



SOC 318 01E: Urban Sociology and Anthro

COURSE SYLLABUS: Fall 2026

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor: Dr. Nicole Farris, Professor
Office Location: Ferguson Room 218
Office Hours: T/Th 8 to 9:30 on campus; online by appointment
University Email Address: Nicole.Farris@etamu.edu
Preferred Form of Communication: **Email**
Communication Response Time: 24 to 48 Hours, M-F, 8am to 5pm

COURSE INFORMATION

Materials – Textbooks, Readings, Supplementary Readings

Textbook(s) Required:

Desmond, M. (2016). *Evicted: Poverty and profit in the American city*. Crown Publishers/Random House.

Kozol, Jonathan. *Fire in the Ashes: Twenty-Five Years Among the Poorest Children in America*. Crown Publishers, 2012.

Other materials Required: Access to HBO Max (\$9.99/one month) where you will watch *The Wire*, Season 4.

Software Required: Access to course website- you need to have an active email username and password. I will post your grades to the course website, as well as your powerpoints, assignments, and supplemental articles that I see fit to include in lecture.

Optional Texts and/or Materials: None

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

Course Description

Urban inequality has consistently been an area of interest in Urban Sociology, which studies life and human interaction in metropolitan areas. Although themes of opportunity and prosperity dominate American culture, the United States is more unequal than any other developed country. This course will explore poverty and inequality in the contemporary United States using the television show “The Wire” to depict urban inequalities, specifically.

We will investigate questions relating both to how much poverty and inequality there is and how particular individuals end up in various positions in the distribution of earnings, income and wealth. This course also seeks to promote an empathetic understanding, using a sociological perspective, that challenges the simple dichotomy between “deserving” and “undeserving” poor, exposing the structural factors, policies, and racial discrimination that helped create this problem.

This course addresses a primary objective of both the department and the university in an innovative and compelling way. The new course will be both appealing to students and suited to promoting a sociological understanding of race and poverty in urban environments. To accomplish this goal the course creates a syllabus that integrates the HBO show “The Wire” with accessible and rigorous academic texts.

This course provides a unique way to draw students into serious discussions of the role race plays in contemporary U.S. society. Dr. William Julius Wilson- a well known Harvard professor and one of the most prominent voices in the field of African American Studies- has developed a similar course.

Regarding the television show, Dr. Wilson stated that:

“The Wire’s exploration of sociological themes is truly exceptional. Indeed I do not hesitate to say that it has done more to enhance our understandings of the challenges of urban life and urban inequality than any other media event or scholarly publication, including studies by social scientists... The wire shows that individuals’ decisions and behavior are often shaped by- and indeed limited by- social, political, and economic forces beyond their control.” – Harvard University Seminar about the Wire, April 2008

More and more elite colleges and universities are incorporating “The Wire” in their course offerings.

This course offers a sophisticated depiction of systemic urban inequality that restricts the lives of the urban poor. The readings will feature academic books and research articles that describe and analyze the politics and life experiences in inner-city neighborhoods.

A variety of journalists and media critics have applauded *The Wire* (and rightfully so); however, many people do not recognize its contribution to social science. Although the series is fictional, it offers a sophisticated depiction of systemic urban inequality that

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constrains the lives of the urban poor. Impressed by its treatment of these complex issues, instructors were compelled to develop a course drawing on *The Wire*'s portrayal of fundamental principles that have long been the concern of social scientists and policymakers concerned with social inequality.

Students in this seminar will watch, critique and discuss selected episodes of *The Wire* along with assigned readings on urban inequality that relate to these episodes. The assigned readings will feature academic books and research articles that describe and analyze life and experiences in inner-city neighborhoods, as well as the social, economic, political, and cultural factors that shape or influence these experiences.

To be clear, this course is not intended to teach students about the show, per se. Rather, I plan to use the show as a thread that integrates the range of topics that form the basis of a thorough understanding of urban inequality—with readings, class discussions and assignments that relate to the themes addressed in the various episodes.

Student Learning Outcomes (Should be measurable; observable; use action verbs)

The purpose of the course will be to gain a basic understanding of sociology in a global world. By the end of this course students should be able to demonstrate knowledge in:

1. Sociological Knowledge: Students should be able to demonstrate a sociological perspective based on critical thinking in order to better understand the social world in which they live and interact on a daily basis.
2. Social Responsibility: Students will demonstrate an understanding of societal and/or civic issues.
3. Sociological Application: Define and give examples of basic sociological terms and concepts that will help them better understand their social world and to lay a solid academic foundation for future courses in sociology and/or related fields.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Minimal Technical Skills Needed

Using the Learning Management System, Powerpoint, Microsoft Word, and Internet.

Instructional Methods

This course will be conducted entirely via the web. All components of this class are online. We will not meet any time as a class. This course is primarily administered through D2L. If

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you need
help using D2L, please see the technology services staff for help.

Student Responsibilities or Tips for Success in the Course

1. It will be very important that you all read regularly the syllabus and ALL Announcements posted at the home page of this course very carefully and follow all instructions about course objectives, grading procedures, etc. Ignorance about details given in the course syllabus and various announcements posted on the D2L web site cannot be accepted as an excuse in any manner. I urge that you FULLY understand course requirements and grading procedures. That will be the key to doing well in the course. Also, please feel free to ask me questions about the course requirements through e-mails as needed.
2. This is an online course. Read instructions given under each week carefully.
3. You can e-mail me whenever you have challenges or questions, particularly those that you don't want to share with your classmates.

Please specify the following in your e-mail: your full name and the course # you are enrolled in so that I check your record before responding to your need or question. Read all announcements posted at the Home Page of the course and read all e-mails sent by me at your My Leo account in the D2L. If you have problem with your email system, please contact the Instructional Technology office. Do follow university deadlines in schedules given at the university's website and in the undergraduate catalog.

There is always a chance that papers or grades get lost in transit. Please keep a record of your grades in case something unexpected should happen. Any student who is dissatisfied with his/her grades during this course is urged to discuss this with the instructor.

Course Assessments

Assignment	Points
Weekly Discussions (5 @ 20 points each)	100
Urban Observation Journal	75
<i>The Wire</i> in Real Life Assignments (2 @ 50 points each)	100
Neighborhood Inequality Project	100
Photovoice Project	100

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AI and Urban Stereotypes Analysis	50
Final Urban Policy Memo	125
Final Video Reflection	50
Total	700

Assignment Descriptions

Weekly Discussions (100 points)

Students will engage in weekly discussions connecting course readings, *The Wire*, and contemporary urban issues.

Urban Observation Journal (75 points)

Students will conduct an in-person observation of an urban space and apply sociological concepts to analyze social interactions, inequality, and community dynamics.

The Wire in Real Life Assignments (100 points)

Students will connect themes from *The Wire* to current events through analyses of recent news articles related to urban issues.

Neighborhood Inequality Project (100 points)

Students will compare neighborhoods using demographic and community data to examine how place influences opportunity and inequality.

Photovoice Project (100 points)

Students will use original photographs to document and analyze urban sociology concepts within their communities.

AI and Urban Stereotypes Analysis (50 points)

Students will critically evaluate how artificial intelligence portrays urban poverty and inequality through a sociological lens.

Final Urban Policy Memo (125 points)

Students will develop an evidence-based policy proposal addressing a contemporary urban issue.

Final Video Reflection (50 points)

Students will create a short video reflecting on how the course changed their understanding of cities, inequality, and urban life.

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Because this course emphasizes applied sociology, many assignments require original observations, photographs, local data collection, and personal reflection. The use of AI may assist with brainstorming and editing but may not replace original analysis or experiences. Students may be asked to verify their work through follow-up questions or supplemental materials.

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

LMS

All course sections offered by Texas A&M University-Commerce have a corresponding course shell in the myLeo Online Learning Management System (LMS). Below are technical requirements

LMS Requirements:

<https://community.brightspace.com/s/article/Brightspace-Platform-Requirements>

LMS Browser Support:

https://documentation.brightspace.com/EN/brightspace/requirements/all/browser_support.htm

YouSeeU Virtual Classroom Requirements:

<https://support.youseeu.com/hc/en-us/articles/115007031107-Basic-System-Requirements>

ACCESS AND NAVIGATION

You will need your campus-wide ID (CWID) and password to log into the course. If you do not know your CWID or have forgotten your password, contact the Center for IT Excellence (CITE) at 903.468.6000 or helpdesk@tamuc.edu.

Note: Personal computer and internet connection problems do not excuse the requirement to complete all course work in a timely and satisfactory manner. Each student needs to have a backup method to deal with these inevitable problems. These methods might include the availability of a backup PC at home or work, the temporary use of a computer at a friend's home, the local library, office service companies, Starbucks, a TAMUC campus open computer lab, etc.

COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT

If you have any questions or are having difficulties with the course material, please contact your Instructor.

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

Technical Support

If you are having technical difficulty with any part of Brightspace, please contact Brightspace Technical Support at 1-877-325-7778. Other support options can be found here:

<https://community.brightspace.com/support/s/contactsupport>

Interaction with Instructor Statement

I prefer communication via email. I rarely answer my office phone and am much more likely to respond to email. I will respond to email within 24 to 48 hours, between normal business hours of 8am to 5pm. Please be sure that when you email me, you use a proper greeting (Dr. Farris, Professor Farris, Instructor Farris), an email body, and an appropriate closing. You should never send an email with just an attachment and no email body. Be sure you have an appropriate and informative subject line and include the name and section of the course you are enrolled in.

COURSE AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES/POLICIES

Course Specific Procedures/Policies

Students are expected to hand in assignments on time. If, due to some emergency or illness, this proves impossible, students are required to contact me by way of explanation before assignments are due, and, if necessary, provide evidence of illness.

Points are accumulated in this course instead of averaged. You will have a grade report on D2L keeping track of your points as this semester progresses. Your grade is not negotiable. It is your responsibility to keep up with your grades and your progress in the class. I will not change grades at the end of the semester, so please do not email me asking if you can do anything for a better grade. Keep up with your work during the semester.

Syllabus Change Policy

The syllabus is a guide. Circumstances and events, such as student progress, may make it necessary for the instructor to modify the syllabus during the semester. Any changes made to the syllabus will be announced in advance.

AI IN DR. FARRIS' CLASSROOM

You're welcome to use AI tools (like ChatGPT), Grammarly, or similar support services in this class—as long as you're using them the way you'd use me: as a resource to support your learning, not as a shortcut to avoid doing the work.

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Think of it like this:

Would you ask me to write your discussion post for you?

Would you ask me to complete your final project or reflection?

Probably not—and if you did, I’d (kindly) say no!

But would you ask me to help brainstorm ideas, explain a sociological concept, give feedback on a rough draft, or suggest ways to structure your response?

Absolutely. That’s using support in a way that still keeps the work (and the learning) yours.

If you do use any AI tools (including Grammarly or ChatGPT), you must note it at the bottom of your assignment.

Just a short line is fine—for example:

- “I used Grammarly to check grammar and clarity.”
- “ChatGPT helped me outline my initial ideas for this post.”
- “I asked ChatGPT to explain symbolic interactionism in simpler terms.”

Being transparent helps build trust and keeps our academic work ethical and clear.

If you’re ever unsure whether you’re using AI appropriately, just ask yourself: *Is this something I would ask my professor to do for me?*

If the answer is yes, you’re probably on the right track.

AI use policy [Draft 2, May 25, 2023]

Texas A&M University-Commerce acknowledges that there are legitimate uses of Artificial Intelligence, ChatBots, or other software that has the capacity to generate text, or suggest replacements for text beyond individual words, as determined by the instructor of the course.

Any use of such software must be documented. Any undocumented use of such software constitutes an instance of academic dishonesty (plagiarism).

Individual instructors may disallow entirely the use of such software for individual assignments or for the entire course. Students should be aware of such requirements and follow their instructors’ guidelines. If no instructions are provided the student should assume that the use of such software is disallowed.

In any case, students are fully responsible for the content of any assignment they submit, regardless of whether they used an AI, in any way. This specifically includes cases in which the AI plagiarized another text or misrepresented sources.

13.99.99.R0.03 Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

13.99.99.R0.10 Graduate Student Academic Dishonesty

University Specific Procedures

Student Conduct

All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment. The Code of Student Conduct is described in detail in the [Student Guidebook](#).

<http://www.tamuc.edu/Admissions/oneStopShop/undergraduateAdmissions/studentGuidebook.aspx>

Students should also consult the Rules of Netiquette for more information regarding how to interact with students in an online forum:

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/netiquette>

TAMUC Attendance

For more information about the attendance policy please visit the [Attendance](#) webpage and [Procedure 13.99.99.R0.01](#).

<http://www.tamuc.edu/admissions/registrar/generalInformation/attendance.aspx>

<http://www.tamuc.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/13students/academic/13.99.99.R0.01.pdf>

Academic Integrity

Students at Texas A&M University-Commerce are expected to maintain high standards of integrity and honesty in all of their scholastic work. For more details and the definition of academic dishonesty see the following procedures:

[Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty 13.99.99.R0.03](#)
[Undergraduate Student Academic Dishonesty Form](#)

<http://www.tamuc.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/documents/13.99.99.R0.03UndergraduateStudentAcademicDishonestyForm.pdf>

[Graduate Student Academic Dishonesty Form](#)

<http://www.tamuc.edu/academics/graduateschool/faculty/GraduateStudentAcademicDishonestyFormold.pdf>

<http://www.tamuc.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/13students/undergraduates/13.99.99.R0.03UndergraduateAcademicDishonesty.pdf>

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Students with Disabilities-- ADA Statement

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Office of Student Disability Resources and Services

Texas A&M University-Commerce

Velma K. Waters Library Rm 162

Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835

Fax (903) 468-8148

Email: studentdisabilityservices@tamuc.edu

Website: [Office of Student Disability Resources and Services](http://www.tamuc.edu/campusLife/campusServices/studentDisabilityResourcesAndServices/)

<http://www.tamuc.edu/campusLife/campusServices/studentDisabilityResourcesAndServices/>

Nondiscrimination Notice

Texas A&M University-Commerce will comply in the classroom, and in online courses, with all federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination and related retaliation on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, genetic information or veteran status. Further, an environment free from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression will be maintained.

Campus Concealed Carry Statement

Texas Senate Bill - 11 (Government Code 411.2031, et al.) authorizes the carrying of a concealed handgun in Texas A&M University-Commerce buildings only by persons who have been issued and are in possession of a Texas License to Carry a Handgun. Qualified law enforcement officers or those who are otherwise authorized to carry a concealed handgun in the State of Texas are also permitted to do so. Pursuant to Penal Code (PC) 46.035 and A&M-Commerce Rule 34.06.02.R1, license holders may not carry a concealed handgun in restricted locations.

For a list of locations, please refer to the [Carrying Concealed Handguns On Campus](#) document and/or consult your event organizer.

Web url:

<http://www.tamuc.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/34SafetyOfEmployeesAndStudents/34.06.02.R1.pdf>

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

Pursuant to PC 46.035, the open carrying of handguns is prohibited on all A&M-Commerce campuses. Report violations to the University Police Department at 903-886-5868 or 9-1-1.

The Counseling Center at A&M-Commerce, located in the Halladay Building, Room 203, offers counseling services, educational programming, and connection to community resources for students. Students have 24/7 access to the Counseling Center's crisis assessment services by calling 903-886-5145. For more information regarding Counseling Center events and confidential services, please visit www.tamuc.edu/counsel

Department or Accrediting Agency Required Content

COURSE OUTLINE / CALENDAR

(This is tentative and subject to change)

8/20 to 12/11

Week 1 (Aug 20-23)

Introduction to Urban Sociology

Topics:

- What is urban sociology?
- The sociological imagination and cities
- Course overview

Due:

- Introductions
 - Syllabus Quiz
-

Week 2 (Aug 24-30)

Urbanization and Classical Theory

Topics:

- Chicago School
- Urban ecology
- The growth of cities

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

Reading:
Lecture 1

Due:

- Discussion 1
-

Week 3 (Aug 31-Sept 6)

Neighborhoods and Place

Topics:

- Social disorganization
- Neighborhood effects

Watch:

The Wire Episode 1: Boys of Summer

Due:

- Discussion 2
 - Urban Observation Assigned
-

Week 4 (Sept 7-13)

Race, Segregation, and Space

Topics:

- Redlining
- White flight
- Spatial inequality

Read:

Begin **Evicted**

Due:

- Urban Observation Journal
-

Week 5 (Sept 14-20)

Housing and Poverty I

Read:

Evicted Chapters 1-8

Topics:

- Housing insecurity
 - Landlords and tenants
-

Week 6 (Sept 21-27)

Housing and Poverty II

Read:

Finish **Evicted**

Watch:

The Wire Episode 2: Soft Eyes

Due:

- Discussion 3
 - The Wire in Real Life #1
-

Week 7 (Sept 28-Oct 4)

Urban Ethnography

Topics:

- Seeing cities sociologically
- Ethnographic methods

Due:

- Photovoice Assigned
-

Week 8 (Oct 5-11)

Crime and Social Control

Topics:

- Broken windows
- Community violence
- Informal social control

Watch:

The Wire Episode 3: Home Rooms

Due:

- Photovoice Project
-

Week 9 (Oct 12-18)

Education and Opportunity

Topics:

- Educational inequality
- School-to-prison pipeline

Read:

Begin Fire in the Ashes

Due:

- Discussion 4
-

Week 10 (Oct 19-25)

Youth and Community Change

Read:

Fire in the Ashes (Part I)

Watch:

The Wire Episode 4: Refugees

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

Due:

- Neighborhood Project Assigned
-

Week 11 (Oct 26-Nov 1)

Community Organizations and Mobility

Read:

Finish **Fire in the Ashes**

Topics:

- Social capital
- Community resilience

Due:

- Discussion 5
-

Week 12 (Nov 2-8)

Gentrification and Redevelopment

Topics:

- Displacement
- Urban renewal

Watch:

The Wire Episode 5: Alliances

Due:

- *The Wire in Real Life #2*
-

Week 13 (Nov 9-15)

Environmental and Spatial Inequality

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

Topics:

- Food deserts
- Transportation inequality
- Environmental justice

Due:

- AI and Urban Stereotypes Assignment
-

Week 14 (Nov 16-22)

Media and Representations of Cities

Topics:

- Stereotypes of urban poverty
- Media narratives

Watch:

The Wire Episode 6: Margin of Error

Due:

- Neighborhood Inequality Project
-

Week 15 (Nov 23-29)

Thanksgiving Week

No new readings.

Students work on:

- Final Project Proposal
 - Final Policy Memo
-

Week 16 (Nov 30-Dec 6)

Urban Futures and Policy Solutions

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

Topics:

- Policy interventions
- Building equitable cities

Watch:

The Wire Episode 7: Final Grades

Due:

- Discussion 6
 - Final Policy Memo
-

Finals Week (Dec 7-11)

Due:

- Final Video Reflection
-

Assignment Timeline

<u>Week</u>	<u>Assignment</u>
<u>4</u>	<u>Urban Observation</u>
<u>6</u>	<u><i>The Wire in Real Life</i> #1</u>
<u>8</u>	<u>Photovoice</u>
<u>10</u>	<u>Neighborhood Project Assigned</u>
<u>12</u>	<u><i>The Wire in Real Life</i> #2</u>
<u>13</u>	<u>AI and Urban Stereotypes</u>
<u>14</u>	<u>Neighborhood Project Due</u>
<u>16</u>	<u>Final Policy Memo</u>
<u>Final</u> <u>S</u>	<u>Final Video Reflection</u>

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