

**INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL ECONOMY**  
**Society, Space, and Transformation in the San Francisco Bay Area**

**Instructor Information:**

Mary Shi  
Email: mary.shi@berkeley.edu  
Mailbox: 410 Barrows Hall

**Seminar Times and Location:**

F 10:00am -12:00pm  
Barrows 104

**Office Hours:** F 2:00pm and by appointment

Drop-in, until last student leaves  
Location: Caffè Strada

**Course Overview:**

How does the organization of economic production and exchange affect other areas of social life? And how is the economy itself a socially embedded institution? As residents of the Bay Area, we are experiencing the ongoing, global transformation of capitalism from a particularly privileged vantage point. From urban restructuring to precarious work to neoliberal self-governance, reverberations of the emerging knowledge economy are visible throughout our everyday lives. This course has two main goals: (1) to give students an introduction to a sociological perspective on political economy; and (2) to challenge students to critically interrogate their own lived experience in the Bay Area as a reflexive entry-point into larger political economic questions. To these ends, after using Marx, Polanyi, and Weber to lay a groundwork in classical political economy, this course will be organized around two themes—the production of space and the production of economic agents—as focused lenses into the literature and for student reflection.

**Course Design and Requirements:**

In addition to providing students with an introduction to political economy, the below course requirements are designed to help students hone their critical reading, writing, and oral communication skills. Students can expect timely feedback on all written assignments and to work with the instructor throughout the course towards writing their final paper. By the end of the course students should be able to (a) apply a range of political economic theories to analyze contemporary changes to the economy and society; (b) produce well-crafted, analytical writing; and (c) think critically about the relationship between individual experience and the social structure.

To meet the below requirements, students will need to complete the readings listed under each week of the syllabus. The reading load for each week will be kept relatively light (~50 pages/week) with the expectation that students read each text very closely. All readings will be made available online via bCourses or university e-book.

***Reading Responses (40%)***

Reading responses should both demonstrate a thorough reading of the texts and your initial *synthetic* efforts to digest said texts. Each response will be made up of two parts.

- The first part of your response (1 full page) should be structured around answering the guiding question provided for that week in the syllabus. Some weeks have multiple questions—you only have to answer one. Simple summarizations of the text are insufficient. Please provide evidence and citations for your answer from the texts. Reading response grades will be solely based on the quality of this first part of each response, although you are required to also do the second to receive credit.
- The second part of your response (up to 1 additional page) is your brief reaction memo. Students can use this space to say whatever they want about the readings. What particularly jumped out to you? What connections did you see to previous readings? What particularly frustrated you? Did anything you read resonate with something in your own life? Or were you completely lost and confused the entire way? The reaction memo is an opportunity for students to provide weekly feedback on the course, reflect on connections beyond the readings, and generate fodder for good classroom discussion.

Students are expected to submit at least **8 reading responses**, including a response for each week of the “Classics” section, although more submissions are encouraged. The final reading response grade will be calculated with the highest 8 grades from the entire semester. Reading responses will be graded according to a ✓+ / ✓ / ✓- system.

Reading responses are due for the week they are listed on the syllabus. No substitutions of questions will be permitted. Students should upload an electronic version of their response via bCourses by **12pm on the Thursday before class**. Reading responses should be double spaced with 1” margins and 12pt Times New Roman font.

***Seminar Participation (20%)***

In a seminar, the core of student learning occurs through discussion. The quality of each individual student’s participation will in aggregate determine the overall quality of the course. My role as instructor is to facilitate this process and create a generative space for each student to further both the internal dialogues they have with themselves and the material, as well as the external dialogue they have with their peers.

Your participation grade will reflect my evaluation of the effort you are making to actively process the course material. This will be based on your (1) quality of preparation for section, (2) verbal participation in discussions, (3) active listening, (4) conversations during office hours, and (5) regular attendance. Please see below for attendance policy

***Final Research Paper (40%)***

Students can focus on either exploring the intersection of political economy and the production of individuals or political economy and the transformation of space. These two

broad themes should be able to encompass a range of more specific questions, although other themes are allowable subject to instructor approval.

Final papers can either be *theoretically* or *empirically* oriented.

- An effective *theoretical* paper will engage one or more theorists in depth to (a) compare and contrast their underlying assumptions and discuss the implications of that analysis; *or* (b) synthesize multiple theorists to develop a more integrated understanding of some concept or empirical phenomenon (e.g. capitalism, neoliberalism, gentrification).
- An effective *empirical* paper will take one empirical phenomenon (e.g. Uber ride sharing, your own experience trying to enter the labor market with a university degree), situate that phenomenon in some theoretical context, and use those theoretical connections to discuss the broader implications of that particular phenomenon. Students are not expected to engage in systematic, new data collection although they should certainly consult the relevant secondary literature where appropriate. This empirical option effectively gives students the opportunity to write a focused auto-ethnography of some aspect of their lived experience, although they can also choose to write on a more distal phenomenon.

To help prepare for the final paper, students will:

- Meet with the instructor (5%) the week of March 11 or 18 to discuss potential final paper topics. To prepare for this meeting, students are required to upload a preparatory document to bCourses by **midnight of Sunday, March 10** that (a) identifies *at least* one research topic; (b) proposes 2-3 related research questions for that topic, and (c) presents a bibliography including at least 5 relevant, scholarly texts. Students may present up to 3 research topics, along with their respective research questions and bibliographies. Students are not expected to have exhaustively read any of the bibliographic materials they propose yet—this exercise is only meant to get students browsing the relevant scholarship.
- Prepare a rough draft of the introduction (5%) to their papers that will be workshopped in class on May 3rd. Documents must be uploaded to bCourses by **Thursday, May 2nd at 12pm**. Introductions (250-500 words) should include the paper's preliminary thesis statement and be accompanied with the full bibliography of the paper, not only what is cited in the introduction.

Final papers (30%) should be 15-20 pages, double spaced with 1" margins and 12pt Times New Roman font, inclusive of bibliography and exclusive of figures. Papers are to follow the norms of academic citation. Papers should be uploaded to bCourses and submitted via hardcopy to the instructor's mailbox in Barrows by **Monday, May 13th at 2pm**.

### **Classroom Expectations and Guidelines**

Students are expected to arrive on time, having prepared for discussion by thoughtfully completing the readings and being ready to participate. All students are expected to engage in a thoughtful and respectful manner with one another. This includes monitoring themselves to ensure no one student holds the floor too long or dominates the discussion.

*Laptops and cellphones are not permitted in class.* Please bring hardcopies of all texts to class as you will be expected to reference the text throughout the discussion.

### **Attendance Policy**

Students are allowed one unexcused absence, no questions asked. All excused absences require documentation verifying the specific circumstances. Unexcused absences beyond the allowance will result in a grade deduction.

### **Late Policy**

Late assignments will be subject to a one-notch grade deduction for every day they are late (e.g. ✓+ to ✓, B+ to B).

### **Email Policy**

Email should be reserved for urgent issues or simple bureaucratic/logistical concerns. Please save substantive questions for class or office hours.

### **Academic Dishonesty**

Do not plagiarize under any circumstances. Plagiarism is the use of intellectual material produced by another person without properly citing its source. If you are unclear as to what constitutes plagiarism, you should immediately consult with me and/or review “Academic Honesty: A Guide for Students,” prepared by the Office of Student Life. Although students are encouraged to collaborate on reading responses all students are expected to submit their own written response, providing their best answer in their own words. Any instances of cheating will not be tolerated and be addressed promptly.

### **Accessibility and Inclusivity**

The closest gender neutral bathrooms are on the sixth floor of Barrows Hall. Students who have been issued a letter of accommodation from the Disabled Students Program (DSP) should contact me to ensure the necessary arrangements have been made. All students should feel free to contact me with other accessibility and/or inclusivity concerns.

## **WEEKLY SEMINAR READINGS AND THEMES**

### **Week 1 (January 25): Introductions**

Review syllabus, in-class introductions, schedule introductory office hours

## **PART I. CLASSICS**

### **Week 2 (February 1): Max Weber**

1. According to Weber, what are the preconditions for capitalism?

Weber, Max. 2011 [1905]. "Chapter 2." *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Stephen Kalberg, trans. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 76-98.

Weber, Max. 2013 [1922]. Sections 11 (main text only) and Section 13 from "Sociological Categories of Economic Action." *Economy and Society*. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press. 90-94, 107-109.

### **Week 3 (February 8): Karl Marx**

1. What is Marx's 'labor theory of value'? How does this compare to Weber's understanding of profit?

Marx, Karl. 1994 [1867]. Chapters 6, 7, and 26 from "Selections from Capital, vol 1." *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*. Lawrence H. Simon, ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. 264-297.

### **Week 4 (February 15): Karl Polanyi**

1. For Polanyi, what is the hallmark of modern capitalism? What are its origins and how do these compare to Weber and Marx's understandings of the origin of capitalism?

Polanyi, Karl. 1957 [1944]. "Chapter 5," "Chapter 6," and, "Chapter 12." *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Boston: Beacon Press. 56-76, 135-150

## **PART II. CONTEMPORARY TRENDS**

### **Week 5 (February 22): 'Classical' Industrial Production**

1. What were the conditions of 'classic' industrial production? How and why did they seem to be changing by midcentury America?

Schoenberger, Erica. 1988. "From Fordism to Flexible Accumulation: Technology, Competitive Strategies, and International Location." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 6: 245-262.

Bell, Daniel. 1976. "The Coming of the Post-Industrial Society." *Educational Forum* 40(4): 574-579.

### **Week 6 (March 1): The Knowledge Economy and the Decline of U.S. Manufacturing**

1. How is production different in the 'knowledge economy' than in mass manufacturing? What consequences emerge from these differences?
2. Would Marx consider manufacturing and knowledge based economies to be distinct

from one another? Do you agree?

Powell, Walter and Kaisa Snellman. 2004. "The Knowledge Economy." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30: 199-220.

Moretti, Enrico. 2012. "Chapter 2." *The New Geography of Jobs*. Boston: Mariner Books, Houghton Miffler Harcourt. 45-72.

### **Week 7 (March 8): Globalization, Financialization, and Neoliberalism**

\* *Final paper proposals and preliminary bibliographies due Sunday, March 10 at midnight via bCourses. Sign-ups for individual office hours over the next two weeks will be done in class.*

1. To what extent are recent changes in the economy and society the result of state initiatives, the result of technological change, or the result of culture? What would Polanyi say?
2. What is neoliberalism and how does it relate to financialization?

Fourcade-Gourinchas, Marion and Sarah L. Babb. 2002. "The Rebirth of the Liberal Creed: Paths to Neoliberalism in Four Countries." *American Journal of Sociology* 108(3): 533-579.

Krippner, Greta. 2011. "Introduction." *Capitalizing on Crisis*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1-26.

## **SECTION 1. THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE**

### **Week 8 (March 15): Urban Political Economy**

1. What is the role of space in social reproduction according to Harvey? What are the key determinants to the construction of space?

Harvey, David. 1985. "Chapter 5: Class Structure and the Theory of Residential Differentiation." *The Urbanization of Capital*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 109-124.

Logan, John R. and Harvey L. Molotch. 1987. "Introduction" and until 'Planning to Win' in "Chapter 5: How Government Matters." *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*. Berkeley: UC Press. 1-16, 147-179.

### **Week 9 (March 22): Economic Agglomerations and Spatial Differentiation**

1. What are the spatial consequences of the knowledge economy?

Sassen, Saskia. 2005. "The Global City: Introducing a Concept." *Brown Journal of Global Affairs* 11(2): 27-43.

Moretti, Enrico. 2012. "Introduction" and "Chapter 4." *The New Geography of Jobs*. Boston: Mariner Books, Houghton Miffler Harcourt. 1-18, 121-153.

**\*\*\* Spring Break \*\*\***

**Week 10 (April 5): Subprime Lending and Precarious Places**

1. 'Financial de-regulation transformed American cities while enrolling them in new, global relations of capital.' Discuss.
2. Is the destructive capacity of markets visible in this week's readings rooted in the same processes Polanyi described in his critique of fictitious commodities?

Chomsisengphet, Souphala and Anthony Pennington-Cross. 2006. "The Evolution of the Subprime Mortgage Market." *Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Review* 88(1): 31-56.  
Schafran, Alex. 2013. "Origins of an Urban Crisis: The Restructuring of the San Francisco Bay Area." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37(2): 663-88.  
Pani, Erica and Nancy Holman. 2014. "A Fetish and Fiction of Finance: Unraveling the Subprime Crisis." *Economic Geography* 90(2): 213-235.

**SECTION 2. THE PRODUCTION OF ECONOMIC SUBJECTS**

**Week 11 (April 12): Economy and Polity in the Formation of Subjects**

1. 'Different structures of economic organization presuppose different types of economic agents, and states take an active role in producing those agents.' Discuss.

Esping-Andersen, Gosta. 1990. "The Three Political Economies of the Welfare State." *International Journal of Sociology* 20(3): 92-123.  
Ferguson, James. 2010. "The Uses of Neoliberalism." *Antipode* 41(1): 166-184.

**Week 12: (April 19): Flexibilization and Precarity in the New Economy**

1. How would Marx, Weber, and Polanyi understand the rise of flexible work? Pick at least two to discuss.

Kalleberg, Arne. 2009. "Precarious Work, Insecure Workers: Employment Relations in Transition." *American Sociological Review* 74(1): 1-22.  
Smith, Vicki. 2010. "Enhancing Employability: Human, Cultural, and Social Capital in an Era of Turbulent Unpredictability." *Human Relations* 63(2): 279-303.

**Week 13 (April 26): New Technologies of Self**

- I. 'New technologies for more minute-monitoring of the self help/hurt us.' Take a stance and discuss.

Fourcade, Marion. 2017. "The Fly and the Cookie: Alignment and Unhinging in 21st-century Capitalism." *Socio-Economic Review* 15(3): 661-678

Schüll, Natasha. 2016. "Data for Life: Wearable Technology and the Design of Self-care." *BioSocieties* 11(1): 1-17.

**Week 14 (May 3): Student Workshopping of Final Papers**

\* *Paper introductions and full bibliographies due Thursday, May 2 at 12pm via bCourses*

**\*\*\* RRR Week \*\*\***

*Students are encouraged to meet individually with the instructor to discuss final papers.*

**Final Papers Due:** May 13th at 2pm, online and hardcopy in mailbox