

SOC: 126 URBAN SOCIETY

WAVERLY DUCK, Ph.D.

North Hall Endowed Professor of Sociology

Office hours on

Tuesdays from 11:00-1:30 PM

Wednesday from 11:00-1:30 PM and by appointment

Communications: Waverly_Duck@UCSB.edu

SUBJECT LINE: URBAN SOCIETY STUDENT

CLASS MEETINGS: Tuesday and Thursday 8-9:15 AM

Girvetz Hall 1112

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Housing has long been positioned as the foundation of the “American Dream,” promising stability, security, and intergenerational mobility. Yet access to stable housing has never been equal in the United States, and for many people housing has been a site of insecurity rather than protection or mobility. This course examines housing insecurity as a structural condition and explores how historical processes continue to shape contemporary patterns of displacement, precarity, and exclusion.

Urban Society is a research-intensive course focused on housing and housing insecurity. The course examines the economic, social, political, and cultural forces that shape housing outcomes at the global, national, and regional levels. Students will engage with both classic and contemporary scholarship in urban sociology while developing a strong foundation in theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of cities and housing.

Students will examine historical and contemporary housing policies and industry practices that produce insecurity across both rental and ownership markets. They will analyze empirical data on housing conditions in their own communities and assess how economic position and place shape exposure to housing instability. The course also invites students to imagine collective responses and policy interventions aimed at building more just, stable, and equitable housing systems. A central component of the course is a sustained social research project, starting from conceptualization and culminating in a final report. Using a range of datasets and archival materials, students will work individually and in small groups to develop empirical questions, operationalize key concepts, collect evidence, analyze data using multiple social science techniques, and present their findings in written form.

The course emphasizes the historical development of housing, transportation, governance, culture, and inequality, with attention to race, class, and gender dynamics. In addition to quantitative research, the course provides training in ethnographic methods, particularly participant-observation (fieldwork). Ongoing projects will be discussed, workshopped, and critiqued throughout the term, offering students a practical introduction to research design, data collection, and analysis in urban sociology.

The course will also include a number of guest speakers, housing experts, and practitioners, including the authors of many of the readings.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students will develop core research skills related to housing insecurity, including qualitative and quantitative data analysis; accessing and using social science databases; policy analysis; archival and historical research; and translating policy into practice. Students will also learn how to write an empirical research paper, design a research poster, and create a public-facing website.

The final project will illustrate, evaluate, examine, and explore housing-related issues at the local, county, state, and federal levels.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

The reading load in this course is around 50 pages/week. I have taken great pains to keep it within this limit. To do well, you must be prepared to complete the reading assignments in full and do so consistently across the entire quarter.

Readings: The readings are available as pdfs on CANVAS. I have also placed the readings on reserve at the library. A bibliography is located at the end of the syllabus.

Grading: Grades for this course are based on the components outlined below, totaling **100 points**. Points are distributed across written work, course engagement, and assessments.

- **Close Reading Assignments (2 total):** 20 points (10 points each)
- **Research Proposal:** 10 points (**FEB 12**)
- **Final Poster and Website:** 10 points (**LAST CLASS**)
- **Book Review:** 15 points (**FINALS WEEK**)
- **Attendance and Participation:** 20 points
- **Photo Essay Assignment:** 5 points (**JANUARY 15**)

- **Quizzes and Exams:** 20 points (TBA)

Total: 100 points

All assignments must be submitted **via Canvas before class** on the assigned due date.

Attendance

Attendance will be taken each class period using a sign-in sheet. We have only ten weeks. Because the course meets only twice per week, regular attendance is essential. That said, we recognize that unavoidable conflicts arise. You may miss up to two class meetings without penalty. If you miss more than two classes, you will receive a 0 for the Attendance and Participation portion of the grade (20 points). If you miss four classes, you will receive an automatic F for the course.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments are due on time. Late assignments will not be accepted or graded. If you anticipate difficulty meeting a deadline, please email me as soon as possible.

REQUIRED BOOKS

Atuahene, Bernadette. Plundered: How Racist Policies Undermine Black Homeownership in America. Hachette UK, 2025.

Ocejo, Richard E. Sixty Miles Upriver: Gentrification and Race in a Small American City, 2024.

THE BOOK REVIEW ESSAY IS DUE FINALS WEEK

PROJECT PROPOSAL AND FINAL POSTER AND WEBSITE

You will be assigned to a group to study one of the seven areas: housing costs, health disparities, local politics, crime and safety, economic development, media representations, and employment. **Your final project will grow directly out of the proposal you submit midway through the course.** The goal of the proposal is to lay out a clear and compelling plan that puts your interests and research in dialogue with the social theories we cover in class.

The proposal must do three things (5 pages):

1. Define the Problem. Identify the central theoretical issue, question, or gap that motivates your group's work. Please explain why this problem matters for the sociology of housing and why it needs to be examined or re-examined now.

2. Engage at Least Two readings from the Course. You must draw on at least two theorists and/or theoretical traditions covered in class, using them as foundations. Your task is not to summarize their work but to build on it, complicate it, or push it in a new direction.

3. Do Something New. The proposal must show how your paper will move beyond what has already been said. This means bringing in something new based on your data and/or research interests.

Your proposal should also include:

Structure of the Project. Sketch the sections of the argument (problem statement, engagement with theorists, main contribution, implications/why is this important?)

Types of Theories. Explain the logic of your argument. How will you use comparison, conceptual development, or synthesis to build your case?

Feasibility and Scope. Show that the project is focused enough to be completed as a single paper but ambitious enough to matter.

Potential Challenges. Anticipate risks, possible weaknesses, and shortcomings.

References. Provide a complete list of works cited in the proposal. These should include the two (or more) theorists from the course, as well as any outside sources you bring into the conversation.

FINAL RESEARCH PROJECT (8-10 pages)

A Brief History of the Neighborhood

Relevant Data and Evidence

Present data that speaks directly to your question. This may include census data, policy documents, maps, or other publicly available sources.

Significance

Discuss what your findings reveal and why they matter. This section should return to your thesis and make clear the contribution of your analysis.

Conclusion

Summarize the central argument and reflect on what this case tells us about how it's related to housing insecurity more broadly.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

What policy changes would you recommend based on your findings, be specific.

PHOTO ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

Who are you?

This may seem like a simple question, but for this essay, I want you to think about it more carefully. Select or take a photograph of yourself and attach it to your essay (submitted digitally). Reflect on what aspects of your identity the photograph reveals and what it may conceal. What can this image tell us about you, and what can't it tell us? Are the most important aspects of your identity visible in the photo? Why or why not?

Keep in mind that this essay represents my first impression of you. Center your own experience, but also remember that this is a graded assignment. In addition to the photograph, include information not captured in the image, such as what you prefer to be called in class, the type of academic environment you find most supportive, and what I can do to support your academic journey.

You may be as creative as you like, as long as you address all of the questions above and follow the guidelines. The essay should be no more than one to one-and-a-half pages (front side only), typed in at least 12-point font. Single or double spacing is acceptable. Upload the assignment to CANVAS.

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING

On Writing and Criticism (Write, rewrite, rewrite, rewrite, and rewrite)

Writing well is difficult, but the returns for learning how to do it are very high. The key to writing well is *extensive editing*. First drafts have one function: to get basic ideas down on paper. After the first draft is written, successive editing results in organization, style, and clarification. Some planning is necessary at the outset, usually in the form of an outline. An outline serves as a general measure of

progress and should be structured around the biggest ideas you have about a topic. Once the first draft is written the outline should be discarded, and the editing begins. As you edit, you see different ways of arranging the argument, places where it is incomplete or where it is vague. It is amazing how many ideas arise when you are actually writing. There are no born writers; editing is the only way.

The reason it is difficult to edit is because higher education rewards poor writing. Professors require students to write in-class exams and students delay writing papers until soon before assignments are due. Both of these practices require students to be evaluated on first drafts, although we pretend the drafts are final products. It is a pedagogical paradox that professors teach this way because none of them use the procrastinating method to write papers. We never share our first drafts with our colleagues, because first drafts are confused, have dumb statements in them, and are little more than a stack of notes we have written to ourselves.

Clarity is the goal of good writing, and therefore of editing. Some good sources of information on clarity and writing are:

1. Strunk, William Jr., and E. B. White. 1999. *The Elements of Style*. NY: Macmillan (This book can be read in 2 hours and restudied for a lifetime; 85 pages).
2. Barzun, Jacques. 1971. *On Writing, Editing, and Publishing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (Contains clear advice and examples; 130 pages).
3. Becker, Howard S. 1986. *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Reading and Participation: I expect that each student will do extensive reading each and every week of the course. Students will not be tested on that reading, but I do want to see evidence that they have read carefully, thoughtfully, and consistently throughout the quarter. This does not mean they must know and understand everything when they walk in the door to start the class meeting. It does not mean their judgments as to what is most important in the readings must always be the same as my judgments. What it *does* mean is that if a student gives me a sense that s/he is not doing extensive and consistent reading for this course, that s/he is not putting in a serious effort, it will bode poorly for (this portion of) their final grade.

I expect students to take part actively in class discussions. If I ask a student a question at a moment when they seem not to be paying attention, and the student

answers, “Can you please repeat the question?” this will be noted. If a student’s comments do not reflect serious preparation for class discussion, this too will be noted. And if a student takes the class discussion into irrelevant tangents, raises issues of interest only to him or herself, or deflects attention from the important issues raised by me in class or by the readings, this also will be taken into consideration. I do not ask for frequent interventions. Some students are talkative; others are quiet. All I ask for are a few just a few substantive, thoughtful, and well-informed contributions per class meeting. There is no court of higher appeal for this portion of the final grade. It is based entirely on my subjective evaluation of a student’s class performance (combined with class attendance).

Why Do I Insist on Attendance All the Way Through Class Meetings? I insist on this policy because I have found that, whenever I do not require it, students trickle out of the classroom one by one during the final several minutes, and they do so in a way that destroys our collective focus. I wish to discourage that as much as possible.

CLOSE READINGS

You are required to submit **two close** readings by the end of the quarter. Close readings may only be submitted once per week, even if multiple readings are assigned. **ONLY READINGS that are 25 pages** or more qualify for a close reading. They begin after Week 3. Close reading critiques should be approximately 3-4 pages in length (using a 12 point font, double-spaced), and should include the following:

1. **Complete bibliographical citation:** Author, title, city of publication, publisher, and date.
2. **A brief synopsis of the piece:** What is the central problem or question the text addresses?
3. **Major thesis:** What is the author’s principal theoretical claim? Is this claim explicitly stated, or does it need to be inferred? Are there secondary or supporting arguments?
4. **Conceptual development:** How does the author build and support the thesis? Does the text draw on historical examples, conceptual distinctions, or comparative analysis? How does it engage with prior thinkers or debates?
5. **Analytical orientation:** Would you characterize the author’s argument as rooted in history, philosophy, observation, economics, etc.? What is at the core of their sense-making?
6. **Critical evaluation:** What tensions, assumptions, or biases can you detect in the argument? How does the piece reflect its social and historical context?

7. **Your assessment:** In what ways does the reading advance sociological theory? How does it help us understand core concepts such as social facts, alienation, rationalization, consciousness, or marginality?

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Academic Integrity: By virtue of enrollment, each student agrees to uphold the high academic standards of the University of California-Santa Barbara; academic misconduct is behavior that negatively impacts the integrity of the institution. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, use of generative language AI models to complete assignments, and helping others commit these previously listed acts are examples of misconduct that may result in disciplinary action.

Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct

Plagiarism is a serious form of academic misconduct. Per University policy, if a student is caught plagiarizing, we will report them to the college, which may then take disciplinary action up to and including expulsion. Note that plagiarism covers not only human sources from which you borrow or lift material without proper citation, but also nonhuman sources, i.e., generative AI such as Chat GPT. Even if you put Chat GPT's output in your own words, you are still plagiarizing. To avoid charges of plagiarism, therefore, **DO NOT USE CHAT GPT (or other AIs) FOR ANYTHING RELATED TO THIS CLASS.**

I fully expect you to do your own work. I expect that what you turn in will be written solely by you for the purpose of this course and will be unique from that of your classmates. Students who attempt to pass off the work of others as their own or assist others in doing so will receive no points for the work and will be subjected to disciplinary action set forth by the university. It is a violation of the honor code to procure, use, and/or distribute slides or video lectures from previous quarters of this class.

Sexual Harassment and Misconduct: Professional conduct and appropriate behavior are critical to create a safe learning environment for students and instructors alike. Here is a statement about sexual harassment from the University:

“What is Sexual Harassment? Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when submission to such conduct is a condition of employment, academic progress, or participation in a university program; or submission to or

rejection of such conduct influences employment, academic or university program decisions; or the conduct interferes with an employee's work or a student's academic career, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work, learning, or program environment. Tangible Action or Quid Pro Quo ('This for That') Sexual Harassment and Hostile Environment Sexual Harassment are both illegal and unacceptable."

Disability Services: Providing academic accommodations to students with disabilities is a shared responsibility of the campus. Students with disabilities are responsible for ensuring that the Disabled Students Program (DSP) is aware of their disabilities and for providing DSP with appropriate documentation. DSP is located at 2120 Student Resource Building and serves as the campus liaison regarding academic issues and regulations related to students with disabilities. The DSP staff works in an advisory capacity with a variety of campus departments to ensure that equal access is provided to all disabled students.

Course Materials: My lectures and course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, tests, video, outlines, and similar materials, are protected by U.S. copyright law and by University policy. I am the exclusive owner of the copyright in those materials I create. You may take notes and make copies of course materials for your own use. You may also share those materials with another student who is enrolled in or auditing this course.

Recordings: You may not reproduce, distribute or display (post/upload) lecture notes or recordings or course materials in any other way — whether or not a fee is charged — without my express prior written consent. You also may not allow others to do so. If you do so, you may be subject to student conduct proceedings under the UC Santa Barbara Student Code of Conduct.

Email Communication: Each student is issued a University e-mail address (username@ucsb.edu) upon admittance. This e-mail address may be used by the University for official communication with students. Students are expected to read e-mail sent to this account on a regular basis. Failure to read and react to University communications in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. The University provides an e-mail forwarding service that allows students to read their e-mail via other service providers (e.g., Gmail, Outlook, Yahoo). Students that choose to forward their e-mail from their UCSB.edu address to another address do so at their own risk. If an e-mail is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to official communications.

Class Schedule

WEEK 1: Overview of the Course

JAN06: Readings: Review of the syllabus and overview/discussion of urban Sociology and Housing

WEEK 2: Foundational Urban Theories

JAN13: Readings: Park, Robert E. 1915. "The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the City Environment." *American Journal of Sociology* 20(5): **577–612**.
Simmel, Georg. 1950. "The Metropolis and Mental Life."

WEEK 3: How did the 1934 National Housing Act shape U.S. homeownership?

JAN20: Readings: Faber, Jacob W. 2020. We Built This: Consequences of New Deal Era Intervention in America's Racial Geography." *American Sociological Review* 85(5): 739-775.

GROUP ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK 4: Whose LAND Is It Anyway?

JAN27: Readings: Massey, Douglas S. 1990. "American apartheid: Segregation and the making of the underclass." *American Journal of Sociology* 96(2): 329-357.

WEEK 5: Whose DEED Is It Anyway? Publicly Subsidized Homeownership and Housing Covenants

FEB03: Readings: Howell, Junia and Elizabeth Korver-Glenn. 2018. "Neighborhoods, Race, and the Twenty-First-Century Housing Appraisal Industry." *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*. 4(4): 473-490.
Duck, Waverly. "An ethnographic portrait of a precarious life: Getting by on even less." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 642, no. 1 (2012): 124-138.

WEEK 6: Theories of the Unhoused

FEB10: Readings: Snow, D. A., & Anderson, L. 1987) Identity work among the homeless: The verbal construction and avowal of personal identities. *American Journal of Sociology* 92(6): 1336-1371.

OPTIONAL: Patel, J. K., Arango, T., Singhvi, A., & Huang, J. (2019, December 22). *Black, homeless and burdened by L.A.'s legacy of racism. The New York Times.*
https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/12/22/us/los-angeles-homeless-black-residents.html?unlocked_article_code=1.CVA.1txn.T4WFh7cG29Rf&smid=nytcore-android-share

GROUP RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE

WEEK 7: Housing: Commodity versus Right

FEB17: Readings: Pattillo, Mary. 2013. "Housing: Commodity versus Right." *Annual Review of Sociology* 39(1): 509–531.

Jones, N., 2004. "It's not where you live, it's how you live": How young women negotiate conflict and violence in the inner city. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 595(1), pp.49-62.

WEEK 8: How is making money with renting, and why is it so expensive?

FEB24: Readings: Sullivan, Esther. 2017. "Displaced in place: Manufactured housing, mass eviction, and the paradox of state intervention." *American Sociological Review* 82(2): 243-269.

WEEK 9: Understanding the Local Housing Crisis

MAR03: Readings: UCSB Blum Center. People's Guide to the UCSB Housing Crisis: Section 1: Current State of the Crisis. Santa Barbara: University of California, Santa Barbara, 2023.

WEEK 10: What would an equitable housing policy look like and how do we create it?

MAR10 : Readings: Harvey, David. 2008. "The Right to the City." *New Left Review* 53: 23–40

King, Loren. "Henri Lefebvre and the Right to the City." In *Philosophy of the City Handbook*, edited by Sharon Meagher and Joe Biehl, 73–90. London: Routledge, 2019.

MARCH 12: Final Poster and Website: 10 points

BOOK ESSAY DUE FINALS WEEK