of the readings in this section is to begin to get an idea of the different meanings of embeddedness in order to understand how economic processes are shaped and constituted by social relations. The second part of the course deals with firms, networks, and industrial regions. These can be seen both as specific forms of “embedded” economic relationships and as “alternatives” to more atomized (and perhaps fictitious) market relations. The third part of the course focuses more explicitly on the concepts and types of economic institutions. Here, we examine how different types of economic institutions (state, law, labor markets) shape and constitute economic behavior. We also begin to consider variations across societies in the organization of economic institutions and activities, and the ways in which these forms of organization may facilitate distinctive economic capacities and possibilities.

Course Readings

Course readings can be downloaded from the course website. If any students are interested in purchasing a course packet containing the readings, I will have the Social Science Copy Center (6th floor or William Sewell Hall, aka Social Science Building) create one on demand only. (This means it will take 24 to 48 hours for them to make you a copy. You will probably have to pay in advance. Please note that I will ask whether anybody wants to purchase a hard copy during the first class meeting. Only if I ascertain that this is the case will I leave a copy with the Social Science Copy Center.)

How to download course readings from web page:
Type the following link into your browser:

https://mywebspace.wisc.edu/xythoswfs/webui/_xy-4880603_1

Click on the folder for the week that you want to download readings for. (Please note that the folders contain both undergraduate and graduate readings for the week.)

Click on file name to download reading.

Please note that the title shown on the syllabus differs from the official course title in the catalog. We are in the process of rethinking and restructuring our offerings in economic sociology. Since the focus of this course is no longer strictly on economic institutions, I have altered the title on the syllabus. This has absolutely no implications for your ability to get course credit if you've already taken Sociology 651 or any other course in the sociology department!
**Course Requirements**
Please note that this course is open to both undergraduate and graduate students. Requirements vary depending on whether you are an undergrad or a graduate student.

A. Attendance and Participation
All students must attend class and participate. This will be 10% of your grade, regardless of whether you are an undergrad or graduate. The course will be run primarily as a lecture. I hope to set up an additional discussion section for graduate students that will meet once a week in addition to scheduled course times.

B. Readings
All students must do the core readings before the class meets. On average, this is from 50-100 pages per week for undergraduates. I know that some of the readings will be difficult. Don't let this worry you too much, as they should become clearer in lecture.

For many (but not all) weeks, graduate students will have additional reading to do. Graduate student reading averages more like 125-150 pages per week. Such is the life of an intellectual (and/or the ideological portion of the ruling class, if you prefer Marx’s categorizations to mine.)

C. Written Requirements

**Undergraduates**
There will be three written take-home assignments. These are somewhere between a take-home exam and a paper assignment. Each assignment has two questions that you must answer (or a choice of two out of three questions). The dates that the papers will be handed out and/or due are noted on the syllabus. The papers will average about 10 pages in length (5 pages per question). Each constitutes 30% of your grade.

**Graduate students**
In terms of official requirements, you too will have three 10 page paper assignments each worth 30% of your grade. However, the assignments are much less structured, with you essentially choosing what you will write about. The exact nature of the papers is up to you, but they should not be summaries of the readings. Rather, they should take critical issue with (some portion of) the readings, develop ideas, and engage the arguments/authors we are covering. To steal a sentence from Erik Wright’s 621 syllabus, the paper “can be written as if it were designed to be a published ‘commentary’ in a journal, or a book review, or a substantive essay in its own right dealing with the issues in the reading.”

Note, however, that if you have other ideas for what you would like to do as a written assignment, I am flexible. The goal of the course is to introduce you to and get you interested in economic sociology. If you have specific things you want to achieve or that would be more useful to you as assignments – a paper for qualifying exams, a research proposal, etc. – we can discuss ways to make these part or all of the official writing assignment.
I. Economic and Sociological Views of the Economy –Themes and Concepts

Week of September 5-7: The Neoclassical View of the Economy

Additional recommended (not required) reading for graduate students:

Week of September 12-14: Social Embeddedness and Social Capital

Additional Required Reading for Graduate Students

Week of September 19-21: Culture, Meaning, and the Moral Dimension of Economic Activity

Week of September 26-28: Getting a Job: Labor Markets, Embeddedness, and Institutions
Week of October 3-5: Negative Consequences of Embeddedness and Culture: Getting a Job II


Roberto Fernandez and M. Lourdes Sosa. 2005. “Gendering the Job: Networks and Recruitment at a Call Center.” American Journal of Sociology, 111: 859-904. (44 pp.)


FIRST PAPER ASSIGNMENT, HANDED OUT 10/5; DUE 10/12
II. Firms, Networks, and Regions

Week of October 10-12: The Modern (Anglo-American) Corporation

Additional Required Reading for Graduate Students

Week of October 17-19: Economic Theories of the Firm

Additional Required/Suggested Reading for Graduate Students

Week of October 24-26: Network Forms of Organization

Highly recommended:

Additional Required Reading for Graduate Students
Week of October 31-November 2: Flexible Specialization and Industrial Districts


Bennett Harrison. 1994. Chapters 1 & 4, Lean and Mean: The Changing Landscape of Corporate Power in the Age of Flexibility. New York: Basic, pp. 3-34 & 75-105. (60 pp., but very fast reading)

Additional Required Reading for Graduate Students


Week of November 7-9: Networks, Power, and Status


Joel M. Podolny. “Networks as the Pipes and Prisms of the Market.” American Journal of Sociology. 107,1:33-60. (26 pp.)

Additional Required Reading for Graduate Students


SECOND PAPER ASSIGNMENT HANDED OUT 11/9; DUE 11/16

III. Economic Institutions, the State, and Business Systems

Week of November 14-16: Conceptualizing Economic Institutions


November 21: The Role of the State, I


Week of November 28-30: The Role of the State, II

Neil Fligstein. *The Transformation of Corporate Control.*
<chapter on antitrust.>

**Additional Required Reading for Graduate Students**

Week of December 5-7: Institutions and Comparative Business Systems
Or Campbell and Lindberg???

Week of December 12-14: An Example: Owners and Workers in the U.S. and Germany
Readings TBA

FINAL PAPER ASSIGNMENT HANDED OUT 12/12; DUE FRIDAY 12/19