

98Ma Junior Tutorial: Urban Social Problems and Public Policy
Spring 2015 W 10-12
Instructor: Eva Rosen

Course Description

In this course we will use a sociological lens to consider contemporary social and public problems of the urban environment, and their relationship to public policy solutions. This course examines the diverse methodological approaches to the study of urban life, focusing on the ways in which sociology has defined and studied cities, the people who live and work in the city, and the transformations taking place in U.S. cities today. Students will develop an ability to engage with methods and perspectives of social science analysis with relevance for policy related questions. We will examine a range of social problems that affect city dwellers such as poverty, homelessness, housing, crime, education, racial segregation, urban redevelopment, disaster, and health, and their correlate policy solutions including public assistance, housing policy, the criminal justice system, education policy, health care and more.

Throughout the course there will be an emphasis on ongoing empirical research and the linkage of theory with research design. Students will learn to appreciate what a research problem is, how to go about investigating it, what alternative explanations might be, and how to evaluate relevant evidence that can help inform policy intervention. After reviewing the relevant literature, students will complete an in-depth independent research project on a social problem of interest, collect their own data, and think through sociological and policy implications. The tutorial will guide students through each step of the research process, including research design, data collection, data analysis, and write-up. The course will specialize in data collection through the use of qualitative methods such as ethnography, observation, and interviewing, but will also draw on census and mapping (GIS) data.