

Social Class in the United States: Identity, Culture, and Consciousness

Class, one of the most basic analytical concepts in sociology, structures our social world in fundamental ways. Nevertheless, the extent to which social class is salient to people, and the specific content of class-based identities, varies widely. In this course we will explore the particular contours of class identity and class culture in the United States. Reviewing a variety of empirical and theoretical perspectives, we will pursue the following questions, among others: How can we best conceptualize class identity in the U.S.? And how does class intersect with other aspects of American culture? Are working-class or elite identities racialized? How are boundaries drawn between classes, and among people of the same social class? What might undermine—or bolster—class consciousness in the U.S. context? And how is social class reproduced? The course is rooted in key studies of the American working class, while comparing those to scholarship on professionals and the upper-middle class. Throughout the course we will be attentive to the variety of research agendas on the topic and the various kinds of data that are brought to bear on these questions. After reviewing the relevant literature students will then design and execute their own original research projects that seek to elucidate some aspect of class identity or class culture in the U.S. Students will have the opportunity to engage in each step of the research process, from question formulation and data collection to analysis and write-up. Along the way we will have workshops on the process of conducting primary research, and on each student's project. The methodological focus will be on interviews and ethnographic data, with an attention to how archival evidence and surveys might also shed light on the subject.