

## RSOC 3620: COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Spring 2008: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 11:00 a.m. -12:15 p.m.

This course applies basic sociological concepts and perspectives to issues of community organization. The course is designed to provide insights into how communities meet (or why they fail to meet) residents' needs. The basic objectives of this course are to: (1) present a conceptual framework that can be used to analyze social organization at the community level; (2) examine both internal and external forces that affect development prospects of urban and rural communities in the United States; (3) identify factors associated with persistent rural poverty; and (4) identify strategies to strengthen local capacity to adapt to changing social and economic environments.

Communities are fundamental units of social organization. With the exception of the occasional hermit, people are born into, socialized within, and live out their lives in human communities. Systematic study of community organization provides an opportunity to examine how we as individuals are shaped by our social environs, and how these social environs vary over time and space. Such study also can provide insight into sources of and solutions to critical social problems such as poverty and environmental quality.

Communities are arenas of social interaction where most important relationships are structured by the presence of informal groups and formal organizations. Informal groups provide the building blocks of any community and play important roles in setting the norms and standards of accepted social behavior. Formal organizations (businesses, schools, government agencies) control significant human and financial resources which give them influence and power to shape the direction of change within a community. We must also pay attention to extra-local actors; few if any communities in the United States are unaffected by regional, state, national, or international pressures. Indeed, communities of all sizes and descriptions increasingly are being influenced by outside forces over which they have little or no control. For example, large corporations make investment decisions based on changing technologies or market conditions that are beyond local control. Similarly, state and federal agencies are continually setting standards for education, health care, or environmental management that affect local communities. And of course international trade relations affect the ability of people in certain communities to earn a living by foreclosing some opportunities (e.g., textiles in the South) while opening others (e.g., the expanding automobile industry in the South).

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**OFFICE HOURS:** No fixed office hours. Generally in office from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Not available immediately after class (teaching another class immediately after this one).

**TEXTS:** Flora, Cornelia and Jan Flora, with Susan Fey. 2008. *Rural Communities; Legacy & Change*. Third Edition. Boulder: Westview Press. 402 p.

Duncan, Cynthia M. 1999. *Worlds Apart; Why Poverty Persists in Rural America*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 235 p.

**OTHER MATERIALS:** In addition to the two texts, a number of supplemental readings have been assigned. These are available through the library's EReserve system. The password into this course's set of readings is the instructor's last name. In addition, there will be several videos used in this course. These should be regarded as seriously as any reading.

**EXAMINATIONS:** Three exams will be given, including the final. Each exam, including the final, will be worth 100 points. No curve will be used in grading exams. The second and the final exams will be cumulative in the sense that knowledge and insights gained in this course should be cumulative. That said, the emphasis on the second and the final exams will be on material covered since the previous exam.

Exam questions will be drawn from reading materials and from material covered in class. I do not lecture from the

texts but rather weave class discussions together with course readings. Exam questions will require you to integrate these materials. Experience indicates it is very difficult to do well without attending class on a regular basis.

All exams will involve answering one essay question from a set of three or more questions. This set of questions in turn will be drawn from a list of questions given to you at least 5 calendar days before the exam date. Distribution may take place via email to students' AU email addresses, or via handout in class, or both. (Email is a medium of official communication and students are expected to check their email accounts daily, not only for this course but for other courses and university announcements.) Typically a list of 8-12 questions will be distributed.

You are encouraged to work together in advance of the exam, sharing ideas on how to address particular questions. The exchange of insights and notes from readings and classroom discussions is a legitimate part of the learning experience for this course and will be useful in preparing for exams. During exams, however, you are individually responsible for writing your own answer and there will be no exchange of information between students.

**QUIZZES:** On the first day of most weeks (i.e., Tuesdays), quizzes on the assigned readings for the week will be given. Each quiz will be worth 5 points and will consist of short answer, multiple-choice, or true-false questions. The quizzes will be easy for those who have kept up with the readings. We will go over the quiz in class immediately after they have been collected. The quizzes will be graded and returned to you, generally by the next class period. Students are expected to stay current with reading assignments. This will facilitate active class participation and maximize benefit from lecture and discussion. Quiz results also are useful to me in knowing what material the class already grasps and what material may require more attention on my part. Quizzes missed due to an unexcused absence will be counted as zero. Quizzes missed with an appropriate written excuse will simply not be counted toward the point total from which your grade will be calculated. There will be no make-up quizzes. Please be on time. An unexcused late arrival will be considered an unexcused absence.

**EVALUATION:** All exams will be worth 100 points (= total 300). The number of quizzes is not fixed but may be as many as 10, in which case quizzes would be worth a total of 50 points (5 x # quizzes). There are no provisions for extra credit. Before the final exam, I will send you by email the scores I have on record. Please check these for accuracy. If you believe an error has been made, please alert me to the problem and bring any evidence (i.e., exams and quizzes) that you have before grades are submitted. It is your responsibility to retain all graded work until the end of the semester and grades have been posted. Course grades will be assigned based on total points earned as a percentage of total points possible, as follows:

A = 90% and above      B = 80 - 89.9%      C = 70 - 79.9%      D = 60 - 69.9%      F = 59.9% and below

**ACADEMIC HONESTY:** The academic honesty code of Auburn University will be enforced. If you have any questions about this code, please read the Tiger Cub [www.auburn.edu/tigercub/](http://www.auburn.edu/tigercub/) or consult with the professor.

**CLASS ATTENDANCE:** Students are expected to attend class. Exam materials draw heavily from material covered in lectures and class discussions.

**BEHAVIOR IN CLASSROOM:** Please turn off all cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices. The University has other policies governing classroom behavior which will be enforced. There will be times when subjects of discussion will result in debate and disagreement. At all times maintain a civil and respectful demeanor towards everyone in the class.

**COMMUNICATION VIA EMAIL:** Consistent with University policy, I will use your official Auburn University email address for electronic communications. It is your responsibility to monitor your email account.

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:** I will make every possible effort, in cooperation with the Program for Students With Disabilities, to provide students with disabilities an equal opportunity to pursue their education. I request that any student with a documented disability let me know what arrangements will best serve their needs as soon as possible. Students needing accommodations should arrange a meeting the first week of class. Come during office hours or email for an alternate time. Bring the Accommodation Memo and Instructor Verification Form to the



**FIRST MID-TERM EXAM, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 19<sup>TH</sup>**

February 18 THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

Flora & Flora, *Rural Communities; Legacy and Change*

Chapter 7: "Financial Capital" (pp. 173-204)

Chapter 9: "The Global Economy" (pp. 241-278)

February 25 COMMUNITY VULNERABILITY IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

Gaventa, John. 1990. "From the Mountains to the *Maquiladoras*: A Case of Capital Flight and Its Impact on Workers." Pp. 85-95 in Gaventa, John, Barbara Smith, and Alex Willingham (eds.). 1990. *Communities in Economic Crisis; Appalachia and the South*. Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press. *EReserve: Gaventa*

Garber, Carter. 1990. "Saturn: Tomorrow's Jobs, Yesterday's Myths." Pp. 175-189 in Gaventa, John, Barbara Smith, and Alex Willingham (eds.). 1990. *Communities in Economic Crisis; Appalachia and the South*. Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press. *EReserve: Garber*

Video: "From the mountains to the *maquiladoras*" (Tennessee Industrial Renewal Network)

March 3 COUNTERING LOCAL VULNERABILITIES

Shuman, Michael H. 1998. "Needs Driven Industries." Chapter 2, pp. 51-82 in *Going Local: Creating Self-Reliant Communities in a Global Age*. New York: Free Press. *EReserve: Shuman 2 (parts 1 & 2)*

Hils, Ralph. 1990. "The Mayhaw Tree: An Informal Case Study in Homegrown Rural Economic Development." Pp. 158-170 in Gaventa, John, Barbara Smith, and Alex Willingham (eds.). 1990. *Communities in Economic Crisis; Appalachia and the South*. Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press. *EReserve: Hils*

Video: Freedom Quilting Bee (Alabama Public Television)

Video: Los Ojos

March 10 CONSUMPTION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Flora & Flora, *Rural Communities; Legacy and Change*

Chapter 10: "Consumption in Rural America" (pp. 257-290)

Lyson, Thomas A. 2004. *Civic Agriculture; Reconnecting Farm, Food, and Community*. Lebanon, New Hampshire: Tufts University Press.

Chapter 5: "Toward a Civic Agriculture." Pp. 61-83. *EReserve: Lyson*

March 17 SPRING BREAK

March 24 LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Flora & Flora, *Rural Communities; Legacy and Change*

Chapter 11: "Governance" (pp. 321-344)

***SECOND MID-TERM TUESDAY, APRIL 1<sup>ST</sup>***

March 31

**POVERTY, POWERLESSNESS, AND SOCIAL CAPITAL IN APPALACHIA**

Duncan, Cynthia M. *Worlds Apart; Why Poverty Persists in Rural America*

Quickly review:

- Foreword by Robert Coles (pp. ix-xii)
- Preface (xiii-xv)
- Appendix (pp 209-221; tables and figures)

Chapter 1: "Blackwell: Rigid Classes and Corrupt Politics in Appalachia's Coal Fields."  
(pp. 1-72)

April 7

**POVERTY, POWERLESSNESS, AND SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA**

Duncan, Cynthia M. *Worlds Apart; Why Poverty Persists in Rural America*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Chapter 2: "Dahlia: Racial Segregation and Planter Control in the Mississippi Delta."  
(pp. 73-151)

April 14

**POVERTY, SOCIAL CAPITAL, AND EMPOWERMENT IN NEW ENGLAND**

Duncan, Cynthia M. *Worlds Apart; Why Poverty Persists in Rural America*.

Chapter 3: "Gray Mountain: Equality and Civic Involvement in Northern New England."  
(pp. 152-186)

April 21

**COMMUNITY CHANGE**

Duncan, Cynthia M. *Worlds Apart; Why Poverty Persists in Rural America*.

Chapter 4: "Social Change and Social Policy." (pp. 187-208)

Flora & Flora, *Rural Communities; Legacy and Change*

Chapter 12: "Generating Community Change"

April 28

**COURSE REVIEW**

**LAST DAY CLASS MEETS: TUESDAY, APRIL 29<sup>TH</sup>**

***FINAL EXAM: WEDNESDAY, MAY 7<sup>TH</sup>, 2:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.***

## EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS FOR MID-TERM EXAMINATIONS

1. In common usage, the concept 'community' usually refers to a town, city or other place where people live. Alternative conceptions of 'community' also are possible. Please identify and discuss two or more examples of communities which are not located in a single physical place and then explain on what basis might these two or more examples be considered 'communities'?
2. Allen and Dillman described three separate eras marking the evolution of American society. Toennies, Durkheim, and Weber – each working in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe – described major changes they had witnessed. In each case, these scholars developed typologies. Here is the question, in three parts: (1) What is the utility of typologies such as were developed by these writers? Next, (2) which (if any) of these typologies makes the most sense and is most useful to you in understanding the broad changes these writers are trying to explore. Finally, (3) explain why you answered part (2) in the way you did (i.e., what makes that particular typology useful to you?).
3. Use the POET variables to analyze the experience of Oakridge, Oregon, the timber dependent community whose story was told in the video shown in class on February 6<sup>th</sup>. How does use of the POET variables help you understand the early history of this community and its subsequent difficulties?
4. Describe the interplay of different types of community capital that were illustrated in the movie on Dudley Street (*Holding Ground: The Rebirth of Dudley Street*). By “interplay” I am looking for a discussion of how one form of community capital (e.g., social capital) may affect other forms (e.g., political capital). Please address all those forms of community capital we have covered to date in readings and class discussions (cultural, human, social, built, natural, financial, and political) which you think are relevant.
5. Discuss both bridging social capital and bonding social capital shown in the movie on Dudley Street (*Holding Ground: The Rebirth of Dudley Street*). Please include in your discussion consideration of why each form of social capital was important to that community.
6. Why do we study power in the context of community? Give some examples from readings, class discussions, and/or videos to describe how power affects what happens in a community.
7. Describe the operations of the “growth machine” and the types of actors likely to be part of the growth machine coalition. How does the concept of political capital help you understand the nature of the growth machine?
8. Fundamental differences exist between those who see community power taking the form of elite domination, and those who think that community power is more diffuse and pluralistic. (1) Review both positions and then (2) take a position in this debate based on reasoned argument and illustrated by materials from assigned readings in this course.
9. To this point we have read and discussed 6 forms of capital (human, social, cultural, political, built, natural). Collectively, the text by Flora and Flora treats these as elements of a broader concept of “community capital.” Summarize the argument of Flora and Flora and then present an argument indicating why you think this conceptual framework is (or is not) useful to understanding the nature of community.

