SOCIOLOGY

Chair, Professor Neil Gross
Professors Cheryl Townsend Gilkes and Neil Gross; Assistant Professors Damon Mayrl and Christel Kesler; Postdoctoral Fellows Natalie Aviles, Nicole Denier, and Marcos Perez

Sociology is the scientific study of society. It is also the study of patterns and processes of human social relations and human behavior. The Sociology Department at Colby provides students with conceptual frameworks and analytic skills necessary to understand how social forces shape people’s lives and how people shape and transform society. Courses focused on a wide range of issues, problems, and organizations show how sociological theory enables us to analyze institutions, social and cultural change, persisting inequalities, and much more. Opportunities for intensive discussion and closely supervised research foster the development of critical and creative thinking. Sociology students are prepared to participate in the private and public sectors of a diverse democracy and world.

A note on course prerequisites: Students who feel they have satisfied a prerequisite in an alternative way are strongly encouraged to consult the instructor to obtain authorization to enroll.

Study Abroad

The department prefers that students majoring in sociology complete Sociology 215 and 271 prior to study abroad. Generally, students will receive credit toward the major for one course per semester taken abroad; preferably that course should be approved in advance. Students majoring in sociology are urged to seek approval for a range of courses, in advance, to be prepared for possible cancellation of an approved course in any program abroad.

Requirements for the Major in Sociology

The sociology major requires 11 courses, including Sociology 131, 215, and 271. Among the eight elective courses, an extra methods course (212 or 272) is encouraged. At least one elective must be centrally concerned with inequality (214, 231, 252, 274, 276, 322; other courses with approval from the department), and at least two electives must be 300-level seminars. One course in another social science at the 200 level or above may be substituted for one 200-level sociology elective (but this cannot be used to fulfill the inequality requirement). Two electives may be taken in a study-abroad program with prior approval from the department. Sociology 215 and 271 should be completed before the senior year, preferably during the second year.

Requirements for the Minor in Sociology

Seven courses including Sociology 131, 215, and 271; four electives, at least two at the 300 level or above. One course in another social science at the 200 level or above may be substituted for a 200-level elective. Electives may include an independent study (Sociology 491 or 492) for at least three credits.

Note: Sociology 271 fulfills the quantitative reasoning (Q) requirement.

Honors in Sociology

The Honors Program in Sociology (Sociology 483, 484) provides a special opportunity for independent sociological research. Seniors majoring in sociology may apply for the honors program by securing a faculty sponsor in the department, a secondary faculty reader, and approval of the department as a whole. To apply, a student must have a 3.25 overall grade point average and a 3.6 grade point average in the major. Exceptions require a petition for approval of the department. Students may apply for the program at the end of the term prior to the semester in which they would begin honors work and no later than the second week of the term during which honors work begins. A maximum of six credits may be received, none of which may count toward the required elective credits in the major. Enrollment options include spring semester; spring semester and Jan Plan; fall semester; fall semester and Jan Plan; fall, Jan Plan, and spring semesters. The final product is expected to be an extensive research paper of exceptional quality. With permission of the department, a thesis in the area of sociology, completed as part of the Senior Scholars Program, may be substituted for the honors thesis.

Distinction in the Major

Distinction in the major upon graduation requires a 3.75 grade point average in the major and a 3.5 overall grade point average.

Course Offerings

SO131fs Introduction to Sociology Sociologists study processes by which people create, maintain, and change their social and cultural worlds. They investigate contemporary social issues and strive to explain relationships between what happens in peoples' lives and the societies in which they live. Sociology's research methods and theories apply to the full range of human behavior, from individual acts to global environmental, political, and economic change. An introduction to how and why sociologists study social and cultural phenomena
such as inequality, race and ethnicity, gender, power, politics, the family, religion, social and cultural change, crime, and globalization.

Four credit hours.  S, U.  GROSS, MAYRL

SO212f  Introduction to GIS and Spatial Analysis  Listed as Environmental Studies 214.  Four credit hours.  GIMOND

SO212J  Introduction to GIS and Spatial Analysis  Listed as Environmental Studies 214J.  Three credit hours.  GIMOND

SO213s  Schools and Society  Listed as Education 213.  Four credit hours.  U.  HOWARD

[SO214]  African-American Elites and Middle Classes  Classical and contemporary sociological theories of stratification and race relations are used to explore the intersection of class and race-ethnicity in the social origins and historical roles of elites and middle classes in the African-American experience.  Particular attention to the writings of Du Bois, Frazier, Cox, and Wilson.  Biographical and autobiographical perspectives provide rich description of socialization, family contexts, work, politics, ideologies, and the impacts of racism and social change.  Includes additional evening meetings for film showings and special events.  Three credit hours.  S, U.

SO215f  Classical Sociological Theory  The history of sociology, and a critical survey of the systems of thought about society, centered on major schools of sociological theory and their representatives.  The place of theory in social research as presented in works of foundational social theorists, including, but not limited to, Comte, Spencer, Durkheim, Weber, Marx, Du Bois, Simmel, and Mead.  Prerequisite: Sociology 131.  Four credit hours.  MAYRL

[SO218]  Contemporary Sociological Theory  Introduces social theories that have had a significant impact on contemporary sociological scholarship.  Students learn how to analyze and compare different theoretical paradigms, preparing them to use theory to better understand how social life is both patterned and dynamic.  Students explore how these theories, like other cultural products, both reflect and affect the historical moment in which they were produced.  Because much of this work engages with Enlightenment thought and institutions, the students develop a critical understanding of some of the central ideas and practices that shaped modern Western society.  Prerequisite: Sociology 131.  Four credit hours.

[SO219]  Self and Society in the Digital Age  We will explore how digital technologies change the ways that we work, play, and interact, and use contemporary social theories to identify and assess the opportunities and challenges afforded by new communication technologies.  Using sociological techniques we will investigate how these technologies are reshaping not only how we communicate but the content of the information we share.  Finally, we will discuss the implications of these changes for ourselves as individuals and as citizens of a large democracy.  Three credit hours.  S.

SO222fs  Migration and Migrants in the United States  He United States is a nation of migrants, who together compose the largest immigrant population in the world.  Migration has indelibly shaped the nation's history, economic development, and ethnic and racial diversity.  We will examine the experience of different immigrant groups in the United States to gain an understanding of what motivates people to emigrate, how national policies determine who is admitted to settle, and how immigrants are incorporated into and reshape mainstream America.  Previously listed as SO298A (Spring 2017).  Four credit hours.  S, I, DENIER

[SO231]  Contemporary Social Problems  Analysis of selected controversial issues and public problems in the contemporary United States.  General theoretical frameworks in the sociology of social problems used to analyze issues from one or more perspectives; areas include alienation, economic and political freedom, the politics of morality, poverty, women's roles, and social inequality.  Four credit hours.  S, U.

SO232f  Revolutions and Revolutionaries  Throughout history, individuals have organized with others to bring about radical social change.  We will explore the experiences of activists, radicals, and revolutionaries in a wide variety of settings.  What is it like to be on the front lines fighting for social transformation?  Why do people risk life and limb to do so?  How do activists advance their goals?  We will examine sociological research, biographical studies, political theory, and historical sources for insights into the lives of those who make social and revolutionary movements possible.  Previously listed as SO297C (Fall 2016).  Four credit hours.  S, I.  PEREZ

SO234f  Capital Punishment in America  Why does the United States continue to use the death penalty when nearly every other Western industrialized nation has abolished it?  We will explore capital punishment’s past, present, and future in America.  Using academic sources, as well as journalistic case studies, we will examine how the death penalty is currently implemented, study its history, and debate its morality, legality, and efficacy.  Four credit hours.  PEREZ

SO243f  College in Crisis?  Some say America’s colleges and universities are doing just fine: students are flocking to them at a record rate.  Others claim the system has reached a breaking point.  Critics point to what they see as signs of crisis: exorbitant tuition fees, questions about how much learning is taking place in the classroom, an out of control party culture, the rise of exploitative for-profit schools,
a mismatch between the curriculum and the job market for graduates, political acrimony on campus, and more. Do these charges have merit? Is the system actually in dire straits? And what can be done to fix it? We will take up these questions and others as we make our way through some of the best recent books on higher education by sociologists, political scientists, and journalists. Previously listed as SO297 (Fall 2015).  

Four credit hours.  GROSS

SO244s  Urban Sociology in a Global Context  An exploration of the complexities of city life in an increasingly globalized world, focusing on three broad topics. First, we will examine the main challenges of urbanization and hyper urbanization in both developed and developing societies: how to provide basic services for urban residents, avoid environmental degradation, and mitigate poverty, inequality, and violence. Second, we will discuss the economic role that cities have played during different historical periods. Third, we will consider how urban life may change in the future, looking especially at technology and climate change. Previously listed as SO298C (Spring 2017).  Four credit hours.  S. PEREZ

SO245f  Careers in the New Economy  Jobs are foundational in our lives—they structure how we use our time, who we interact with in our day-to-day lives, and the resources we have to secure health and well-being. Over the past 30 years, major social and economic changes have transformed the nature of work in the United States. This course provides a framework for understanding contemporary work life and labor markets. We will draw from a rich body of work in sociology to inform this framework, which in turn will be used to assist students in developing practical strategies to pursue their own career and job goals. Previously listed as SO297A (Fall 2016).  Four credit hours.  S. DENIER

SO246s  Starting a Business or Nonprofit? Lessons from Sociology  From Silicon Valley startups to grassroots political campaigns, there are many ways to organize people in order to accomplish collective goals. But how do organizations succeed in competitive environments? What can managers do to ensure employee cooperation? Which business models are most likely to thrive in the new economy? We will read cutting-edge scholarship from sociology and organizational studies to understand what organizations are and how they work. We will extend insights from a wide variety of case studies to discussing different approaches to solving common problems faced by new and changing organizations. Previously listed as SO298B (Spring 2017).  Four credit hours.  S. AVILES

SO247f  Universal Health Care: Could It Work Here?  Why does the United States lack a universal health-care system? What would it take to implement such a system here? We analyze the historical evolution of the patchwork of institutions and organizations that make up American health care. We read recent sociological scholarship that compares the United States to other developed countries in order to understand how different health-care systems function. And we apply concepts from these readings to debate whether universal health care is a viable prospect. Previously listed as SO297B (Fall 2016).  Four credit hours.  S. AVILES

SO249s  Life Sciences and Society  What is social about the life sciences? We consider what happens when biology, medicine, and social order meet. We will look at cases where individuals and groups draw on ideas from biology to justify ill-conceived and dangerous social reform projects, from eugenics to more recent efforts at using genomics as a tool to identify populations at risk for criminal behavior. We will also explore the role social forces play in shaping science, from profit motive in the market for pharmaceuticals to political activism around medical conditions like HIV/AIDS. Previously listed as SO298D (Spring 2017).  Four credit hours.  S. AVILES

SO252f  Race, Ethnicity, and Society  An examination of the roles of race and ethnicity in organizing complex stratified societies, in structuring systems of durable inequalities, and in organizing and shaping communities and enclaves within stratified societies. Using multiple sociological perspectives on race, ethnicity, minority groups, prejudice, discrimination, and institutional racism, special attention is paid to the United States with reference to immigration, slavery, conquest, annexation, colonialism, internal migration, social conflict, social movements, labor, citizenship, transnational adaptation, law, and public policy. Prerequisite: Sociology 131 or 231 or American Studies 276 or Anthropology 112.  Four credit hours.  U. GILKES

[S0253] Sociology of Sport  Focuses on sport as a social institution and cultural phenomenon. Drawing on classical and contemporary theories, students explore how broader social forces shape personal and collective experiences of sport through contexts of family, education, identity, the body, fandom, economy, war, and nation. Students work independently and in groups to examine the structural and symbolic dimensions of sport across micro-, meso-, macro-, and global levels of sociological analysis. Readings address how meanings of sport are variably shaped at the shifting intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, and citizenship within particular relations of power and inequality. Prerequisite: Sociology 131.  Four credit hours.

[S0255] Urban Sociology  An examination of urban social and cultural life in a historical and cross-cultural comparative perspective, with special emphasis on the United States. Explored are social, psychological, political, ethnic, and economic issues pertaining to urbanization and to urban social problems as well as to such topics as urban architecture, urban planning, urban renewal, and neighborhood life in national and global contexts. Students participate in a community-based service learning project as part of the course requirement. Prerequisite: Sociology 131.  Four credit hours.

[S0259] Activism and Social Movements  An examination of the goals, ideologies, leadership, and development of reformist and
revolutionary mobilization efforts both within and beyond the boundaries of the United States. Prerequisite: A 100-level sociology course or American Studies 271. Four credit hours.

SO271s  Introduction to Sociological Research Methods  Provides sociology majors with basic intellectual tools for understanding, evaluating, and conducting social science research. Specific objectives include (1) developing rudimentary statistical skills, (2) linking theoretical problems to hypothesis testing and statistical inference, (3) exploring major types of empirical research and their implications for problem solving (e.g., experiments, surveys, participant observation), (4) applying and refining knowledge of sociological methods through diverse readings in both the sociological literature (e.g., American Sociological Review, American Journal of Sociology, Social Forces, Sociological Methodology) and in non-academic publications (e.g., the Economist, the Atlantic, the New York Times). Prerequisite: Sociology 131 and sociology major. Four credit hours. Q. DENIER

[SO272]  Qualitative Research Methods and Methodology  The theory, methodology, and methods of qualitative research. Using readings, discussions, and various research activities, students examine the interrelationships of methodological theory and its development, data collection, analysis, and report writing. Prerequisite: Sociology 131 and sociology major. Four credit hours.

[SO274]  Social Inequality and Power  Students will assess different arguments about why life chances are so unequal despite a founding commitment to equality within the United States and other democracies. We will follow Charles Tilly's advice that, in order to understand contemporary inequalities, we must first step back and put these processes into historical perspective. In addition to studying global, macro-level processes driving changes in the national economy, we will also look at how face-to-face interactions and local institutions shape people's abilities to navigate the changing economic landscape and to secure new economic and social opportunities. Prerequisite: Sociology 131. Four credit hours. U.

[SO276]  Sociology of Gender  Gender involves a cluster of human social practices that deploy human bodies' capacities to engender, to give and receive pleasure, and to give birth. Students will explore what is social about gender and how it affects our personal life experiences as well as the operation of large institutions. They will explore why gender relations are historically specific and how they are also shaped by other axes of inequality such as race/ethnicity, social class, and nationality. They will learn how to use sociological tools to design and to assess what is at stake in contemporary projects to shape gender relations. Prerequisite: Sociology 131. Four credit hours. S, U.

SO297Af  Comparative Perspectives on Inequality  How do social inequalities in contemporary American society compare to inequalities in other contemporary democracies and in American history? We will use a comparative perspective to better understand the causes and consequences of inequality and grapple with questions such as: How high are current levels of income and wealth inequality in the United States? How do gender, race, and ethnicity, and the social class into which we are born, affect life chances in different societies? What role do families, schools, labor markets, and governments play in generating inequalities? What are the consequences of inequality for economic growth, democratic vitality, health, and well-being? Four credit hours. S. KESLER

SO297Bf  Data Analysis and Visualization for Social Science  We have access to more data than ever, but how can we actually use it to help us better understand the social world? Students will learn, through practice, how to find, access, and analyze quantitative data using statistical software. We will carefully study analyses in existing published research. Students will ask and answer research questions of their own and learn how to conduct basic exploratory analysis, especially in visual form, as well as to use more advanced techniques such as linear regression and regression with categorical outcomes. Prerequisite: Sociology 271. Four credit hours. KESLER

SO297Ci  Religion and Society  An introduction to the sociological study of religion. We begin by exploring classic sociological approaches to the study of religion and society, including those of Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Geertz. We will then explore how these different perspectives have been deployed by social scientists to address a number of important and recurrent themes: How does religion influence the way people think and act? How do religious groups attract and retain members? How does religion contribute to social change? We conclude by considering how social forces contribute to religious change. Four credit hours. S. MAYRL

SO297Jj  The Authoritarian Mind  Social psychology has a long and diverse history in the American sociological discipline. Students will explore a particular lineage of social psychology that is concerned with the effects of material and social conditions on how people make sense of social situations and act toward others. They will then deploy what they have learned to better understand why at certain moments in history people have become more accepting of authoritarian rule and complicit in events such as the Holocaust. We will discuss whether or not the contemporary United States has the potential to become an authoritarian state. Three credit hours. S. MULLINS

SO298As  Gender, Work, and Family  Some gender inequalities have changed dramatically over the course of the last half century, while others remain far more persistent. We will explore how gender inequalities take shape in two major intersecting life realms: the family and the workplace. We will pay special attention to how gender, work, and family issues vary by social class and race, and how work-family policies help balance work and caregiving responsibilities. Four credit hours. S. KESLER
SO298Bs  Social Policy and Inequality  How does social policy shape inequalities in income, educational attainment, the job market, health, and housing? How do we assess the effects of such policies? We will consider examples of both small- and large-scale policies that target social inequalities. We will evaluate their effects and also consider the social forces that influence policymaking in the United States and other advanced democracies.  Four credit hours.  S.  KESLER

SO298Cs  State, Society, and Politics  Investigates the relationships between the state — the most powerful and prominent political organization in modern life — and society. We will begin by considering the various ways that sociologists have tried to understand what the state is and what it does. We will then proceed to consider how ordinary citizens can influence state action and whether globalization is weakening the state’s importance in contemporary society. Lastly, we consider how states shape societies, inquiring into the various factors — such as political culture, ideas, institutions, and social cleavages — that shape the development of policy.  Four credit hours.  S.  MAYRL

SO322s  Social Class and Schooling  Listed as Education 322.  Four credit hours.  U.  HOWARD

[SO324]  Elite Schooling in Global Context  Listed as Education 324.  Four credit hours.  I.

[SO332]  Nonprofit Organizations and Philanthropy  An academically-grounded, community-based educational experience exploring the meaning of philanthropy and the nature of nonprofit organizations. Students will volunteer in Waterville area nonprofit organizations, working with them as assistant grant writers. The class, operating like the board of a granting foundation, will review organizations’ grant applications, make funding decisions, and allocate one or more grants totaling $10,000. The Learning by Giving Foundation, founded by Doris Buffett, generously provides funding for these grants. Prerequisite: Sociology 131 or equivalent introductory course in the social sciences.  Four credit hours.

[SO342]  Embodiment and Disability  Examines the social construction of disability in the United States as a cultural and political phenomenon. With a focus on embodiment, students consider how normalcy and difference are marked on bodies, and how notions of diversity, inclusion, and accessibility play out in the arenas of education, employment, reproduction, immigration, aging, sports, and the military. Class readings, discussions, and assignments address how disability intersects with other categorizations of difference through interactions, cultural and media representations, family and educational policies, and activism for sexual and reproductive justice. Prerequisite: Sociology 131.  Four credit hours.

[SO344]  Sociology of Sexualities  Sociological investigation and consideration of the historical and contemporary constructions of human sexualities and the structures, institutions, and symbols that shape them. Theoretical frameworks include constructionist, feminist, poststructuralist, and queer theory. Students examine pressing social issues concerning sexual desire and attraction, sexual behaviors and practices, and the relations of sexuality to other categorizations, including race, social class, gender, and (dis)ability. Students examine non-normative sexual identities and expressions and the structures and symbols shaping their popular and political understandings. Issues are examined within the contexts of both historical developments and contemporary social movements for the full rights of people of every sexuality. Previously offered as Sociology 237. Prerequisite: Sociology 131.  Four credit hours.

SO355f  African-American Women and Social Change  Sociological analysis and historical overview of African-American women and their families, work lives, and community (especially religious and political) experience. A focus on the contradictions between lived experience and cultural expectations surrounding gender and on the distinctive experiences of African-American women as a force for social change. Prerequisite: An introductory social science course or American Studies 276.  Four credit hours.  U.

[SO357]  Civil Rights, Black Power, and Social Change  A seminar examining the impact of the civil rights and black power movements on sociological concepts, theories, and perspectives on race relations, racial stratification, social change, and ethnicity. The PBS series Eyes on the Prize I and II are used to introduce readings and discussions of sociological and ideological texts influenced or produced by activists and activities of the civil rights or black power movements. The connections among civil rights and black power movements and other social movements in the United States and other societies. Prerequisite: An introductory anthropology, sociology, government, history, or American studies course.  Four credit hours.  S, U.

[SO358]  The Sociology of W.E.B. Du Bois  Intensive survey of the life and work of W.E.B. Du Bois, prolific scholar, activist, and founder of one of the oldest sociology departments and research centers. Sociology was Du Bois's chosen discipline at the same time he contributed to history, literature, and cultural studies and formed a foundation for African-American studies. This exploration of his sociological imagination assesses the importance of his work for understanding racial-ethnic relations and conflict in the United States and the world. Readings include The Souls of Black Folk, The Philadelphia Negro, selected topics from the Atlanta University studies, The Gift of Black Folk, appropriate biographical/autobiographical texts, and critical studies. Prerequisite: A 100-level sociology course or American Studies 276.  Four credit hours.  S, U.
SO359s  Sociologies of Slavery and Slave Communities in the United States  A multidisciplinary exploration of the experience of enslaved African Americans and the impact of that experience on culture and social institutions in the United States. Using the insights of sociology and anthropology, attention is paid to slave communities and the strategies enslaved women and men developed for physical and psychic survival as well as for resistance. Slavery is examined as a social institution and cultural force and as a site for the construction and reproduction of "race" and durable inequalities in the United States. Attention to the varieties of cultural inheritance generated during slavery, especially music, folklore, and religious expression and their persistent impacts on American popular culture and African-American consciousness. Prerequisite: Anthropology 112 or Sociology 131.  Four credit hours.  S, U.  GILKES

[SO361]  Special Topics in Health and Medicine: Substance Use and Abuse  Using a sociological framework, we examine a number of perspectives in the study of substance use and abuse (e.g., social-psychological, economic, pharmacological, political, historical/ legal). Key topics include the nature of addiction, substance abuse and the brain, drug markets, the treatment industry, prohibition and temperance movements, decriminalization, adolescent drug and alcohol use, and dysfunctional family systems. Students will demonstrate understanding through in-class exercises (individual and group problem solving), participation in general discussion, and weekly response papers. Previously offered as SO397. Prerequisite: A lower-level social science course.  Three credit hours.

SO364s  Policing the American City  Few weeks go by, it seems, without the release of a new video showing an American police officer mistreating or brutalizing someone. While defenders point out that in any large occupation there will inevitably be some bad apples, and that policing is dangerous work in which situations can easily spin out of control, critics see more sinister forces at play, including an effort to control and subordinate minority populations. We will discuss and debate these and many other issues as we read some of the best social science research on police and American cities. What exactly is the social role of the police? What factors shape police behavior? And how might relations be improved? Previously listed as SO398A (Spring 2016).  Four credit hours.  S.  GROSS

SO366s  American Class Structure  Class and class inequality are central to the American political conversation today. But what is class? How should it be conceptualized and measured? What does the American class structure look like under different conceptualizations? What makes class inequality tick—what are the social processes and dynamics that drive it? And how does class connect up to other forms of inequality? We will read books and articles that offer answers. While our main focus will be the United States, we will also consider the American class structure in comparative perspective. Previously listed as SO398 (Spring 2017).  Four credit hours.  S.  GROSS

SO483fj  Honors Project  Prerequisite: Senior standing, admission to the honors program, and permission of the supervising faculty member.  Two to four credit hours.  FACULTY

SO491f, 492s  Independent Study  Individual topics in areas where the student has demonstrated the interest and competence necessary for independent work. Prerequisite: Junior or senior standing and permission of the department.  Two to four credit hours.  FACULTY