

\*\*Draft syllabus—subject to change!

**Sociology 504: Public Sociology**



**Spring 2012**

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Office hours: Wednesday 2-4pm and by appointment

This is a hybrid course that will both entail *reflecting* upon the idea of “public sociology” and *producing* public sociological work. In the analytical component, we will explore such questions as: what is the sociological audience? What is the relationship between academia and public intellectual life? How do styles of writing/public address determine our relationship to different publics? We will read work by M. Burawoy, B. Agger, and B. Ehrenreich, among others. The workshop component of the course will involve participating in the production of *Contexts*, the ASA’s magazine/journal charged with disseminating translating sociological work to broader publics. (The magazine is now housed at Rutgers and at Seattle University.) Students in this course will learn about the production of the magazine from the inside, and actually participate in writing, editing, image selection, and other tasks. The course will: 1) deepen students’ substantive expertise in cutting-edge sociological scholarship; 2) guide them in developing writing skills that address academic and non-academic audiences; 3) engage in critical and constructive discussion of the field of sociology; and 4) provide an inside view of the journal reviewing and editorial decision-making process. And they may even get their work published!

**Required books:**

Dan Clawson, Robert Zussman, et al, eds., *Public Sociology* (California 2007)

Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed* (Holt 2002)

**Requirements:**

Do the reading, participate in discussion, and contribute to assorted tasks entailed in producing *Contexts*, and turn in:

- 1) an “in brief” piece for *Contexts* and one of the following:
- 2) a podcast for *Contexts.org* (working in groups)
- 3) an op-ed essay for a newspaper or a blog entry

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**January 18. Introduction to Course**

**January 25. Introducing *Contexts***

Come to class having thoroughly examined 2-3 back issues of *Contexts* (available in Sociology Dept library), and having familiarized yourself with the website (contexts.org). Be prepared to discuss such questions as: 1) the different components of *Contexts*; 2) the differences between *Contexts* and a typical academic journal in terms of audience, format, writing style, etc; 3) What you think works best about the publication, and what you think needs improvement; and 4) preliminary ideas about what you would most like to contribute to *Contexts*. We'll talk about the nuts-and-bolts process of constructing *Contexts*, and how you might contribute to it.

### **February 1. The Public Sociology Debate**

Read Michael Burawoy, "For Public Sociology" in Clawson, et. al.

We'll discuss what's at stake in the public sociology debate, what different varieties of public sociology look like, and how *Contexts* fits into all of that.

Workshop: Read proofs of "In Brief" section forthcoming in Spring 2012 issue (Sakai); think about a topic you might like to write about. We will discuss the kinds of "In Brief" pieces we might be able to contribute to future issues of *Contexts*, and spend time brainstorming possible ideas.

### **February 8. Did Professionalization Kill the Public Sociologist?**

Read Todd Gitlin, "How Our Crowd Got Lonely" (Sakai)

Ben Agger, "Beginning Science," from B. Agger, *Public Sociology* (Sakai)

Arlene Stein, "Discipline and Publish" (Sakai) --recommended

Workshop: How does an idea become an article? Read "Author Submission Guidelines" (Contexts.org). We will brainstorm article ideas and possible authors for future issues. We'll also read correspondence from authors proposing feature articles, and editorial responses, and consider the process of "greenlighting" articles. We'll check in re: "In Brief" ideas.

### **February 15. Sociology as Narrative; Narrative Sociology**

Read: John Shelton Reed, "On Narrative and Sociology" (Sakai)

Selected *Contexts* feature articles (Sakai)

Workshop: What makes an effective feature article? We will read article reviews and discuss the review process at *Contexts*. You will get to review an article yourself. First draft of your "In Brief" is due.

### **February 22. The Uneasy Relationship of Sociology and Journalism**

Read: Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed* (excerpts); "A Journalist's Plea" (in Clawson et al)

Workshop: We'll listen to a podcast, discuss how they're constructed, and brainstorm possible podcasts you'd like to create. Second drafts of "In Brief" pieces are due.

\*\* February 23-26. 2012 Annual Meeting, Eastern Sociological Society, NYC. (Millennium Broadway Hotel). I'm organizing a session on public sociology (date/time TBA) that I hope everyone can attend.

### **February 29. Books and the Public Sphere**

Read: Herbert Gans, "Best Sellers by Sociologists: An Exploratory Study" (sakai)  
Peter Dreier, "How Michael Harrington and Rachel Carson Changed the World" (sakai)

Workshop: What happens after feature articles are accepted for publication? Read "Self-editing and formatting" (Contexts.org). We'll also talk about writing blogs and op-eds. On the latter, check out <http://www.theopedproject.org/> and read some *New York Times* op-eds before class.

### **March 7. Genres of Narrative Sociology: Ethnography**

Read: Herbert Gans, "Public Ethnography: Ethnography as Public Sociology" (Sakai)  
Arlene Stein, *Stranger Next Door*, excerpt

Workshop: We'll discuss the relationship between words and images, and how images can illuminate sociological understanding. Take a look at the photo essays, as well as photos and graphics in the last issue of Contexts. We'll also do some proofreading in class, and other things.

\*\*Spring Recess

### **March 21.**

#### **Reflection: Activist Public Sociology: Does Sociology have a place in/near Social Movements?**

Patricia Hill Collins, "Doing the Sociology that Had No Name," in Clawson et al  
Frances Fox Piven, "From Public Sociology to Politicized Sociologist," in Clawson et al

Workshop: You'll help put the final touches on the next issue of Contexts, do more proofreading, and other fun stuff. We may listen to your podcasts in progress and read your op-eds/blogs in progress.

### **March 28. Policy-Oriented Public Sociology**

Read: Arthur Stinchcombe, "Speaking Truth to the Public, and Indirectly to Power," in Clawson et al  
Douglass Massey, "The Strength of Weak Politics," in Clawson, et al.

Workshop: TBA

### **April 4. Blogs, Social Media and Other New Technologies**

Reading TBA

Workshop: TBA

**April 11. Are New Technologies a Threat to Scholarly Authority?**

Read: Kathleen Fitzpatrick, "Peer-to-Peer Review and the Future of Scholarly Authority" (sakai)

Workshop TBA.

**April 18. The Public Sociology Debate, Reconsidered**

Reading TBA

Workshop TBA

**April 25. Conclusion**