

**Sociology of the Marketplace (SYO-4353-001)**

**Fall Semester 2006**

**Time: Tuesday, 4:00-6:50 PM**

**Location: GS 103**

**Professor: Dr. Mark Frezzo**

**Office: SO 391C**

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**Course Description**

Though widely celebrated as the hallmark of the capitalist system, the global marketplace remains shrouded in mystery. In our roles as businesspeople, employees, and consumers, we tend to ignore the social and political underpinnings of markets. Drawing on recent research in the sociology of economic life, this course explores the “embeddedness” of markets in power structures, social networks, and cultural practices. In the process, it examines a series of questions about contemporary capitalism. How have recent technological advances—particularly in the domains of communications, transportation, and shipping—changed the global economy? What is the significance of blue and white-collar outsourcing to low-wage zones? How have transnational corporations influenced the policies of nation-states and global governance institutions? What is the significance of recent challenges to the global culture of consumerism?

Substantive topics include: the structure and logic of capitalism, transnational corporations, flexible production, the information revolution, outsourcing, paradigms in economic policy (including liberalism, Keynesianism/developmentalism, and neoliberalism), economic inequality, and consumerism.

**Course Objectives**

In essence, this course is designed to introduce students to the theoretical, methodological, and substantive problems of economic sociology—a growing field that explores the major aspects of economic life (including production, distribution, exchange, consumption, and disposal). Students will become conversant in the vocabulary of economic sociology. In addition, they will learn to draw on economic sociology in analyzing the role of transnational corporations in the contemporary world. Finally, they will learn to evaluate challenges to global consumerism.

Note: This course does *not* presuppose a background in economics or business. Students from all majors are welcome.

## Course Requirements

The course combines lectures, discussions, and group exercises. It is important for you to attend class regularly, complete the reading, and participate diligently in classroom activities. The class discussions will be designed to cultivate students' public-speaking, argumentative, and critical-thinking skills.

The coursework will involve ten journal entries and two in-class exams. For each **journal entry**, students will be asked to capture the major themes of the reading, connect the reading to the course, and offer their reflections on the reading in 250-300 words or approximately one-half page (single-spaced). Students will post their journal entries on the Blackboard site. (From the Course Menu, select "New Entry.") The journal entries must be posted before the beginning of each class session. The Blackboard system records the date and time of each post.

The **exams** will consist of ten essay questions (each requiring a two-paragraph or eight-sentence answer). The exams will be designed not only to solidify students' command of the course material, but also to cultivate such writing skills as accuracy, comprehensiveness, clarity, and originality. The exam format will be explained in detail at the beginning of the semester. Your grade will be calculated as follows:

- **10 Journal Entries = 15% of the Final Grade**
- **Midterm Exam (October 3) = 35% of the Final Grade**
- **Final Exam (December 5) = 35% of the Final Grade**
- **Class Participation = 15% of the Final Grade**

Attendance for the entire class period is mandatory. I will pass around a sign-in sheet for both halves of each class period. You are asked to notify me prior to absences. Class participation grades will include attendance, attentiveness, and intervention in discussions. Students who are reluctant to contribute to class discussions are encouraged to join online discussions on the **Blackboard site**.

Throughout the semester, I will upload discussion questions, announcements, summaries, and other useful items to the Blackboard site. You are expected to visit the Blackboard site on a weekly basis. In addition, you are encouraged to post your questions, comments, and reflections on the discussion boards. After each class session, I will post a summary on a discussion board marked "Professor's Blog." You are urged to read the blogs carefully.

Each week, I will send e-mail reminders to the entire class. Since the Blackboard site allows professors to send e-mail messages only to FAU accounts, you are urged to check your FAU account frequently for reminders.

My **office hours** are as follows: Tuesday, 1:45-3:45 PM; Wednesday, 4:45-6:45 PM; Thursday, 4:45-6:45 PM. You may also make an appointment to meet at another time. If you have any questions about the reading material or any other aspect of the course, you should not hesitate either to visit my office or to contact me by e-mail. I encourage students to visit my office at least once per term.

## Preparing for Class

In preparing for class, you should take the following steps. First, download the discussion notes from the Course Documents section of the Blackboard site. Second, use the discussion notes to guide yourself through the reading. Third, write down any questions or comments you may have. Be sure to bring the discussion notes to each class session. After each session, be sure to review the Blackboard site for helpful information (including the Professor's Blogs). Feel free to post questions or comments on the Blackboard site.

## Course Readings

•Carruthers, Bruce and Sarah Babb (2000). *Economy/Society: Markets, Meanings, and Social Structure*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

•Bakan, Joel (2004). *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

•Klein, Naomi (2002). *No Logo*. New York: Picador.

The books are available at the Campus Bookstore and Booksmart. You are urged to purchase your books at the *beginning* of the semester. Both bookstores have a policy of returning unsold books in the middle of the semester. You may wish to share the costs of the books with one or two other students. Alternatively, you may wish to photocopy the readings. In any case, you are *required* to bring the appropriate reading materials—whether in book or photocopied form—to each class session. In each session, I will refer to specific pages in the reading.

## Course Schedule

1. August 22: What Is the Sociology of Economic Life?
  - Discussion of Syllabus and Course Objectives
  - Professor's Introduction
2. August 29: The Social Construction of Markets
  - Journal Entry 1 (Posted on Blackboard)
  - Professor's Introduction
  - Discussion: Carruthers and Babb, 1-44
3. September 5: The Workplace
  - Journal Entry 2 (Posted on Blackboard)
  - Professor's Introduction
  - Discussion: Carruthers and Babb, 71-99
4. September 12: Economic Inequality in the United States
  - Journal Entry 3 (Posted on Blackboard)
  - Professor's Introduction
  - Discussion: Carruthers and Babb, 101-141

5. September 19: Development
  - Journal Entry 4 (Posted on Blackboard)
  - Professor's Introduction
  - Discussion: Carruthers and Babb, 143-180
  - Review Sheet Distributed
6. September 26: Globalization
  - Journal Entry 5 (Posted on Blackboard)
  - Professor's Introduction
  - Discussion: Carruthers and Babb, 181-225
  - Review for Midterm Exam
7. October 3: Midterm Exam
8. October 10: The Rise of the Transnational Corporation
  - Journal Entry 6 (Posted on Blackboard)
  - Professor's Introduction
  - Discussion: Bakan, 1-59
9. October 17: Corporate Rationality
  - Journal Entry 7 (Posted on Blackboard)
  - Professor's Introduction
  - Discussion: Bakan, 60-110
10. October 24: Challenges to Corporate Rule
  - Journal Entry 8 (Posted on Blackboard)
  - Professor's Introduction
  - Discussion: Bakan, 111-168
11. October 31: What Is Branding?
  - Journal Entry 9 (Posted on Blackboard)
  - Professor's Introduction
  - Discussion: Klein, xv-xxiii and 3-128
12. November 7: Corporate Consolidation
  - Journal Entry 10 (Posted on Blackboard)
  - Professor's Introduction
  - Discussion: Klein, 129-194
13. November 14: Flexible Production and the Global Factory
  - Professor's Introduction
  - Discussion: Klein, 195-278
14. November 21: Challenges to the Culture of Consumerism (Part One)
  - Professor's Introduction
  - Discussion: Klein, 279-420
  - Review Sheet Distributed

15. November 28: Challenges to the Culture of Consumerism (Part Two)

- Professor's Introduction
- Discussion: Klein, 421-458
- Conclusion
- Review for Final Exam
- Course Evaluations

16. December 5: Final Exam

**Teaching Philosophy**

In designing and implementing courses in various domains of sociology, I follow four guidelines. First, I conceptualize the classroom as a learning community. Accordingly, I foster cooperation among students not only by carefully moderating class discussions to maximize inclusiveness, but also by designing small group exercises to maximize collegiality. Second, I treat students as social scientists. Accordingly, I encourage them not only to take their own ideas seriously (irrespective of their disciplinary backgrounds or previous experience), but also to approach problems with social scientific rigor. Third, I believe that the most important aspect of teaching consists in the cultivation of critical-thinking skills. I design class discussions, group exercises, and exams with this goal in mind. I encourage relentless questioning in every course-related endeavor. Fourth, I believe that the purpose of sociology is to interrogate the contemporary period. It is my hope that students will come to think of themselves as active participants in global civil society.