Rural Sociology 7600  
Theories and Concepts in Rural Sociology  
Fall 2015 Syllabus

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Course Description

Rural sociology is a broad sub-field of sociology which is informed theoretically and methodologically by the broader discipline. This course examines the distinct substantive foci of rural sociology, including agriculture, environment, social inequalities, globalization/international development, community, and demographic processes—and the conceptual perspectives that have been applied to understand these substantive topics. In addition, the course addresses broader sociological questions about uneven regional development, the role of space in social theory, and the social construction of "rurality."

We will focus on classical and contemporary “big-picture questions” that rural sociologists address—and also examine how these might be carried-down to more empirically-oriented work.

The course has a seminar format and is directed toward students with a strong social science background. It is centered upon class discussion, critique of the readings, and your involvement in research assignments related to the course topic. We will also have rural sociology faculty members visit the course to discuss the exciting range of research topics they study!

Course Objectives

Student completing this class should gain the following knowledge and skills:

1. Understand the major research areas in contemporary rural sociology, with their conceptual literatures and empirical traditions.

2. Gain a general background in key substantive focus areas of rural sociology, particularly agriculture, the environment, demographic change, social inequalities, and development/globalization.

3. Gain the opportunity to pursue your independent research related to thesis, dissertation work, and other scholarly interests, including working on your own articles for presentations and publications.

4. Acquire an understanding of rural sociology as an overall field. Students will gain a “sociology of knowledge” understanding of rural sociology, which situates the sub-field of rural sociology into the broader discipline of sociology and other social sciences—and also traces the development of the body of literature in rural sociology historically.
5. Be able to demonstrate how rurality introduces a spatial contingency to theory and social science generalization. That is, students should understand how and why trends and relationships involving social life found in the urban U.S. (the main focus of “modern” sociology) may not hold in other sociospatial settings.

6. Gain expanded analytical skills necessary for advanced work in the social sciences. We will discuss how sociologists apply theory and concepts to various topics and how they interpret research results. The class should also help you to sharpen critical thinking, as you engage in critiquing the theoretical and methodological approaches presented in the readings.

**Course Requirements and Grading**

This course has three sets of written requirements in regard to grading: (A) a short review of literature on a rural sociological topic to be selected by the student—this review can be used to develop your term paper (literature review due date October 5); (B) a term paper on a topic that is mutually agreeable (due date, the last day of class, December 7) (C) three critical essay papers involving questions about the readings (I will provide these questions to you a week earlier in advance). In addition, each student will participate in an assignment that involves leading discussion of readings for one class period.

The grade you earn is determined in the following way. The literature review and the term paper count 10% and 30%, respectively, toward your final grade. Each critical essay paper counts 10%. An evaluation of your class discussion performance and other class participation will count the remaining 30%. Criteria regarding class participation will be: (1) that your class participation reflects thoughtful consideration of the required readings, clearly demonstrating your knowledge, questions, and concerns about the topics introduced in the readings for each week; (2) that your discussion assignment is well-prepared and that your individual contribution is clear and high quality; (3) that you are consistent in class participation, which also means that you are fully present for each class in addition to being a conscientious participant. Arriving late/leaving early disrupts on-going class discussion—and hurts a seminar climate where everyone is counted upon to contribute and to be “on the same page” in terms of material discussed. Please turn off and store all cell phones. I suggest that you do not use laptops—use pen and paper for taking notes. Texting, checking email, and chatting destroy the learning environment for other students.

**Required Readings**

Books:


Articles:
*Available electronically.* Noted under each reading, is how you can download each of these readings: directly on-line via Carmen or (if not posted on Carmen) via the OSU Library electronic journal system.
List of Topics and Required Readings

Week 1 (August 31) Overview of course.
Grading and Administrative Procedures. Begin discussion of class topics, focusing on Rural Sociology’s relationship to other social sciences and the discipline of sociology.

Week 2 (September 7) No Class – Labor Day--- a break for workers!

Situating Rural Sociology with Regard to: the Broader Discipline of Sociology, Sociological Theory, and the University Institutional Setting
This section addresses how rural sociology developed historically as a distinct sub-field in sociology and its link with related fields. It also addresses how rural sociology is practiced in institutional settings and the contribution that OSU rural sociologists have made to the field.

Week 3 (September 14) Surveying the Field


Week 4 (September 21) NO CLASS
Assignment: Develop the literature review for your course paper

Week 5 (September 28) Connections with Classical Sociological Theory and Public/Policy Sociology


Week 6 (October 5) Contemporary Research in Rural Sociology: Some OSU examples

Guest speakers, rural sociology faculty, Professors Jeff Sharp (6:00pm), Kerry Ard (6:45), Kristi Lekies (7:15) and Cathy Rakowski (7:45pm) will discuss their research. Readings will be provided beforehand for the class.

**LITERATURE REVIEW DUE OCTOBER 5**

Week 7 (October 12) Population Patterns and Urban - Rural Differences and Patterns of Change

This section addresses major economic, social, and demographic changes relevant to understanding U.S. rural society, including a comparison with past history. It covers the “rural demography” tradition.

Articles in Bailey et al. Rural America in a Globalizing World (2014): Brown (pp.299-310); Johnson (chapter 16); Cromartie and Parker (chapter 17); Crowley and Ebert (Chapter 21).


Week 8 (October 19) Agrarian Change and Land Dispossession under Capitalist Development

This section addresses the fate of farm populations in the course of development and from a historical comparative perspective. It covers the classical “sociology of agriculture” tradition.


Week 9 (October 26) The Contemporary Food System
This section addresses modern food system and questions about production/consumption in agriculture.

Articles in Bailey et al. Rural America in a Globalizing World (2014): Bonanno (pp.3-15); Sharp and Deemer (chapter 7); Hinrichs and Eshlemann (chapter 8).


Week 10 (November 2) Environment and Natural Resources
This section addresses the relationship between the environment and development and provides an overview of the rural sociological literature on environmental sociology.


**Week 11 (November 9) Inequality in Rural Society: Class, Gender, and Ethnicity**  
*This section examines the contours of stratification in the rural U.S. including covering the “rural poverty” tradition.*  


Articles in Bailey et al. *Rural America in a Globalizing World* (2014), Sachs (pp.421-443) Green (Chapter 22), Wulfhorst et al. (Chapter 23), and Struthers (Chapter 25).

**Week 12 (November 16) Rural Development and Spatial Inequality**  
*This section addresses uneven development, place-stratification, and policy response strategies to rural disadvantage such as economic development policy and educational upgrading. This literature is part of the new “sociology of development” specialty area which has a new section in the American Sociological Association.*


Articles in Bailey et al. *Rural America in a Globalizing World* (2014), Lobao (pp.543-555) Slack (Chapter 29), Dickies and Robinson (Chapter 30), and Flora and Flora (Chapter 31).


**Week 13 (November 23) Community**  
*This section address the rural community research tradition.*

Salamon, *Newcomers to Old Towns* (Chapters 1-6 and 8-9)


**Week 14 (November 30) Development and Globalization.** *While articles have addressed other nations throughout this course, this section specifically addresses research applied to international development/globalization and social change.*


**Week 15 (December 7) Continuing Challenges for the Profession**


**COURSE TERM PAPER DUE WEEK 15, December 7**