

Sociology 571
Seminar in Rural and Environmental Change
(3 credits)
Spring 2088

M 6:10-9:00 p.m.
SS 330

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Office Hours:

1:15 – 2:45 p.m. M,W

or by appointment

Course Objectives

Across all societies, people understand that there is something socially unique about being “rural” that is directly connected to the environment. How does environmental change occur and how is it directly linked to rural restructuring? How do rural people not only respond to but also initiate change or “develop”? How can we, as sociologists, participate in this process as both scientists and citizens?

This course seeks to provide you with the analytical tools for understanding rural and environmental change and the role of participatory action research methods in contributing to rural governance. The course is based on two assumptions. The first is that almost every aspect of life in rural society, including the Rocky Mountain region, is influenced by globalization and climate change and the challenges to rural policy makers and rural citizens are significant. The second is that rural places and environmental resources remain unique, important, complex, and dynamic.

The first objective of this course is to provide you with an overview of rural restructuring and new factors shaping changes in rural policy and rural governance. The second objective is to provide you with an understanding of participatory research methods or “action research.”. Finally, the third objective of this course is to provide you with a local action research experience in rural and environmental change to further your understanding and allow you to apply what you learn in this course in actual practice.

Course Focus

The course focuses on contemporary rural and environmental change in “developed” countries with an emphasis on the Rocky Mountain region. The justification for this focus is twofold: a) many other graduate courses on campus address social change in the context of the developing world and b) the field experience in the region will be more meaningful in a comparative but common sociopolitical context. This focus on rural people in developed nations will not preclude review and discussion of change processes experienced by less developed regions since, in general, rural policy-making and governance is a systematic effort directed towards strengthening social institutions and processes, identifying issues, and building the social capacities that can solve rural and environmental problems.

Within this focus on developed nations, the course also distinguishes rurality in terms of community, region, and nation. Despite the importance of community as a social phenomenon and a topic of sociological inquiry, the study of community is characterized by uncertainties and

disagreements about the key attributes that define “the community”, the contexts in which community relationships emerge, and the relationships between community processes and broader forces of social change. Similarly, rurality is traditionally defined as the absence of urbanization, and the limitations of these definitions and the implications for rural studies often pose policy challenges, especially at the regional and national levels.

Course Organization and Class Activities

This course is offered as a graduate seminar. Most of us think of a graduate seminar in terms of size (between five and twenty students), configuration (a circle around a central table), focus (the centrality of shared texts) or professorial function (director, guide, facilitator or conductor). However, a stimulating graduate seminar goes beyond these features by providing a deeper discussion. It becomes a venue in which everyone contributes new knowledge, has a voice, and each person's ideas are valued-- a venue for exploring different perspectives, an opportunity to experiment, and a way to flesh-out skeletal ideas through the challenge of friendly and supportive critics. To create such a seminar, willing participation in reading, speaking, and listening is vital. Responsibility for having read and reflected is shared. Hopefully, we will all contribute to create such a seminar. To that end, the following are the course requirements:

Course Requirements

Readings

The attached course schedule specifies reading assignments that are to be completed prior to each class meeting. Many of the course readings are derived from the following texts available in the U.C. Bookstore:

- OECD Rural Policy Reviews: *The New Rural Paradigm: Policies and Governance*. 2006. OECD Publishing.
- Reason, Peter and Bradbury, Hilary (Eds.). 2001. *Handbook of Action Research*. Sage Publication.
- Other readings found and selected by seminar participants.

Course Grade

Your final course grade will be based on my *qualitative* assessment of the following course requirements:

1. ***Course Participation and Critiques***. Each student needs to participate in class discussions. You should plan to be active contributors to class discussion by making observations about the readings, presenting questions based on the readings, critiquing the readings, and engaging others with ideas from the readings. You should also be prepared to respond to questions, ideas, and critiques.
2. ***Student Led Seminar Discussion***. You will also contribute to class by assuming responsibility for leading discussion on part of each week's reading. We will collectively assign responsibility for each week's (as relevant) readings to individual students. You will then each lead discussion on part of the week's reading assignment. This includes searching

and reading new material on the part of the reading to which you've been assigned and introducing the new material to the class as part of your student led discussion. This is not a formal Powerpoint style presentation, but rather shared facilitation on the readings for the week. In addition, each of you will be responsible for the entire week's reading as part of seminar discussion (see Course Participation and Critiques).

Field Action Research Experience. Each of you will identify a non-profit group/organization focused on some aspect of rural and environmental change based here in Missoula and approach that group about a seminar action research project. You will work with members of this group in identifying a project in which you can work *with* them (versus for them or about them) throughout the semester. Each week we will collectively discuss our weekly experiences with the group with whom we are working. These discussions will become increasingly more systematic in terms of chosen groundings, selected practices, other exemplars, and acquired skills. We will also relate our action research to the broad changes in rural life and rural governance introduced at the beginning of the course.

No predetermined number of hours is required for your field action research but you should plan on considerable, out-of-class time in working with the local group (given their mutual interest and consent in your participation with them).

Research Poster. Your final seminar product will be a professional poster that you could, or actually will, present at a conference based on your action research experience. The final class period will be devoted to your discussing your poster as you would at an actual poster session at a conference. Posters will cost approximately \$40 to \$50 if produced through the SSRL and may be subsidized by the department if you choose to "donate" your poster for display.

Course Outline and Assigned Readings

All readings should be completed by the day for which they are assigned. **Each week will also include reports and discussion of each student's action research project.**

Soc 571

| Mon | Tue | Weds | Thu | Fri |
|--|------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| <i>Week 1</i> 21 Jan | 22 Jan | 23 Jan | 24 Jan | 25 Jan |
| Martin Luther King Holiday: No Class | | | | |
| <i>Week 2</i> 28 Jan | 29 Jan | 30 Jan | 31 Jan | 1 Feb |
| Introduction to the Course and Organization: Subsequent Course Discussion Leader Assignments (Volunteer) | | | | |
| <i>Week 3</i> 4 Feb | 5 Feb | 6 Feb | 7 Feb | 8 Feb |
| <i>The New Rural Paradigm: Student-Led Discussion</i> | | | | |
| <i>Week 4</i> 11 Feb | 12 Feb | 13 Feb | 14 Feb | 56 Feb |
| <i>Handbook of Action Research: Prelude, Introduction and Part One: Groundings Student-Led Discussion</i> | | | | |
| <i>Week 5</i> 18 Feb | 19 Feb | 20 Feb | 21 Feb | 22 Feb |
| <i>President's Day: No Class</i> | | | | |
| <i>Week 6</i> 25 Feb | 26 Feb | 27 Feb | 28 Feb | 29 Feb |
| <i>Handbook of Action Research: Part Two: Practices: Student-Led Discussion</i> | | | | |
| <i>Week 7</i> 3 Mar | 4 Mar | 5 Mar | 6 Mar | 7 Mar |
| To Be Announced | | | | |
| <i>Week 8</i> 10 Mar | 11 Mar | 12 Mar | 13 Mar | 14 Mar |
| <i>Handbook of Action Research: Part Three: Exemplars</i> | | | | |
| <i>Week 9</i> 19 Mar | 20 Mar | 21 Mar | 22 Mar | 23 Mar |
| <i>Handbook of Action Research: Part Four: Skills</i> | | | | |
| <i>Week 10</i> 24 Mar | 25 Mar | 26 Mar | 27 Mar | 28 Mar |
| <i>Spring Break</i> | | | | |

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|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| <i>Week 11</i> 31 Mar | 1 Apr | 2 Apr | 3 Apr | 4 Apr |
| Making an Effective Poster (To Be Announced) | | | | |
| <i>Week 12</i> 7 Apr | 8 Apr | 9 Apr | 10 Apr | 11 Apr |
| Student-Selected Readings and Student Led Discussion | | | | |
| <i>Week 13</i> 14 Apr | 15 Apr | 16 Apr | 17 Apr | 18 Apr |
| Student-Selected Readings and Student-Led Discussion | | | | |
| <i>Week 14</i> 21 Apr | 22 Apr | 23 Apr | 24 Apr | 25 Apr |
| Student-Selected Readings and Student-Led Discussion | | | | |
| <i>Week 15</i> 28 Apr | 29 Apr | 30 apr | 1 May | 2 May |
| Class Poster Session | | | | |
| <i>Week 16</i> 5 May | 6 May | 7 May | 8 May | 9 May |
| <i>Finals Week</i> | | | | |