Social Networks & Society

Sociology 167S
Summer 2019

Seminar, Classes meet Tuesday and Thursday at 10:30-12:20 AM

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Office hours: After classes and by appointment

Course Description

The well-known “It is not what you know, but who you know.” saying captures nicely the importance of social networks in one’s life chances. Nevertheless, this course aims to go beyond such commonsensical yet significant insights on social connections. Our immediate social ties reveal just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the significance of social networks: one’s position in the larger social network as well as the type of that network and its features are influential in explaining many outcomes. Moreover, social networks are key forces and conduits that shape not only individuals but also society at large. From revolutions and collective action to epidemics of contagious diseases, from market outcomes of innovative products to culture wars, social networks have profound impacts on societal outcomes. Social media—which is only one among many examples of social networks in action—is transforming our society in unprecedented ways that we have not yet fully grasped. In sum, this class explores how social networks shape society via their impacts on individuals, institutions, and structures as well as how social networks are influenced by them.

Social networks is a rich field of interdisciplinary inquiry, drawing from and contributing to diverse fields such as physics, mathematics, computer science, economics, epidemiology, sociology, and anthropology. Nevertheless, we will mostly stay on the realm of sociology, with a particular emphasis on how social networks affect society. Hence, while we will familiarize ourselves with some methodological techniques to analyze basic social network data, we will not master them; such courses usually go under the name of Social Network Analyses (SNA).

We will start the class with the basics of networks and discuss how studies of social networks illuminate our understanding of society. We will continue with familiarizing ourselves with key network concepts, measures, processes, and analyses. As the course unfolds, we will be exploring how social networks emerge and evolve over time, and interact with society in the contexts of substantive areas and issues of inequality, politics, culture, and health. As we cover the different topic areas, we will also explore methods relevant to research in these areas. Finally, we will conclude the term arming ourselves with thinking of social networks as a theoretical lens onto society.
There are no prerequisites for this course. All of the reading materials will be available on the course website. For network visualization and analysis, we will use a network software, *Gephi*, and there will be instructions on how to download and use it on the course website. Nevertheless, it is not mandatory and students are welcome to try out and use another network software as well if they feel more comfortable other software.

**Course Requirements**

*Participation: 20%*
This is a seminar and not a lecture class, hence your participation is key. Participation consists of not only attendance but also demonstration of familiarity with the assigned readings and active engagement in class discussions. Note that there are no unexcused absences allowed in the summer school, and such absences shall be reported.

*Reading responses: 10%*
These should be around half-page discussions of the readings of each class, articulating concisely what the reader learnt from reading them. Additionally, the students should raise at least 2 discussion questions that cut across all readings. Reading responses are due at 11:59 PM of the day before each class.

*Weekly assignments: 10%*
Weekly assignments will cover the technical aspects of social network analysis. These will require the use of network software *Gephi*. Assignments are due 11:59 PM of each Monday.

*Final project proposal: 20%*
The final project proposal is due at the midterm, 11:59 PM of the third Wednesday. It must clearly articulate a research question, outline a research design showing how to tackle the research question, and a discussion of potential network data source. The students will receive feedback regarding the feasibility of their project, which is key for a successful final paper.

*Final paper: 40%*
The final paper consists of writing up a research project on the effect of social networks on society. Components of the paper include i) identifying and describing a compelling and relevant research question; ii) locating a relevant network data source and/or collecting network data, analyzing the network data; iii) interpreting the results, and situating the interpretation, analysis and question in the broader literature on social networks and social phenomenon.
Academic Integrity

Plagiarism, cheating and other forms of academic dishonesty are unacceptable and will not be tolerated. We will strictly follow the standards of Yale College concerning academic integrity, and we shall report all suspected behavior. Please check out the below websites and familiarize yourself with the university’s policy on academic integrity and guidance on how to avoid plagiarism.

- http://catalog.yale.edu/undergraduate-regulations/policies/definitions-plagiarism-cheating/
- https://ctl.yale.edu/writing/wr-instructor-resources/addressing-academic-integrity-and-plagiarism

If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or academic dishonesty, we are happy to discuss them with you.

Course Schedule

Week 1a: Introduction: “What is a social network? Why should we care about it?”

Recommended reading:

Week 1b: Emergence and Evolution of Social Networks

Recommended readings:
Week 2a: Centrality, Groups, and Embeddedness

*Recommended reading:*

Week 2b: Role structures, Multiplex Ties, and Blockmodeling

Week 3a: Diffusion and Influence

*Recommended reading:*
- Kadushin, Charles. “Networks, Influence, and Diffusion” *Understanding Social Networks*
# Week 3b: Networks and Inequality


# Week 4a: Networks and Culture


# Week 4b: Networks and Politics


**Recommended readings:**

Week 5a: Networks and Health


Week 5b: Social Networks as Theory


Recommended reading: