RURAL SOCIOLOGY 5500
SOCIAL CHANGE AND DIFFUSION OF INNOVATIONS
Fall Semester 2015 (3 credits)

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Office Hours:  Thursdays 4:00-7:00 PM and by appointment

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COURSE OBJECTIVES
Why do some social groups adopt innovations such as new technologies, ideas, and behaviors more rapidly than others? What are the impacts of innovations for different social groups in the U.S. as well as globally? How can innovations better tailored to promote people’s well-being and development across communities and nations? This course addresses these questions by studying innovation-diffusion as form of social change.

The primary objectives of the course are:
1. To examine innovation diffusion as a specific type of social change. You will become acquainted with the social, economic, and cultural processes involved in the dissemination of new ideas and technology. Focus is particularly on social changes related to rural populations and communities, agriculture, and the environment, in the U.S. as well as in global development settings. We also address innovation-diffusion broadly across society.

2. To begin, continue, and develop your own substantive interests on the topics of: innovation diffusion; social change-development; and social, economic, and environmental impacts. The course should benefit upper-level undergraduates and graduate students whose professional careers/fields of study span the previous topics. Graduate students who are interested in thesis or dissertation work will find the class particularly useful as the assigned term paper can be adapted to your thesis/dissertation research in your field.

3. To understand the major conceptual approaches to studying innovation diffusion. Much of the innovation diffusion literature centers on top-down models of social change, whereby an organization (e.g. government entity or corporation) introduces an innovation to a recipient audience. We will discuss two, classic major top-down models: the traditional, adoption-diffusion model that focuses on the adopter-side; and the alternative approach which emphasizes the propagator-side or provider of the innovation. You will also become acquainted with more recent, less "top-down" approaches including those that focus on how mass populations (people and communities at large) and specific social groups including farmers and other nonscientists actively contribute to the development and the diffusion of new technologies/other innovations.
4. To understand the relationship between innovation-diffusion as a change process and how it compares to other social change or “development” processes. You will become familiar with the major sociological theories and concepts that have been applied to the study of social change. Sociologists define “social change” as transformations in social structure (society) or patterns of relationships involving statuses, roles, groups, and institutions.

5. To critically examine the impacts of diffusion of innovations/technology transfer and implications of traditional, "top-down" strategies of introducing change. Included are issues such as social class and gender differentials in the dissemination of ideas and technology, non-adoption as a form of behavior, social (group) and economic constraints on adoption behavior, and the consequences of new technology at the individual, community, and societal levels. We will also examine the strategies by which social groups including the poor, farmers, indigenous people, and women may be empowered to enact their own changes. We will compare "bottom-up" strategies of producing innovations and social change relative to traditional "top-down" strategies.

REQUIRED BOOKS AND OTHER READINGS

Course Texts: (all books are available at the OSU book stores; a copy of each of the books is also on reserve at the Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences Library (now temporarily located on the third floor of Howlett Hall). For information call 292-6125.

3) All other readings are available for you to download electronically. Most of these readings will be uploaded for you on Carmen through the OSU’s electronic reserve. If for some reason you do not find the article uploaded for you on Carmen, you can download each of these readings via the OSU library’s on-line journal system.

Trouble-Shooting: If you have problems downloading the journals from the OSU library, please call them at 292-6125 and ask them to guide you. If you have any problems downloading material from the electronic reserve material on Carmen, please call e-reserves at 292-6448 and ask them to guide you.

CLASS FORMAT, ASSIGNMENTS, AND GRADING
RS5500 is a combination of lecture and class discussion. At the beginning, to orient you toward the material, much of the class is lecture. The focus each week will be on the assigned readings, outlined below. We will also have guest lectures. Students may take the course for undergraduate credit or graduate credit, with different expectations. Exam questions and the term paper assignment are tailored differently to graduate and undergraduate students. Additional readings for graduate students are noted in the syllabus.
Written Assignments:

Two exams:
*For students taking the class for undergraduate credit:* (1) an in-class exam given October 21; This exam will be mainly multiple choice (2) the second is a take-home *exam due to me on Monday December 14*. The second exam will be given to you on December 9 (our last day of class). This is an essay exam that will consist of several essay questions from which you will choose two questions.

For *graduate students*, both of the above exams will be take-home. Both are essay exams that will consist of three to four questions, from which you will choose two questions. (1) *Your first exam is due October 21* and you will receive it on October 14. (2) *The second is due to me on Monday December 14*. The second exam will be given to you on December 9 (our last day of class).

**Research abstract and research paper:** *An abstract for your research paper is due September 30 with the completed research paper due November 18*. For the research paper, undergraduate students will be asked to choose an innovation and to answer a set of questions about it. Graduate students are also asked to choose an innovation, preferably one related to their thesis or dissertation and to write a paper on this topic. Prior to beginning the research project, the student will produce a one-page abstract and give a short (three-minute) class presentation about the innovation chosen—on September 30. Based upon this, I will provide my comments to help you to decide if the innovation is appropriate for use as an example for the final paper.

Class Performance Requirements:

You can earn a large part of your grade based upon your performance in class. This requires that you are able to demonstrate that you have read the assigned material in advance and that you are fully prepared to contribute to the class discussion. Quality is more important than quantity in what you have to say. As part of your class contribution, you will have short in class assignments where you work with other students to demonstrate your ability to apply your knowledge in this class.

Grading criteria for what you earn from class participation are the following: (1) High quality class participation reflects thoughtful consideration of the required readings and course assignments, clearly demonstrating your knowledge, questions, and concerns about the topics introduced each week. *In class discussion, it is important to reference the readings.* (2) High quality class participation reflects in-class assignment performance that provides excellent coverage of the points outlined in the assignment instructions. (3) High quality class participation reflects consistency in participation, which also means that you are present each class as well as the entire time for each class—and that you are devoting full-attention to the class. (4) High quality class participation means that you have fully prepared for class with the assignments and fully engage in the learning experience. Your class-preparation will be assessed with periodic in-class quizzes that will be given on the week’s reading material that you should have read prior to coming to class. You will earn credit from these quizzes that counts as part of your class participation grade.
Your input to class discussion is very important. You are expected to attend all class sessions. Please do not come to class late or leave early, as this disrupts the learning experience for other students. This course is based on in-class discussion and it includes group activities. Some participation points will come from in-class assignments. The only way to earn these points is to actually be present in class. If you need to miss a class due to illness, please provide a written, physician's note so that your grade will not be affected. Please know that it is your responsibility to secure any missed material and notes from another student in the case you are ill.

Please be respectful of others and the work we will accomplish together this term. Texting, web-surfing, and chatting during the class are disrespectful: they disrupt the learning experience for other students. They also signal a student’s failure to participate in the class. For these reasons, please turn off all cell phones and other electronic devices. This means no texting and no looking at your smart phone or laptop. If we see you using any of these things, be prepared to have points deducted from your class participation. Please just use a pen and paper for taking notes.

The grade you earn for the course is based on the following contributions (1000 points total):

- Abstract (for paper) 50
- First exam 300
- Second exam 200
- Final paper 250
- Class performance/ quizzes 200 (includes 5 quizzes @ 20 points each)

Total points 1000

Grading scale: A 940 and above; A- 900-939; B+ 870-899; B 840-869; B- 800-839; C+770-799; C 740-769; C- 700-739; D+ 670-699.

Academic Integrity (Academic Misconduct):
Academic integrity is essential to maintaining an environment that fosters excellence in teaching, research, and other educational and scholarly activities. Thus, The Ohio State University and the Committee on Academic Misconduct (COAM) expect that all students have read and understand the University’s Code of Student Conduct, and that all students will complete all academic and scholarly assignments with fairness and honesty. Students must recognize that failure to follow the rules and guidelines established in the University’s Code of Student Conduct and this syllabus may constitute “Academic Misconduct.”

The Ohio State University’s Code of Student Conduct (Section 3335-23-04) defines academic misconduct as: “Any activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the University, or subvert the educational process.” Examples of academic misconduct include (but are not limited to) plagiarism, collusion (unauthorized collaboration), copying the work of another student, and possession of unauthorized materials during an examination. Ignorance of the University’s Code of Student Conduct is never considered an “excuse” for academic misconduct, so I recommend that you review the Code of Student Conduct and, specifically, the sections dealing with academic misconduct. If I suspect that a student has committed academic misconduct in this course, I am obligated by University Rules to report my suspicions to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. If COAM determines that you have violated
the University’s Code of Student Conduct (i.e., committed academic misconduct), the sanctions for the misconduct could include a failing grade in this course and suspension or dismissal from the University.

If you have any questions about the above policy or what constitutes academic misconduct in this course, please contact me. Other sources of information on academic misconduct (integrity) to which you can refer include: The Committee on Academic Misconduct web pages (oaa.osu.edu/coam/home.html) Ten Suggestions for Preserving Academic Integrity (oaa.osu.edu/coam/ten-suggestions.html) Eight Cardinal Rules of Academic Integrity (www.northwestern.edu/uacc/8cards.html)

Disability Statement:
Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Please contact the Office for Disability Services at 614-292-3307 in room 150 Pomerene Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS
PART I: THE STUDY OF SOCIAL CHANGE

WEEK 1 (August 26)
Introduction to the Course: Welcome to RS5500!
Grading, administrative procedures, assignments, and selecting a topic for your course papers.

WEEK 2 (September 2)
Social Change, U.S. Society, and the Adoption-Diffusion Model as a Type of Change
1) Readings from, Harper and Leicht: Chapter 1, By Way of Introduction; Chapter 2, The Causes and Patterns of Change; Chapter 4, American Social Trends; Chapter 5, Change in the Settings of Everyday Life; Chapter 6, Economics, Politics, and the American Prospect.


WEEK 3 (September 9)
Sociological Concepts and Theories: Illustrating Social Change

1) Readings from Harper and Leicht, Chapter 3, Social Theory and Social Change.


WEEK 4 (September 16)
1) The McDonaldization of Society 8th edition (2015) by Ritzer, Chapter 1 (An Introduction); Chapter 2 (The past, present and future of McDonaldization); Chapter 4
WEEK 5 (September 23) NO CLASS
ASSIGNMENT: Develop your course paper, select your innovation and develop your abstract. Be ready to present your abstract next class

PART II: INNOVATION-DIFFUSION RESEARCH: TWO CLASSICAL MODELS OF STUDYING “TOP-DOWN” PROCESSES OF DIFFUSION

WEEK 6 (September 30)
Diffusion of Innovations from the "Adopter-side" Model

DUE SEPTEMBER 30: ABSTRACT FOR YOUR RESEARCH PAPER & THREE MINUTE PRESENTATION.

WEEK 7 (October 7)
Diffusion of Innovations from the “Provider-side” Model


WEEK 8 (October 14) Extending the Two Models
1) Harper and Leicht, Chapter 10, Technology, Innovations and Networks


GRADUATE STUDENTS’ TAKE-HOME MIDTERM QUESTIONS GIVEN OCT. 14
WEEK 9 (October 21)
UNDERGRADUATE MIDTERM—IN CLASS
GRADUATE STUDENTS’ TAKE-HOME MIDTERM DUE

PART III. SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF “TOP-DOWN” INNOVATION-DIFFUSION

WEEK 10 (October 28)
Consequences of Innovation Diffusion: Issues of Social and Economic Inequality
1) Brown, Chapter 8, The Development Perspective II, pp. 229-277 Available: OSU library electronic reserve via Carmen, titled: Brown, Development Perspective II

2) Rogers, Chapter 11, pp. 405-442 Available: OSU library electronic reserve via Carmen, titled: Rogers, Consequences of Innovations


PART IV. MOVING RESEARCH FORWARD: QUESTIONING AND ELABORATING INNOVATION-DIFFUSION MODELS

WEEK 11 (November 4)


WEEK 12 (November 11) NO CLASS – VETERAN’S DAY
PART V. DEVELOPMENT IN THE GLOBAL SYSTEM AND BOTTOM-UP SOCIAL CHANGE FROM BELOW

WEEK 13 (November 18)
Globalization, Development, and the Environment


COURSE PAPER DUE NOVEMBER 18

WEEK 14 (November 25) NO CLASS—HAPPY THANKSGIVING BREAK

WEEK 15 (December 2)
Technology, the Poor, and Gender in Developing Nations


WEEK 15 (December 9)
"Bottom-Up" Approaches to Social Change: Participatory Approaches and Diffusion across Communities


SECOND EXAM ----this is a take-home exam with two essay questions for you to complete. It will be given to you December 9 and due Monday December 14.

HAVE A GREAT HOLIDAY BREAK!!!

ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF REFERENCE THAT MAY BE OF INTEREST TO YOU!

DIFFERENT APPLICATIONS OF INNOVATION-DIFFUSION MODELS
See particularly journals such as:
Rural Sociology
Agriculture and Human Values
Technology and Society
American Behavioral Scientist, Volume 53 Issue # 9 2010 is an entire issue devoted to rural/urban differences in technology.


Sautter, Tippett, and Morgan. 2010 “The Social Demography of Internet Dating.” Social Science Quarterly 91 (2)


SOCIAL IMPACTS OF TECHNOLOGY
See particularly journals such as:
*Science, Technology and Human Values*
*Rural Sociology*
*Agriculture and Human Values*
*Sociologia Ruralis*

For rural urban differences, see the series of articles in the *American Behavioral Scientist* 2010, Volume 53 (9).


