



SOSC 12400 18 - Self, Culture, and Society I - Instructor(s) - Neil Brenner

Project Title: **College Course Feedback - Autumn 2024**

Number Enrolled: **18**

Number of Responses: **11**

Report Comments

Opinions expressed in these evaluations are those of students enrolled in the specific course and do not represent the University.

Creation Date: **Friday, January 31, 2025**

What are the most important things that you learned in this course? Please reflect on the knowledge and skills you gained.

Comments
I learned so much during this course. I felt really out of my comfort zone initially because this course had a lot to do with economics, but my professor was super insightful/facilitated amazing discussions that always left me really thinking about the topics. I felt super challenged to really extrapolate ideas of writers.
Writing academic papers in the social sciences style, critical analysis of texts.
Smith, Marx, and Weber. Classical social-economic theories.
Learnt a lot about capitalism and the history of how modern society developed
The various theories on the rise of capitalism. It completely reframes the way you perceive modern society and your place within it.
I learned how to break down texts and write analytical essays to understand author's arguments and methodology.
Capitalism, social power, and generally the methodologies used to study society
The rise of capitalism and the division of labor.
Khaldun, Adam Smith, Marx, Weber. Lots of discussion about capitalism as well as universal truths versus the influence of immediate time periods on truth.
How different economists and socialists such as Marx, Khaldun, Smith, and Weber conceptualized the emergence and impact of political economy specifically relating to modern capitalism.

Describe how aspects of this course (lectures, discussions, labs, assignments, etc.) contributed to your learning.

Comments
I really appreciated Professor Brenner's openness to meeting with students after class/answering my questions over email. I felt that all my questions/confusions were answered throughout the quarter and that I was able to feel confident learning these topics that initially intimidated me.
Discussions were fantastic at unraveling texts and building understanding.
Lectures are helpful in understanding the focus of these theories.
Class discussions are essential to SOSC 12400. The material is dense, and the theories are complicated, making it easy to miss key concepts and arguments. Hence, discussions, including lectures built within them, were essential to understanding course materials and authors. Plus, the discussions were super interesting, so it wasn't hard to stay engaged and, in turn, learn!
The in class discussions made me comprehend the texts better and provided a space for my peers and I to talk about the text.
Passionate lecturer and the discussions were good
Discussions were great and very insightful, readings were also very interesting.
Classes were awesome though sometimes erred on the side of lecture rather than discussion, readings were great and relevant, papers were topics on what we covered in class. Genuinely one of the best classes I've taken at UChicago and normally I hate reading.
In-class discussions were most effective since we got to talk about the texts and Professor Brenner provided a lot of keen insights into the authors' ideologies.

Please respond to the following:

	Mean	Median	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
This course challenged me intellectually.	4.73	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	27.27%	72.73%
I understood the purpose of this course and what I was expected to gain from it.	4.73	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	27.27%	72.73%
I understood the standards for success on assignments.	4.55	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	45.45%	54.55%
Class time enhanced my ability to succeed in graded assignments.	4.82	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	18.18%	81.82%
I received feedback on my performance that helped me improve my subsequent work.	4.73	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	27.27%	72.73%
My work was evaluated fairly.	4.91	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	9.09%	90.91%
I felt respected in this class.	4.91	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	9.09%	90.91%
Overall, this was an excellent course.	4.73	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	27.27%	72.73%

Additional comments about the course:

Comments
I am 100% happy I chose Self to be my SOSC course. It is a lot of work but really pays off.
Neil is a fantastic professor. He is super passionate about the content, well available for office hours, and has very fair expectations for success.
Autumn Quarter of Self is super interesting. I'd say the experience of most people is reading authors you've heard of but have never had the time actually to delve into (such as Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Max Weber, etc.!) The hype is real, take SOSC 12400 if you want to be intellectually stimulated.
Truly such an amazing course. Neil's commentary on the texts are so helpful in understanding their impact and the mindset of the authors. Texts gave me a better understanding on certain political theorist and honestly the importance of their writing.
Awesome professor!
Professor Brenner is incredible I love him with my whole heart please take this class he's so so passionate. The reading is not even that much and sometimes you can get away with not doing it, but the discussions are fruitful and there is ample room to pose whatever thoughts and questions you have while learning a lot about the texts.

I would recommend this course to:

	No	Yes
Highly-motivated and well-prepared students	9.09%	90.91%
Anyone interested in the topic	0.00%	100.00%

Thinking about your time in the class, what aspect of the instructor's teaching contributed most to your learning?

Comments
I really liked how thoughtful Professor Brenner was entering each seminar – it was clear he had recently read the readings with us, and had lots to say on the topics. He'd first try to have us break down the ideas, but would help us out when necessary. He also held office hours before every essay that were extremely helpful.
Discussions, especially when we were being led toward points instead of just being told things.
Lecture and paper feedback.
Explanation of concepts in class was very rigorous
Neil, as was said in some previous course feedback, sounds like he's giving a scripted TED Talk every time he speaks. The amount of familiarity he has with the material is truly awe-inspiring. But the TED Talk energy isn't just because he is well-versed with course materials, it's because he is so PASSIONATE about them. Never in my life have I had an instructor like Neil, and I feel so lucky to have been taught by him.
He offers incredibly detailed feedback and seems incredibly invested in what his students think about the work we're interacting with.
Discussion posts
Discussions were very useful.
His insights in lecture, he would often highlight the big ideas so that when we read or re-read or wrote essays we had a foundation to build off of. The discussions were fruitful and guided well.
Professor Brenner is clearly extremely interested in the course topics and he is also well-versed in these theories so his explanations and interpretations of the authors' arguments were extremely important for understanding what would have been hard to do all alone.

What could the instructor modify to help you learn more?

Comments
n/a
Feedback in a more timely manner.
This is a seminar course, and I feel like the emphasis on lecture is a bit too much. I understand that there is a very specific way that we're supposed to understand these texts, yet it sometimes feels like the professor only opened it up to fish answers out of their students. There's not much of a conversation between students. I don't think I'm learning a lot from my classmates. Also, I'd like to get the paper prompts more than one week before it is due.
I think Neil could condense some of his essay prompts because they were, at times, challenging to complete thoroughly without going significantly over the word count.
I understand why we got the essay prompts a little later but I think maybe even getting them a day or two in advance would help with constructing the essays better. I found myself not even knowing where to start because I wasn't reading the literature with a certain framework.
Perhaps more structured plans for classes because sometimes it felt like we didn't really get anywhere over the course of a class
Not much room for improvement. I guess maybe being a little more clear on what he wants from the essay prompts, but I think he evaluated my essay fairly regardless.
Maybe slightly less talking because sometimes at the beginning of class Professor Brenner would talk for 30 minutes as he was very excited about a multitude of things in the class, leaving me slightly perplexed (as Plato would say) but overall fantastic class.
I liked when he gave long monologues about his interpretations however sometimes it would have been better to let the students have more of a leading role.

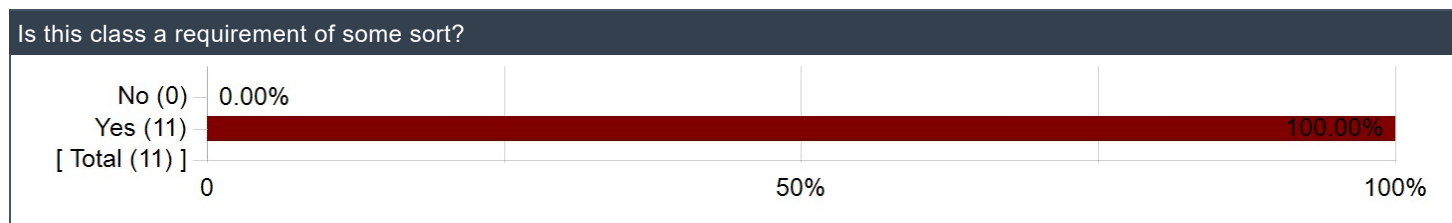
The Instructor . . .

	Mean	Median	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
Organized the course clearly.	4.64	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	36.36%	63.64%	0.00%
Presented lectures that enhanced your understanding.	4.82	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	18.18%	81.82%	0.00%
Facilitated discussions that were engaging and useful.	4.45	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	18.18%	18.18%	63.64%	0.00%
Stimulated your interest in the core ideas of the course.	4.45	5.00	0.00%	9.09%	0.00%	27.27%	63.64%	0.00%
Challenged you to learn.	4.73	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	27.27%	72.73%	0.00%
Helped you gain significant learning from the course content.	4.73	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	27.27%	72.73%	0.00%
Was available and helpful outside of class.	4.82	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	18.18%	81.82%	0.00%
Motivated you to think independently.	4.73	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	27.27%	72.73%	0.00%
Worked to create an inclusive and welcoming learning environment.	4.91	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	9.09%	90.91%	0.00%
Overall, this instructor made a significant contribution to your learning.	4.82	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	18.18%	81.82%	0.00%

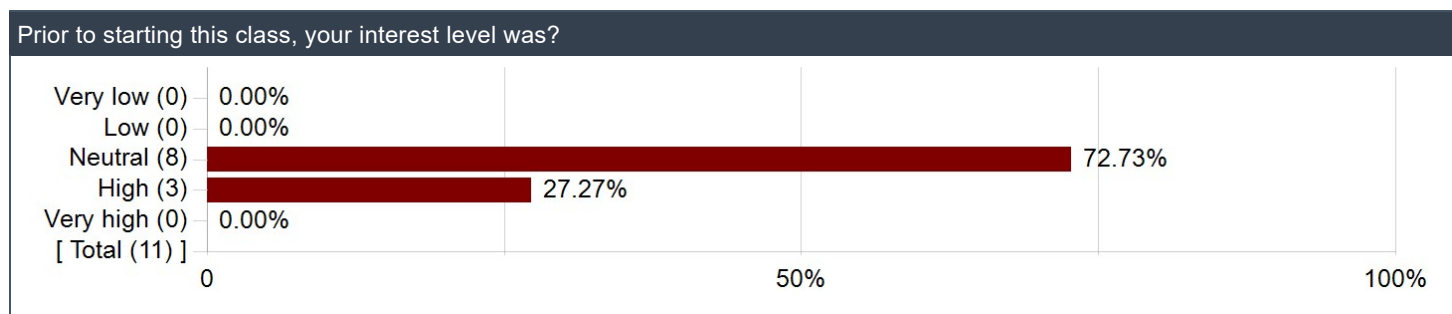
How much did the following elements of the course contribute to your learning gains?

	Mean	Median	No Gain	A Little Gain	Moderate Gain	Good Gain	Great Gain	N/A
Laboratory Experience	N/A	N/A	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Field Trips	N/A	N/A	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Library Sessions	N/A	N/A	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Review Sessions	N/A	N/A	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Writing Seminars	N/A	N/A	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%

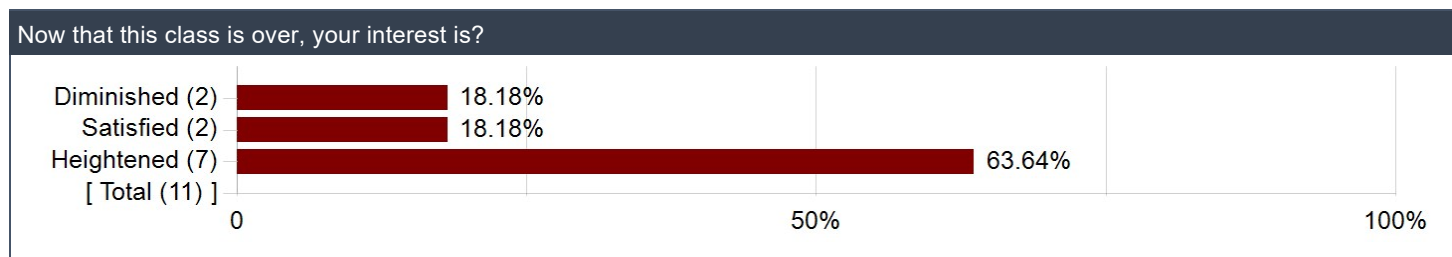
Is this class a requirement of some sort?



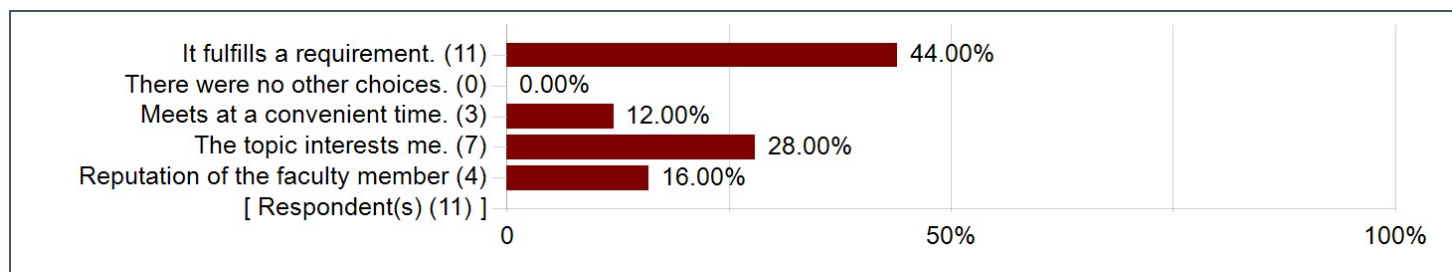
Prior to starting this class, your interest level was?



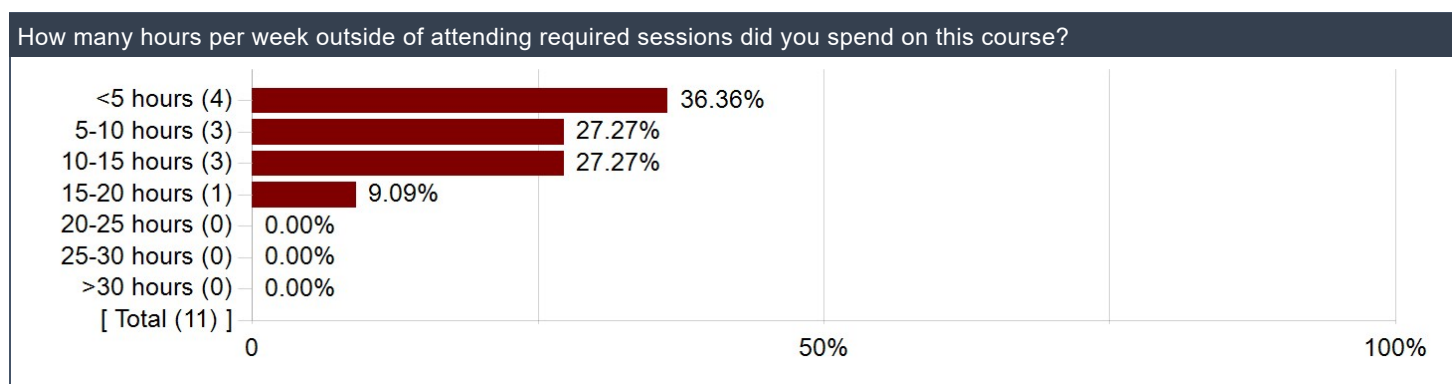
Now that this class is over, your interest is?



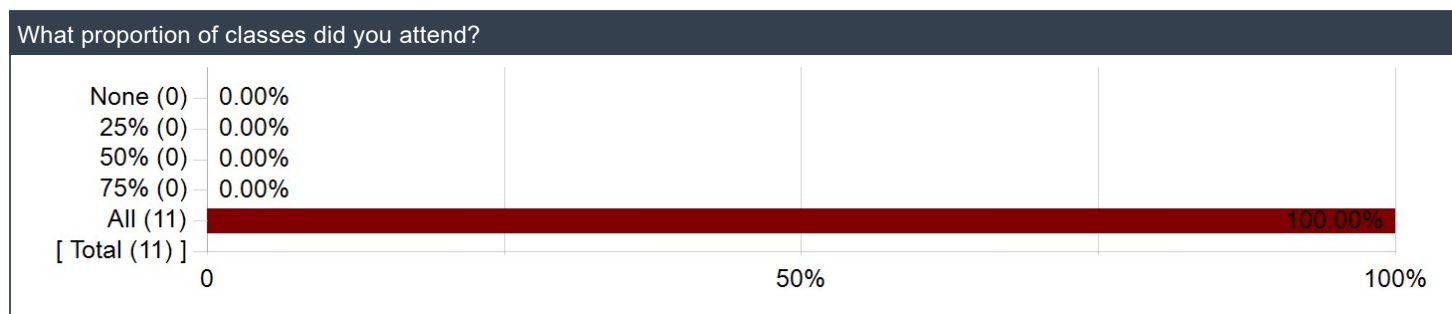
Why did you choose to take this course? (Select all that apply)



How many hours per week outside of attending required sessions did you spend on this course?



What proportion of classes did you attend?



Please comment on the level of difficulty of the course relative to your background and experience.

Comments
No experience, coming out of high school solidly as a STEM kid, everyone can succeed.
Good for everyone
SOSC 12400 is certainly a challenge at times (especially the final paper, I spent 35–40 hours on it, not because I wanted to, but because the prompt was that massive) BUT it is totally worth it. Neil is an incredible instructor who makes the course far more digestible as he is highly motivated to make sure his students have an extensive, clear understanding of the material. I'd say that you must have a competent instructor, like Neil, to be successful in this course without previous extensive experience with the material as the course content is usually not easily digestible and I've relied on class discussion + Neil's explanations of things EXTENSIVELY to understand the concepts we've engaged with properly.
I have never taken a class like this before where we so intensely extrapolated texts. It was definitely new challenging but it helped me understand what goes behind people's theories, and the formation of our modern society and the self
HUM and normal high school humanities classes
There is a decent amount of reading but not much work beyond weekly discussion posts and two 1500–word essays.
Professor Brenner has straightforward essay prompts, and he's incredibly supportive when things came up in life I love this man please take this class
No previous experience is needed, you just have to be curious about the origins of the modern capitalist society.