

**SOCA 323
SOCIOLOGY OF RURAL LIFE**

MASTER SYLLABUS

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Overview

This course examines the status of rural people and places in the United States and prospects for improving well being. It is broadly divided into three parts:

Part 1 – The significance of “rural” in modern society

Here we ask fundamental questions about what distinguishes rural from urban social life in modern society. We explore popular images and stereotypes of rural people and places before turning our attention to alternative approaches to “rural” in social research and policy.

Part 2 – Population and economic changes in rural America

We begin by examining rural-urban population trends in global context. We then address the demographic and economic history of rural America, with an emphasis on the changing role of agriculture and extractive industries. Following this overview, we examine rural poverty.

Part 3 – Improving rural well-being

First, we explore alternative perspectives on the ability of communities to address their needs. We then look specifically at service delivery, with an emphasis on rural health. Lastly we examine a range of economic development alternatives, paying special attention to relationships with community development, education and training, and natural resource preservation and use.

A variety of course materials is used, including book excerpts, online resources, and film clips. By the end of this course, you should have the basic tools and analytical skills needed to:

- Think critically about meanings of “rural” and challenge stereotypes
- Identify the connections between the well-being of rural areas and that of the nation as a whole
- Identify relationships among structural changes at national and global levels, capacity for local action, and the well-being of rural residents

Procedures and Grading

Textbook

There is no required textbook for this course. All readings are available online either from the WVU Libraries’ electronic reserve system (files are labeled by author’s last name) or from other sources as specified on the course schedule. Instructions for accessing E-RESERVES will be provided in class. Complete citations are included with each reading.

Class format, attendance, and participation

You will maximize your chances of success in this class if you attend regularly and keep up with the assignments. To emphasize the importance of attendance, I offer opportunities to earn extra credit on randomly chosen class periods. No additional extra credit will be offered.

Lectures are designed to provide “big picture” context to the readings and highlight key concepts and their application. Class participation is strongly encouraged, both in the form of discussion and in-class exercises. If you miss a class, you are responsible for obtaining announcements and notes from a classmate. I will then be happy to discuss the material with you during office hours.

Assignments and exams

Readings

All reading assignments are listed on the class schedule in relation to the date we will discuss them. You are expected to complete the readings before class.

Short writing assignments

Local community study

In order to relate the course material to the reality of a local place, you will complete three assignments that involve collecting and interpreting information about a West Virginia community. Select any community EXCEPT those included in the Charleston, Huntington, Morgantown, Parkersburg, and Wheeling urbanized areas. More detailed instructions for each of these assignments will be provided in class.

1 – History of the community (2-3 pages)

When and why was the community settled? How has its population and economy changed over the years? Describe these changes in narrative form – you will add supporting data in the second assignment. You might start by searching Mountain Lynx for books on local history, which are typically organized by counties. You may also utilize historical references available online – *focusing on those from government or university sources.*

2 – Demographic and economic profile (5-6 pages including tables/charts)

In this paper you will expand your historical account by compiling data on population and economic changes over the past century. I will provide guidance during our computer lab session about how to utilize the Census Bureau’s web site and other data sources. Your report should include tables and/or charts that you create.

3 – Your thoughts on the community’s future (3-4 pages)

Based on the course material and everything you learned about the community in the first two assignments, write about your thoughts on its future. Since it is impossible to fully appreciate a place without going there and talking to residents, identify questions that you would ask community leaders and residents if you were to do such a study.

Reactions to newspaper articles

Find two newspaper or magazine articles related to two separate topics from the course schedule. For each one, write a **one-page** reaction paper that highlights connections to the course material. You may use articles from the Internet as long as they are associated with a newspaper or magazine. If you would like, use a database such as Lexis-Nexis to search for articles from major newspapers. Attach a copy of the article to your write-up that clearly identifies the source. You may turn in these assignments at any time, but no later than the last day of class.

Exams

There will be three exams in this course. Exams will consist of a combination of multiple choice and short answer questions. The final will emphasize material covered after the second exam, but will include questions that integrate key concepts from the entire semester. I will post study guides on E-RESERVES, which we will go through on the class period prior to each exam.

Late assignment and exam policy

Assignments must be turned in on the date due for full credit unless you have a verified emergency or university-sanctioned absence. I will deduct 25% of your earned points for each day (not class period) that they are turned in late. I will not accept assignments over e-mail without pre-approval.

Exams are to be taken in class on the date they are scheduled. Only students with verified emergencies/ absences are allowed to take a make-up exam without a penalty. All others who do not take the exam when scheduled will receive an automatic 10% deduction from their make-up score. All make-ups must be taken within 2-3 days of the scheduled exam except in special, pre-approved circumstances. If you do not contact me to make arrangements by the end of the day following the scheduled exam, you will receive a score of zero.

Grading

Grades will be determined as shown on the chart below. If your total score puts you within two points of a higher grade, I will consider class participation. Don't forget about extra credit! *Please keep your returned assignments and exams.* If you have any questions about your grades, you will be responsible for showing me the assignments/exams in question so that we can discuss them.

	Points	Weight		
Community study	80	25%	A	302+
History of the community (20 pts)			A-	292-301
Demographic/economic profile (30 pts)			B+	283-291
Future of community (30 pts)			B	270-282
Reactions to newspaper articles	20	6%	B-	260-269
(2 @ 10 pts each)			C+	250-259
Exams			C	237-249
Exam 1	75	23%	C-	228-236
Exam 2	75	23%	D+	218-227
Final exam	75	23%	D	205-217
			D-	195-204
TOTAL	325	100%	F	194 and below

Social justice

West Virginia University is committed to social justice. I concur with that commitment and expect to foster a learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation to participate in class, please see me to discuss these needs and make appropriate arrangements with Disability Services.

Class Schedule

PART I – THE SIGNIFICANCE OF “RURAL” IN MODERN SOCIETY

- Week 1** **Introduction**
- Course objectives, procedures, grading
 - Why study rural sociology?
- Popular images and stereotypes of rural people and places**
- Kellogg Foundation report: “Perceptions of Rural America” – download from: <http://www.ruralstrategies.org/issues/perceptions.html>
- Week 2** **RECESS (Martin Luther King, Jr. birthday) or popular images/stereotypes (cont.)**
- Historical perspectives: Rural and urban as societal types**
Introduction to persisting significance of rural and urban
- Macionis summary – “Urbanism as a Way of Life”
 - Laundra – Excerpt from: *Youth Gone Wild: Delinquency in Rural America*
- Week 3** **Persisting significance of rural and urban (continued)**
Official rural-urban classifications
- USDA Economic Research Service: “Measuring Rurality: What is Rural?” – go to: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/Rurality/WhatIsRural/index.htm>
- Social constructions of rural and urban**
- FILM and discussion: “Catskill Mountain Locals”
- PART 2 – POPULATION AND ECONOMIC CHANGES**
- Week 4** **Population change (including comparisons to international trends)**
- Giddens et al. summary – “Urbanization in the Developing World”
 - Johnson – “Unpredictable Directions of Rural Population Growth and Migration”
 - **Assignment 1 due**
- Computer lab session on utilizing online data access tools (Group 1)**
- Week 5** **Computer lab session on utilizing online data access tools (Group 2)**
- Changes in the rural economic base and relationships with population trends**
- USDA Economic Research Service: “Overview” and “Which Industries are Most Important in Rural America?” – go to: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/Industry/>
- Week 6** **Review session**
- EXAM 1**
- Week 7** **Rural poverty: Trends and alternative explanations**
- Jensen et al. – “Rural Poverty: The Persisting Challenge”
- Alternative explanations (continued), feature on welfare reform in rural America**
- Blakely et al. – “Lessons from the Mountain State”

PART 3 – IMPROVING RURAL WELL-BEING

Focus on the ability of communities to address their needs

- Week 8** **What is community? Is it on the decline in modern society?**
- Wilkinson – “Introduction: Studying the Community in Rural America” (Wilkinson2 on E-RESERVES)
 - Hobbs – pp. 385-396 from “Social Organization in the Countryside”
- Community power**
- Flora et al. – “Power in Communities”
- Week 9** **Community action and community development**
- Cable - “From Fussin’ to Organizing: Individual and Collective Resistance at Yellow Creek”
 - **Assignment 2 due**
- Rural social work practice**
- Davenport and Davenport – “Rural Social Work Overview”
- Week 10** **Rural health**
- Morton – “Rural Health Policy”
- Rural health (continued)**
- FILM and discussion: “The Oregon Story”
- Week 11** **Review session**
- EXAM 2**
- ### **Focus on economic development options**
- Week 12** **Overview: Prospects for rural economic development and relationships with community development**
- Education and training, introduction to school quality and consolidation**
- Gibbs – “Education as a Rural Development Strategy”- download from: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/AmberWaves/November05/Features/Education.htm>
- Week 13** **School quality and consolidation (continued)**
- Reynolds - “Decentering the Consolidation Debate”
- Conflicts over natural resource preservation and use**
- **Assignment 3 due**
- Week 14** **Natural resource conflicts (continued), applications to planning and “smart growth”**
- Egan and Luloff – “Exurban Migration: Implications for Forest Communities, Policies, and Practices”

Debates surrounding rural benefits of solid and hazardous waste treatment/storage

- Clayton et al. - "Landfills and West Virginia's Economic Development"

Week 15**Conclusions, rural policy**

- Swanson and Brown – "Challenges Become Opportunities: Trends and Policies Shaping the Future"

Review session for final exam

- Reactions to news articles due