

CHRISTOPHER G. PRENER, PH.D.

# SYLLABUS

SOC 3220-01: URBAN SOCIOLOGY & *THE WIRE*  
FALL, 2017  
SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY



# *Basics*

## *Course Meeting Times*

Monday, Wednesday, & Friday, 11:00am to 11:50am  
Grand Hall 145

## *Course Website*

Web content can be accessed via <https://classroom.google.com>

## *Contact Information*

Office: 1918 Morrissey Hall  
Email: [prenercg@slu.edu](mailto:prenercg@slu.edu)

## *Office Hours*

Wednesdays, 3:00pm to 4:00pm in 3600 Morrissey (GeoSRI Lab) then  
4:00pm to 5:00pm in 1918 Morrissey (Office)



# Course Introduction

*The Wire is a Greek tragedy in which the postmodern institutions are the Olympian forces. It's the police department, or the drug economy, or the political structures, or the school administration, or the macroeconomic forces that are throwing the lightning bolts and hitting people in the ass for no decent reason.*

David Simon (2007)

## Course Description

Using a unique television series about Baltimore, Maryland (*The Wire*, which aired from 2002 until 2008), this course will investigate the structural causes of urban social problems, trace their development, and explore their consequences. We will also discuss the interrelations between different social issues, the similarities between the experiences of Baltimore and St. Louis, and the prospects for urban social change. We will focus on the first three seasons of *The Wire* and what they reveal about aspects of racial and class inequality that have been the concern of urban sociologists for decades.

## Course Objectives

This course has four objectives. At the end of the course, students should be able to:

1. Describe the trajectory of urbanization in America: what are the key historical moments in the development of American cities like Baltimore and St. Louis?
2. Assess the effect of structural and institutional inequalities on urban American communities: how have structural inequality, institutional racism, and deindustrialization shaped the development of urban social problems?
3. Critically evaluate *The Wire's* portrayal of structural and institutional inequalities: how does *The Wire* illustrate these issues, what does *The Wire* say about the balance between structure and

agency, and where does *The Wire* fall short in illustrating the complexity of these problems?

4. Propose a social program for addressing an urban social problem: for their final project, students will propose a social program that addresses one of the urban social problems from this course, emphasizing the ways in which they believe community cooperation can contribute to greater equality for residents of American cities.

### *Cultural Diversity Core Requirement*

This course fulfills the College of Arts and Sciences core requirement for Cultural Diversity in the United States. The Cultural Diversity in the United States requirement is designed to help students gain a better understanding of the cultural groups in the United States and their interactions. Students who complete a Cultural Diversity course in this category will gain a substantial subset of the following skills:

1. Analyze and evaluate how various underrepresented social groups confront inequality and claim a just place in society.
2. Examine how conflict and cooperation between social groups shapes U.S. society and culture.
3. Identify how individual and institutional forms of discrimination impact leaders, communities and community building through the examination of such factors as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, economic class, age, physical and mental capability, and sexual orientation.
4. Evaluate how their personal life experiences and choices fit within the larger mosaic of U.S. society by confronting and critically analyzing their own values and assumptions about individuals and groups from different cultural contexts.
5. Understand how questions of diversity intersect with moral and political questions of justice and equality.

### *Core Documents*

There are two core documents for this course. This **Syllabus** sets out core expectations and policies for the course. The **Reading List** contains topics, readings (both required and optional), and assignment due dates for each week. These two documents spell out what is *required* for this course. Both documents are available on the **Course Website**.

## Readings

There are three books required for this course. Each book has been selected to correspond with one or more of the course objectives. The books are:

1. Fernández-Kelly, Patricia. 2015. *The Hero's Fight: African Americans in West Baltimore and the Shadow of the State*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. ISBN-13: 978-1400852123; List Price: \$35.00; ebook versions available.
2. Fung, Archon and Eric O. Wright, eds. 2003. *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance*. New York, NY: Verso Press. ISBN-13: 978-1859844663; List Price: \$29.95.
3. Potter, T. and C.W. Marshall, eds. 2009. *The Wire: Urban Decay and American Television*. New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing. ISBN-13: 978-0826438041; List Price: \$34.95; ebook versions available.

I do not require students to buy physical copies of texts. You are free to select a means for accessing these texts that meets your budget and learning style. If ebook editions (e.g. Kindle, iBooks, pdf, etc) of texts are available, they are acceptable for this course. All texts should be obtained in the edition noted above.

All readings are listed on the **Reading List** and should be completed before the course meeting on the week in which they are assigned (unless otherwise noted). Full text versions of most readings not found in the books assigned for the course can be obtained using the library's **Electronic Reserves** system. The password for the Electric Reserves will be emailed out to students at the beginning of the semester.

## The Wire

Obtaining legal access<sup>1</sup> to Seasons 1 through 3 of The Wire is required for this class. You have a number of options for doing so:

1. Purchase DVDs
2. Purchase digital copies through iTunes or Amazon Instant Video
3. Stream via Amazon Prime
4. Stream via HBO Go and HBO Now
5. Copies of the DVDs have been placed on course reserve in Pius

<sup>1</sup> Students are strongly discouraged from obtaining the The Wire through illegal means (e.g. pirated copies, illegal streaming, or download/torrent sites). Doing so is a violation of both Federal Law and University Policy.





# *Course Expectations and Policies*

## *General Expectations for Students*

My priority is that class periods are productive learning experiences for all students. In order to foster this type of productive environment, I ask students to follow a few policies:

1. Arrive to class on time and stay for the entire class period.<sup>2</sup>
2. Silence *all* electronic devices before entering the classroom.
3. Do not engage in side conversations. This is disrespectful to the speaker (whether me or a classmate), and can affect the ability of others in the class to learn.
4. Be respectful of your fellow classmates. Do not interrupt when someone is speaking, monopolize the conversation, or belittle the ideas or opinions of others.
5. Complete the assigned readings for each class in advance, and come prepared with discussion points and questions.

<sup>2</sup> If you drive to campus, please get an on-campus parking pass for the semester or use a smartphone app to top off your meter. Leaving class to feed your meter is disruptive for both you and your classmates.

## *Course Content*

In this course, students will be required to read text and view materials that they may consider offensive or upsetting. Both *The Wire* and many of the readings for this course contain graphic images (both violent and sexual), coarse language, and discussions of sensitive issues that some students may find upsetting. The ideas expressed in these materials do not necessarily reflect my own views nor the views of the Department of Sociology & Anthropology or Saint Louis University. Course materials have been selected for their sociological relevance. They are meant to be examined in the context of intellectual inquiry of the sort encountered at the university level.<sup>3</sup>

If you find yourself unable to complete a particular reading or episode because of its content, please let me know as soon as possible. This class also covers topics that have a long history of divisiveness in the United States. Students can expect to confront viewpoints

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from the Saint Louis University Department of English's course content syllabi statement.

that they may disagree with or find contentious. I do not expect that students will always agree with each other, and I encourage healthy discussion and debate in class. However, I will insist that all such conversations be conducted respectfully.

### *Attendance and Participation*

Attendance and participation are important components of this course since it is a discussion-based seminar. Students are expected to attend all class sessions. Making up missed classes are your responsibility. Please email me if you will be missing class so that we can touch base about any assignments, and make sure to obtain notes from a classmate. If I use slides during a particular class I will post copies to the **Course Website**. However, you should note that I do not routinely use slides in the class and, when I do, my slides are intended only to serve as references. Please note that lectures and discussions cannot be recorded by any means (e.g. audio or video recordings, or photographs) without my permission.

### *Communication*

Email is my preferred method of communication. I dedicate time to email responses each workday, meaning that my response time is typically within 24 hours during the workweek. If you have not received a response from me after 48 hours (or by end of business on Monday if you emailed me over the weekend), please follow-up to ensure that your message did not get lost in the shuffle.

Please use your SLU email account when emailing me. All messages regarding course updates, assignments, and changes to the class schedule including cancellations will be sent to your SLU email account. It is imperative that you check your SLU email account regularly.

Please also ensure that all concerns or questions about your standing in the course are directed to me immediately. Inquires from parents, SLU staff members, and others will not be honored.

### *Electronic Devices*

During class periods, students are asked to refrain from using electronic devices (including cell phones) for activities not directly related to the course. For this class, I expect students to limit their use of electronic devices to accessing course readings and notes.

There is evidence that using electronic devices during lectures results in decreased retention of course content <sup>4</sup> and lower overall course performance.<sup>5</sup> Students who are not using a laptop but are in direct view of another student's laptop also have decreased performance in courses.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, students who take notes the "old fashioned way" have better performance on tests compared to students who take notes on laptops.<sup>7</sup>

I therefore ask students to be conscious of how they are using their devices, the ways such use impacts their own learning, and the effect that it may have on others around them. I reserve the right to alter this policy if electronic device use becomes problematic during the semester.

## Student Support

If you meet the eligibility requirements for **academic accommodations** through the Disability Services office (located within the Student Success Center), you should arrange to discuss your needs with me after the first class. All discussions of this nature are treated confidentially, and I will make every effort to work with you to come up with a plan for successfully completing the course requirements. Please note that I will not provide accommodations to students who are not working with Disability Services.<sup>8</sup>

If you are a **student-athlete** who is in-season, you should discuss your game schedule with me after the first class and share your travel letter with me as soon as you have a copy. You are reminded that games and tournaments are not excuses for failing to complete assignments, and that NCAA rules prohibit student-athletes from missing classes for practice. Low grades that jeopardize eligibility must be addressed immediately by you, not by a coach or academic coordinator.<sup>9</sup>

I also encourage you to take advantage of the **University Writing Services (UWS) program**. Getting feedback benefits writers at all skill levels and the quality of your writing will be reflected in assignment grades. The UWS has trained writing consultants who can help you improve the quality of your written work. UWS's consultants are available to address everything from brainstorming and developing ideas to crafting strong sentences and documenting sources.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Hembrooke, Helene and Geri Gay. 2003. "The Laptop and the Lecture: The Effects of Multitasking in Learning Environments". *Journal of Computing in Higher Education* 5(1): 46-64.

<sup>5</sup> Fried, Carrie. 2008. "In-class laptop use and its effects on student learning". *Computers & Education* 50(3): 906-914.

<sup>6</sup> Sana, Faria et al. 2013. "Laptop Multitasking Hinders Classroom Learning for Both Users and Nearby Peers". *Computers & Education* 62: 24-31.

<sup>7</sup> Mueller, Pam and Daniel Oppenheimer. 2014. "The Pen Is Mightier Than the Keyboard Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking". *Psychological Science* 25(6): 1159-1168.

<sup>8</sup> Additional details can be found on the Disability Services [website](#). You can contact them at [disability\\_services@slu.edu](mailto:disability_services@slu.edu) or 314-977-3484 to schedule an appointment.

<sup>9</sup> More information about resources and academic support for student-athletes can be found at the Student-Athlete Academic Support Services [website](#).

<sup>10</sup> More information on the UWS program can be found on their [website](#). The UWS program has a number of on-campus locations.

## Academic Honesty

All students should familiarize themselves with [Saint Louis University's policies](#) concerning cheating, plagiarism, and other academically dishonest practices:<sup>11</sup>

*Academic integrity is honest, truthful and responsible conduct in all academic endeavors. The mission of Saint Louis University is "the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity." Accordingly, all acts of falsehood demean and compromise the corporate endeavors of teaching, research, health care, and community service via which SLU embodies its mission. The University strives to prepare students for lives of personal and professional integrity, and therefore regards all breaches of academic integrity as matters of serious concern.*

Any work that is taken from another student, copied from printed material, or copied the internet without proper citation is expressly prohibited. All relevant assignments should include in-text citations and references formatted using the [American Sociological Association \(ASA\)](#) or the [American Psychological Association \(APA\)](#) style guidelines. Any student who is found to have been academically dishonest in their work risks failing both the assignment and this course.

## Title IX

All students should familiarize themselves with [Saint Louis University's policies](#) on bias, discrimination, and harassment:

*Saint Louis University and its faculty are committed to supporting our students and seeking an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. If you have encountered any form of sexual misconduct (e.g. sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, domestic or dating violence), we encourage you to report this to the University. If you speak with a faculty member about an incident of misconduct, that faculty member must notify SLU's Title IX Coordinator, Anna R. Kratky (DuBourg Hall, Room 36; [akratky@slu.edu](mailto:akratky@slu.edu)); 314-977-3886) and share the basic facts of your experience with her. The Title IX coordinator will then be available to assist you in understanding all of your options and in connecting you with all possible resources on and off campus.*

*If you wish to speak with a confidential source, you may contact the counselors at the University Counseling Center at 314-977-TALK.*

<sup>11</sup> This course is also governed by the College of Arts and Sciences' academic honesty policies, which are available on their [website](#).

Consistent with the above policy, I will forward all reports of inappropriate conduct to the Title IX Coordinator's office. Please also be aware that communications over various online systems, including (but not limited to) Google Classroom and Google Apps, are also covered by this policy.



# *Course Assignments and Grading*

## *Assignments*

### *Attendance and Participation (10%)*

As discussed above, both attendance and participation are important aspects of this class. The class participation grade will be based on (a) attendance, (b) overall quality of contributions to discussions, (c) occasional class “entry” and “exit tickets”, and (d) facilitating a weekly overview of *The Wire* (worth 5% of your final grade). This facilitation will include leading a discussion of the major plot elements of the week’s episodes. I will lead the first week’s overview to give you a sense of what facilitating requires, and I will post a grading rubric on the [Course Website](#). If you have difficulty speaking aloud in class, it is imperative that you discuss this with me early in the semester.

### *Ethnographic Assignment (5%)*

Each student will visit a local “landmark” - the Shell gas station located at 35 South Grand Boulevard (corner of South Grand and Forest Park Avenue). During their visit they will collect field notes and then synthesize them into a short paper (approximately 3 pages in length) describing their experiences and how they compare to the gas station’s reputation as “shady Shell”. Additional details and a grading rubric are available on the [Course Website](#). Field notes should be collected by **September 6<sup>th</sup>**; the assignment will be due in class on **September 11<sup>th</sup>**.

### *Census Data Assignment (5%)*

Each student will obtain census data on (a) the city of Baltimore, (b) the city of St. Louis, (c) the American city nearest to where you grew up, and (d) the Census Tract you grew up in. Detailed instructions, a list of questions to be answered, and a grading rubric will be provided on the [Course Website](#). This assignment will be due in class on **September 18<sup>th</sup>**.

*Pop Reading Notes (10%)*

Throughout the semester, I will collect copies of your reading notes for review. I will not announce beforehand that I am collecting notes, so it is imperative that you come prepared with reading notes to each class meeting. Pop reading notes *cannot* be handed in late. Additional details, an outline style structure for note taking, and a grading rubric are available on the [Course Website](#). Pop reading notes will be graded using the “check” grading system.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See *Grading* on page 18 for details on how this grading scale is applied.

*Response Papers (20%)*

Students are required to submit five response papers (approximately 3 pages in length) throughout the course of the semester. Your papers should connect the readings, lectures and episodes of *The Wire* from the previous week. These are not review papers; you should spend little to no space summarizing the readings or *The Wire*. Rather, you should draw analytic comparisons between the various aspects of the course and critique what you have read and seen.

Response papers are due on the Monday following the week that you are responding to. Weeks that are eligible for response papers are clearly indicated on the **Reading List**. At least three should be completed by **October 23<sup>rd</sup>**. The lowest grade of the five will be dropped if all five are submitted. If one or more response papers are not submitted, all five paper grades will be factored into your final grade. Additional details and a grading rubric are available on the [Course Website](#).

*Analytical Paper (15%)*

Each student will write a short essay (6-7 pages) analyzing a specific character from Seasons 1 or 2 of *The Wire* from a sociological perspective. The paper should analyze the character’s behavior, attitudes, social status, etc. using theories, ideas, and concepts discussed in class and the readings. In other words, you will explain how this character illustrates, challenges, and/or complicates what we have learned about urban inequality. Detailed instructions will be provided on the [Course Website](#). This assignment will be due on **November 13<sup>th</sup>**.

*Final Paper and Poster (35%)*

For the final assignment, students will select a topic related to urban inequality and produce a paper that includes: a) the relevant historical background for your topic, b) a summary of key theoretical and



empirical research related to the topic in question, c) a proposal for a policy or program designed to address that topic in St. Louis, d) and a discussion of how your proposed program is informed by the ideas from Fung and Wright (2003). Your discussion should emphasize the ways in which your program addresses the marginalization of groups in St. Louis and creates a more just and equitable community here. You will also need to create a research-style poster presenting both your topic and the program you are proposing. Detailed instructions will be provided on the [Course Website](#) under 'Assignments' and we will talk about this project in class as the semester progresses.

Students will be required to submit a brief memo identifying your topic and two to three key readings on **September 18th**. An annotated bibliography with *an additional* ten to fifteen readings will be due on **October 16th**. Drafts of the poster and paper will be due on **November 6th**. Each of these initial deliverables will be graded using the "check" system.<sup>13</sup> The poster presentation will be due in class on during our finals week session (Friday, **December 15th** from 8am until 9:50am) along with the final paper.

<sup>13</sup> See *Grading* on page 18 for details on how this grading scale is applied.

The final project deliverables' grades will be broken down the following way:

SOC 3220 Final Project				
Assignment	Weight	Points	Qty.	Total
Memo	1%	10 pts	x1	10 pts
Annotated Bib.	4%	40 pts	x1	40 pts
Draft Poster	4%	40 pts	x1	40 pts
Draft Paper	4%	40 pts	x1	40 pts
Final Poster	11%	110 pts	x1	110 pts
Final Paper	11%	110 pts	x1	110 pts
<i>Total</i>	35%			350 pts

Be advised that the poster represents an added cost to this course. Posters can be printed for \$0.80/inch (about \$30 for the size needed for this assignment) in the Instructional Media Center, located in the lower level of the Xavier Hall Annex.

### *Submission and Late Work*

Copies of all assignments should be submitted via the [Course Website](#) as a *Google Doc file* unless otherwise noted in the assignment instructions. The [Course Website](#) will have submission portals for each assignment. Create your file in Google Docs and then use the submission portal to submit the file. Once submitted, you will not be able to edit the file again until it is returned with feedback and a

grade. Feedback will be returned to students via comments embedded in each Google Doc.

For this course, the only exception to this policy is for the draft and final versions of your poster. These should be submitted via the appropriate portal on the [Course Website](#), but should be submitted as pdf files exported from either Microsoft PowerPoint or Apple Keynote.

The Google Doc submission policy is in place because it facilitates clear, easy grading that can be turned around to you quickly. Submitting assignments in ways that deviate from this policy will result in a late grade (see below) being applied in the first instance and a zero grade for each subsequent instance.

Once the class begins, any assignments shared will be treated as late. Assignments shared within 24-hours of the beginning of class will have 15% deducted from the grade. I will deduct 15% per day for the next two 24-hour periods that assignments are late; after 72-hours, I will not accept late work.<sup>14</sup> If you cannot attend class because of personal illness, a family issue, jury duty, an athletic match, or a religious observance, you must contact me beforehand to discuss alternate submission of work.

<sup>14</sup> These periods begin at 11:00am each day. All assignments must be turned in by 11:00am on the third day after they are due to receive partial credit.

### *Extra Credit*

From time to time I may offer extra credit to be applied to your final grade. I will only offer extra credit if it is open to the entire class (typically for something like attending a lecture or event on-campus). If I offer extra credit, I will typically require you to submit a short written summary of the activity within a week of the event to obtain the credit. When offered, extra credit opportunities cannot be made-up or substituted if you are unable to attend the event.

### *Grading*

Grades will be included with assignment feedback and will also be made available through Blackboard's Grade Center.<sup>15</sup> The Grade Center will be updated regularly. It will reflect the grades in my grade book that your midterm and final grades are based on. If you notice any inconsistencies between the grade returned with an assignment and what appears in the Grade Center, please let me know immediately.

All grades that use a "check" system (the memo, annotated bibliography, draft poster, and draft paper) will be calculated using the

<sup>15</sup> This is the only official use of Blackboard for this course.

following approach unless otherwise noted. A “check-plus” represents excellent work and will get full credit. A “check” represents satisfactory work and will get 85% of the points available for that assignment. A “check-minus” represents work that needs substantial improvement and will get 75% of the points available for that assignment.

I use a point system for calculating grades. The following table gives the weighting and final point totals for all assignments for this course:

Assignment	Grading Point System			
	Weight	Points	Qty.	Total
Attendance	10%	100 points	x1	100 points
Ethnography	5%	50 points	x1	50 points
Census Data	5%	50 points	x1	50 points
Pop Reading Notes	10%	10 points	x10	100 points
Response Papers	20%	50 points	x4	200 points
Analytical Paper	15%	150 points	x1	150 points
Final Project	35%	350 points	x1	350 points
<i>Total</i>	100%			1,000 pts

Note that this table assumes all five response papers are turned in.<sup>16</sup>

I will return assignments with grades that represent number of points earned. If you want to know your percentage on a particular assignment, divide the number of points earned by the number of points possible and then multiple it by 100.

Final grades will be calculated by taking the sum of all points earned and dividing it by the total number of points possible (1,000). This will be multiplied by 100 and then converted to a letter grade using the following table:

Grade Point	Final Grading Scale	
	Letter	Percentage
4.0	A	93.0-100
3.7	A-	90.0-92.9
3.3	B+	87.0-89.9
3.0	B	83.0-86.9
2.7	B-	80.0-82.9
2.3	C+	77.0-79.9
2.0	C	73.0-76.9
1.7	C-	70.0-72.9
1.0	D	63.0-69.9
0.0	F	< 63.0

<sup>16</sup> If you only turn four response papers in, each response paper will be worth 40 points and a zero will be entered for one of the papers. Point totals for each assignment will be re-weighted to give you the same ratio of points you earned out of 50, but out of 40 instead.

No chances will be given for revisions of poor grades. Incomplete grades will be given upon request only if you have a "C" average and have completed at least two-thirds of the assignments. You should note that incomplete grades must be rectified by the specified deadline or they convert to an "F".

# Course Schedule

## Course Overview

Week	Monday Date	Topics
1	August 28 <sup>th</sup>	Course Introduction
2	September 4 <sup>th</sup>	The Urban Imagination
3	September 11 <sup>th</sup>	Institutions and Inequality
4	September 18 <sup>th</sup>	Race and Poverty
5	September 25 <sup>th</sup>	Police and Social Control
6	October 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Experiencing “The Game”
7	October 9 <sup>th</sup>	Deindustrialization
8	October 16 <sup>th</sup>	When Work Disappears
9	October 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Off the Books: Illegal Labor
10	October 30 <sup>th</sup>	Ghettos & Gentrification
11	November 6 <sup>th</sup>	Housing & Discrimination
12	November 13 <sup>th</sup>	Substance Use & Abuse
13	November 20 <sup>th</sup>	Death & Isolation (1)
14	November 27 <sup>th</sup>	Death & Isolation (2)
15	December 4 <sup>th</sup>	Urban Utopias
16	December 11 <sup>th</sup>	Course Conclusion

## Reading List

Please consult the stand-alone **Reading List** document for details on readings and assignments for each week.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> All course documents including the **Reading List** are available on the [Course Website](#).

## Scheduling Notes

The weekly schedule may change as it depends on the progress of the class. However, you must keep up with the reading assignments. In the event of a cancellation due to weather or another disruption, I may alter the weekly schedule.