

SOC/AAS XXXX Sociological Perspectives on the City
University of Minnesota Fall 2026
Meeting time/location: Tuesdays/Thursdays 2:00–3:15 PM

Instructor: Matthew Aguilar-Champeau
Email: matthewaguilarchampeau@gmail.com
Office: 1146 Social Science
Office Hours: Tuesday 12:45–1:45 PM (and by appointment)

Teaching Assistant: TBA
Email: TBA
Office Hours: TBA (held online)

Course Description: This course introduces classic and contemporary urban sociology while inviting you to study Minneapolis and nearby regions as living laboratories. We move from the “foundations” (Simmel, Wirth; Park & Burgess) through political economy and critical geography (Harvey, Logan & Molotch, Smith, Zukin), to globalization and networks (Friedmann, Sassen, Wellman), and then to cultural infrastructures and digital platforms that now mediate urban life. Along the way, you will conduct an urban walk, a short city report, and a collaborative social-mapping project that pairs qualitative fieldwork with public-facing visualization.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

1. Explain and compare core paradigms in urban sociology (Chicago School ecology; political economy; global/relational approaches) and apply them to cases.
2. Analyze how capital, policy, and the built environment produce socio-spatial inequalities (segregation, gentrification, displacement) and possibilities (publics, subcultures).
3. Use qualitative methods (observation, fieldnotes, interviewing) and basic social-mapping to investigate urban phenomena ethically.
4. Communicate sociological findings in multiple modes (short memos, maps, presentations) for both academic and public audiences.

The Principle of Charity:

“In philosophy and rhetoric, the **principle of charity** requires interpreting a speaker’s statements to be rational and, in the case of any argument, considering its best, strongest possible interpretation. In its narrowest sense, the goal of this methodological principle is to avoid attributing irrationality, logical fallacies or falsehoods to the others’ statements, when a coherent, rational interpretation of the statements is available.”

Text(s):

Readings will be available on Canvas in PDF format and should be completed by class time on Tuesday.

Grade Distribution:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| Participation and Attendance | 15% |
| Three Reading Reflection Memos | 15% |
| Urban Walk: Fieldnotes and Reflection | 15% |
| City Report | 15% |
| Social Mapping Project | 35% |
| End-of-term Reflective Letter | 5% |

Major Assignments (details):

Participation and Attendance (15%): Talking in class and having conversations about topics is important to make class time worth it and to show you're paying attention. So try your best to be engaged in classroom discussions when we have them, and in small-group discussions as well. To do this, you will need to have read the material for the given day. The readings on this course have been specifically chosen for their clarity and quality.

Three Reading Reflection Memos (15%): Due Weeks 3, 7, and 11. Synthesize a core reading and pose a non-trivial question about the works.

Urban Walk: Fieldnotes and Reflection (15%): Walking audit of the Minneapolis campus (Week 4). Submit fieldnotes and a 2–3 page analytic memo connecting observations to course concepts.

City Report (15%): A 1000–1200 word report on one city (U.S. or global) analyzing development, governance, and inequality using at least two theories of development. Lightning share with the class will occur on Week 7.

Social Mapping Project (35%): Public-facing investigation of an urban micro-public (e.g., a street, block venue, or route) pairing qualitative fieldwork with a small digital/analog map. The pieces of this assignment include:

- Week 6: Proposal (5%)
- Week 8: Annotated bibliography (5%)
- Week 11: Draft map and methods memo (8%)
- Week 13: Field map and 6–8 page analytic brief (12%)
- Week 14: Peer evaluation of teamwork (5%)

End-of-term Reflective Letter (5%): A 600–800 word self-assessment of your learning with evidence from your work.

Letter Grade Distribution:

| | | | |
|---------------|----|---------------|----|
| ≥ 93.00 | A | 73.00 - 76.99 | C |
| 90.00 - 92.99 | A- | 70.00 - 72.99 | C- |
| 87.00 - 89.99 | B+ | 67.00 - 69.99 | D+ |
| 83.00 - 86.99 | B | 63.00 - 66.99 | D |
| 80.00 - 82.99 | B- | 60.00 - 62.99 | D- |
| 77.00 - 79.99 | C+ | ≤ 59.99 | F |

Course Policies:

- **Submissions:** All assignments must be uploaded to Canvas in PDF format. Use standard formatting: double-spaced, Times New Roman 12-point font.
- **File Naming:** Please name files using the convention: `lastname_assignmentname.pdf`.
- **Late Policy:** Late work will be accepted with a 10% grade dock for each day it is late, up to 3 days.

Course Outline:

| Week | Content |
|---------|--|
| Week 01 | Defining Urban Sociology (09/08–09/10) Wirth, “Urbanism as a Way of Life”; Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life” |
| Week 02 | Human Ecology (09/15–09/17) Park, “Human Ecology”; Burgess, “The Growth of the City” |
| Week 03 | Urban Ethnography (09/22–09/24) Whyte, “Street Corner”; Gans, “Urban Villagers” <i>Due: Reading Memo #1</i> |
| Week 04 | Urban Walk (09/29–10/01) Jacobs, “The Uses of Neighborhoods”; Wellman and Leighton, “Networks, Neighborhoods, and Communities” |
| Week 05 | Political Economy (10/06–10/08) Harvey, “The Urban Process Under Capitalism”; Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins” |
| Week 06 | Political Economy II (10/13–10/15) Molotch, “The City as a Growth Machine”; Merrifield, “Metromarxism” <i>Due: Project Proposal</i> |
| Week 07 | Segregation, Race, Inequality (10/20–10/22) Massey and Denton, “American Apartheid”; Wacquant and Wilson, “The Cost of Racial and Class Exclusion in the Inner City”; Du Bois, “The Philadelphia Negro” <i>Due: City Report Lightning Share (in class); Reading Memo #2</i> |
| Week 08 | Gentrification/Displacement (10/27–10/29) Smith, “Gentrification, the Frontier, and the Restructuring of Urban Space” <i>Due: Project Annotated Bibliography</i> |
| Week 09 | Globalization (11/03–11/05) Friedmann, “The World City Hypothesis”; Sassen, “Whose City Is It?” |
| Week 10 | Platformed City (11/10–11/12) Wellman, “Networks in the Global Village”; Dijck, “The Platform Society” |
| Week 11 | Public Space and Policing (11/17–11/19) Anderson, “The Cosmopolitan Canopy”; Wacquant, “Urban Outcasts” <i>Due: Project Draft Map and Methods Memo</i> |
| Week 12 | Urban Culture, Subcultures (11/24–11/26) Zukin, “The Culture of Cities”; Thornton, “Club Cultures” <i>Due: Reading Memo #3</i> No class Thursday (Thanksgiving) |
| Week 13 | Sustainability (12/01–12/03) Orfield, “American Metropolitics”; Calthorpe, “The Regional City”; Campbell, “Green Cities, Growing Cities, Just Cities?” <i>Due: Project Final Map and Analytic Brief</i> |
| Week 14 | Presentations and Synthesis (12/08–12/10) <i>Due: In-class Presentations; Peer Evaluation</i> |
| Week 15 | Finals Week (No meeting) <i>Due: End-of-term Reflective Letter</i> |