Syllabus

Community Studies and Action
ELEC-GG 2718-001
Fall 2014
Wednesdays 6:20-8:40
1 Washington Place, Room 601

David Moore, instructor
Gallatin School, New York University
Office: 1 Washington Place, #408
212-998-7328
david.moore@nyu.edu
Office hours: Tuesdays and Wednesdays 2:30-4, preferably by appointment

Overview

The concept of community, one of the core ideas in social thought, conjures up many different images: towns and residential neighborhoods (Bronxville, the Lower East Side); work groups, professions and academic disciplines (the claims team, the medical community); major social institutions (the university, the church); racial, ethnic, and religious groups (African Americans, Basques, American Muslims); and other interest groups (environmentalists, business people). Thinkers from Aristotle to John Winthrop to Robert Putnam have invoked the idea; so have social activists from Thomas Jefferson to Saul Alinsky and Cesar Chavez (not to mention Barack Obama!). In the last hundred years or so, some social commentators have argued that community as a form of social life is threatened and disappearing; others find it surviving, even thriving, though perhaps in a transformed condition.

The primary function of this course is to explore the some of the ways the phenomenon of community has been studied, explained, and theorized in various academic disciplines. In a more general sense, our purpose is to grapple with the ways a “single” phenomenon—or at least a single term—can be investigated from a variety of conceptual and theoretical perspectives. As we will see, different scholars define the phenomenon differently; they ask different questions about it; they use different methods to study it; and they reach different conclusions about how it works. So the course operates both at the particular level of the problem of community and at the general level of social theorizing; you should come out of it understanding both the nature of various forms of community and the implications of some paradigms of social inquiry. For those of you interested in community as an arena for social practice, the course will spend some time on the ways these perspectives lead to different kinds of action. Please be clear, however: The course is not about training community organizers or activists; it will touch on how some forms of practice imply certain theoretical premises, but don’t expect to learn action strategies or tactics.

The course will address such questions as these:
* What do we actually *mean* by the term “community”? What do we mean to *do* when we use it? Do the various forms of community have core features in common, or is the term (sloppily, counter-productively) used to refer to very different phenomena?

* What kind of *thing* is it? Is it a social group, an idea, a symbol, a discourse? For that matter, what kinds of “things” can social scientists study? What sorts of purposes do they try to accomplish? What kinds of assumptions and premises do they work from? We will be thinking about such different approaches as positivism, interpretivism, constructionism, structuralism and post-structuralism, considering the things each of those perspectives is good for—or not.

* What are the *conditions* under which communities arise and flourish? What are the factors—social, cultural, economic, political—that contribute to their health or demise? When, how, and in what sense do they change? When do they wither and how do they die? Has community actually disappeared from modern (or post-modern) life? If so, is that a good thing or a bad thing? Has anything come to replace community?

* What *impact* does community (or the lack of it) have on the lives of individuals and groups? Is that impact positive or negative, healthy or confining?

In addition to this focus on the problem of community, we will spend a good deal of time reflecting on the process of theorizing about social phenomena: on the logic of inquiry across traditional disciplinary boundaries; on the assortment of methods appropriate to that study; on strategies for defining and pursuing your own thematic concerns. The class may help you construct an effective plan for clarifying and pursuing your concentration, and even begin to think about the nature of a possible thesis.

**Process and structure**

Because of this dual character—because of our focus on the *substance* of the community problem and on the nature of *perspectives* on inquiry—this course will be highly participatory. That is, much of the specific work we do together (and individually) will emerge from the particular concerns of the members of the class. My strategy will be to prime the proverbial pump with a set of general readings about the idea of community, and then to call on students for interpretations and analyses of the issues that matter to them most. That means that I count on you to express your core interests, to raise important questions, to invest yourself in the course. It would even be great if you could suggest appropriate readings for the class, or at least for yourself.

The structure of the course—which could change if enough people make a solid proposal—has a few elements. The basic structure, between the Introduction and the Wrap-up, is organized around investigations of several perspectives on the concept of community: traditional sociology (the human ecology of the Chicago School, studies of particular localities, structural-functionalism, neighborhood effects research); community psychology (and the notion of Psychological Sense of Community); the symbolic turn in anthropology and cultural studies;
the idea of community of practice; and several postmodernist approaches. Throughout, we will
be examining several (loosely defined) types of community: the community of locality (the
neighborhood, town, etc.); the community of interest (race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation,
activity, consumption, etc.); and postmodern community (a term we’ll get to know better).

In addition, because I will be in Australia from September 27 until October 10, I have asked two
of my colleagues to meet with you while I am away. Both are not only outstanding scholars,
but important activists in community-building of different sorts. Gianpaolo Baiocchi will talk
with you about his work with participatory budgeting and the notion of civic imagination. Steve
Duncombe will explore his work in creative activism, which draws on the arts and on out-of-the-
box thinking to generate and sustain community and achieve political goals.

Much of the course, then, will be structured as a true seminar, an opportunity for students
to present their thoughts about concepts, issues and theories. You will offer critiques of the
readings; you will identify and pursue lines of inquiry relevant to your own concerns; you may
collaborate with other students on projects and investigations. The class will succeed on the
foundation of your active participation.

Assignments

There are three kinds of assignments during the semester beyond the common and optional
readings; these may be altered if the group figures out something more productive:

First, you will write periodic response papers on the course’s Classes site; this medium will
provide us a platform for an ongoing conversation between classes. On six to eight occasions, I
will post guiding questions about the readings, the discussions, and so on; some of the prompts
will be fairly specific and directive (e.g., summarize your understanding and critique of a
particular theory or approach), while others will leave plenty of room for divergent thoughts.
You will post responses to those questions (cf. 500 words) by 3 pm on the Tuesday before the
related class session (so members of the class have time to read them). NB: These response
papers will not receive letter grades, but will contribute to your final grade on the basis of their
punctuality and their thoughtfulness; these criteria are not about “correctness,” but about the
contribution the comments make to the class conversation (by raising questions, offering new
perspectives, challenging assumptions, etc.).

You will write one formal paper: The paper will be a case study of a community of your
choice and conception, utilizing a theoretical and methodological perspective of your devising.
(NB: The selected community may be of any empirically observable sort: locality, interest,
postmodern, etc.; that is, it could be a place like Bushwick, an interest group like a professional
association, or a postmodern phenomenon like the Twitter followers of a celebrity.) You will
select the specific community by the third week of class; your investigation will take shape—
both conceptually and empirically—over succeeding weeks. Length: ca. 15-20 pages. Due 5 pm,
Wednesday, December 10, delivered by email to david.moore@nyu.edu.
Finally, you will do a presentation to the class during either session 12 or session 14. The core of the presentation will be the case study you’re doing for the final paper, but the form and content will vary across students. Some will focus on the theoretical foundations of the study, showing how certain ideas worked (or did not) in describing and explaining some aspect of the community; others will highlight modes of action in the community, and analyze the underlying assumptions and theories driving strategy; some may raise issues or perspectives that we have not addressed in class (e.g., the relation of space and place to community, or the varieties of political theory underlying communitarianism). The presentation formats may range from PowerPoint lectures followed by Q&A sessions to simulation exercises to debates to video productions. We will discuss the options in class, including the possibility of collaborative presentations by small groups of students.

**Expectations and standards**

Students in this class will be expected to honor several principles that will make the enterprise more satisfying and substantial; your performance on these various dimensions will contribute to your final grade:

$ Attend class regularly and punctually. Please be ready to start at 6:20, and to stay until the end of class; do not disrupt the conversation by arriving late or leaving early. If you miss sessions (in whole or in part), you obviously cannot learn from them. Please let me know in advance if you have a serious emergency and cannot attend a session; do not schedule professional, medical, academic or other appointments during class time.

$ Do the reading and writing assignments on time, by the sessions when they will be discussed. Participation will be very difficult—and largely useless—unless you have completed the work.

$ Participate effectively in class activities—discussions (both in-class and online), small group exercises, presentations. We need the input of everyone in the class to make this a rich experience. During discussions, show respect for your classmates: Disagree and debate, but don’t attack; contribute, but don’t dominate. Make suggestions for process and content; give feedback at appropriate times. Participate productively in small group activities: do your share of the work, support other members.

$ Use electronics appropriately: During class, you may use a laptop, iPad, or other electronic device for taking notes, pulling up readings or other class resources, or, on rare occasions, looking up information online at my request, but not for surfing the internet, checking your email or Facebook, playing games, or other non-class activities. Please turn off your cellphones for the duration of the class; you may not make or take calls or texts; don’t distract yourself or other members of the class by checking your devices.

Grades will be based on the various aspects of students’ work in the course. The weight of each factor may vary somewhat depending on the student’s focus and style:
Regular and punctual attendance (20%)
Quantity and quality of participation in and contribution to discussions, timely submission of response papers (20%)
Quality of the papers: shorter (20%); longer (30%)
Quality of the presentation (10%)

The criteria for the grades will focus on the student’s effort and ability to go beyond the basic expectations of doing and understanding the assigned work (NB: I will distribute rubrics describing the standards for the papers and presentations, for participation, and more generally, and we will discuss those standards in class):

The student who earns an A will not only come regularly (that is, miss not more than one class), participate actively and constructively, and demonstrate in her writing a solid understanding of the ideas, problems and theories discussed in class and in the readings; she will also contribute additional ideas based on other readings and/or on empirical work in one or more communities—that is, she will do independent work to flesh out and extend the common assignments, showing insight, creativity and extra effort; merely using ideas and materials from the syllabus and the classes will not warrant an A;

The student who earns a B will show a solid grasp of the materials and ideas, but not make an original contribution or draw on sources beyond the syllabus; she will also participate regularly and effectively in discussions;

The student who participates inadequately (misses classes, doesn’t take part in face-to-face or online discussions, etc.) and who displays a shaky understanding of the basic themes and ideas of the course will receive a C or below.

NYU Classes

In this course, we will use NYU Classes, an online site that will do several things:

contain the latest version of the syllabus;
provide access to online versions of many of the readings (through pdf files and through links to external sites);
provide a vehicle for asynchronous discussions of class issues and ideas; post students’ response papers;
offer a space for special announcements.

Be sure to check the Classes site regularly—at least before every class—so you can post and read reactions and questions, get access to resources, and find out about changes in the syllabus.

Book purchases and other readings
You will need to purchase the following text at the NYU Bookstore on Broadway (or through amazon.com, bn.com, or another bookseller). The other required readings will be available on the course Classes site in .pdf format or through links. Be sure to acquire all these materials early enough so that you have time to complete the readings before the related discussions.


**Academic Integrity**

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website (http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html) for a full description of the academic integrity policy. You are responsible for knowing and following these standards; ignorance is not an excuse.
Schedule/Themes/Assignments
NB: This schedule is open to change, depending on students’ interests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 9/3</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Course content and strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student backgrounds and interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 9/10</td>
<td>The history of approaches: an overview</td>
<td>Delanty: Introduction, Chaps. 1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Blackshaw: pp. 1-48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 9/17</td>
<td>Classic community studies</td>
<td>Choose one, prepare report:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lynds, <em>Middletown</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Zorbaugh, <em>Gold Coast and the Slum</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lynds, <em>Middletown in Transition</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dollard, <em>Caste and Class in a Southern Town</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Warner, <em>Yankee City</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Whyte, <em>Street Corner Society</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Seeley et al., <em>Crestwood Heights</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vidich and Bensman, <em>Small Town in Mass Society</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gans, <em>The Urban Villagers</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wylie, <em>Village in the Vaucluse</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Liebow, <em>Tally’s Corner</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gans, <em>The Levittowners</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 9/24</td>
<td>Neighborhood effects research</td>
<td>Sampson, <em>Great American City</em>, Parts 1 and 2, selections from rest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. 10/1</td>
<td>Conceptions of community action</td>
<td>Baiocchi et al., <em>The Civic Imagination</em>, Chaps. 1-7 (all)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guest: Gianpaolo Baiocchi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. 10/8</td>
<td>Forms of community action</td>
<td>Duncombe, <em>Dream</em>, Chaps. 1, 3, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guest: Steve Duncombe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Reading Material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 7. 10/15   | Psychological sense of community               | Macmillan and Chavis, “Sense of community”  
Bess et al., “PSOC: Theory . . .” (3-22)  
Sigmon et al., “Psychological home” (25-41)  
Hillier, “Presumptive planning” (43-67)  
Choose one:  
Mahan et al., “SOC in a university setting” (123-139)  
Miers and Fisher, “Being church and community” (141-159)  
Bateman, “SOC in the school” (161-179) |
| 8. 10/22   | Symbolic conceptions of community              | Cohen, *Symbolic Construction of Community*, all |
| 10. 11/5   | Community at work                              | Wenger, *Cultivating Communities of Practice*, Chaps. 1-3; dip into others       |
| 9. 10/29   | Place and identity: a postmodern version       | Jackson, *HarlemWorld*, Introduction, Chaps. 1, 5; dip into others               |
| 11. 11/12  | Postmodern community: theory and examples      | Delanty, *Community*, Chaps. 7-9  
*Options*: Maffesoli; Bauman; Nancy (see bibliography) or  
*Choose a particular kind of postmodern community, read up on it* (e.g., virtual community; diaspora; community of disaster; the homeless) |
| 12. 11/19  | Presentations: Students 1                      | TBD                                                                              |
| 13. 11/26  | No class: Thanksgiving eve                      |                                                                                  |
| 14. 12/3   | Presentations: Students 2                      | TBD                                                                              |
| 15. 12/10  | Wrap-up                                        | Final paper due 5 pm via email                                                  |