

SOC 384:
SPECIAL TOPICS SEMINAR
THE SOCIOLOGY OF GUNS

Fall 2016, Tuesday/Thursday, 11:00 am-12:15 pm

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 12:30 pm - 1:30pm, and by appointment

INTRODUCTION

Guns often have a spectacular presence in the American imagination, from the Colt .45 “Peacemaker” to the Tommy Gun to George Zimmerman to Sandy Hook Elementary to the American sniper Chris Kyle. Guns are also a part of everyday life in communities across the country. They are used as tools of criminal violence and self-defense, and are one of the most commonly owned pieces of sporting equipment in the United States.

Clearly, guns are an important part of American society and culture. With more than 300,000,000 guns held by private citizens and a Constitutional amendment associated with gun ownership, the possession, regulation, meaning, and use of firearms reaches into important realms of American society, including: civil rights and liberties, identity and culture, crime and violence, public health and personal safety, and even sport and leisure.

This course explores the multifaceted role guns play in the U.S. from a sociological perspective. We will begin by developing a firm foundation of understanding the history and technology of firearms, as well as the historical and constitutional origins of the 2nd Amendment. We will then turn our attention to a range of topics, including: the prevalence and distribution of guns; lawful possession and use of firearms; illegal and legal gun markets; gun crime and injuries; and the varieties of responses to gun injuries and crime.

Throughout the semester, our efforts at understanding will be focused on *James Wright’s “Ten Essential Observations on Guns in America.”* We will engage and attempt to update this classic essay which is now just over 20 years old.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND ASSESSMENT

If you engage this course thoughtfully and with commitment, by the end of the semester you will achieve the following learning objectives:

Learning Objective	Method of Assessment
(1) Better understand the multifaceted role guns play in the U.S., including the history and legalities, and the everyday uses and abuses. Relatedly, you will be able to approach the issue of guns in society in a scholarly – that is, objective and nuanced – manner from a sociological perspective.	(1) Firearms Course Field Trip, Writing Assignment, Class Participation
(2) Better understand your personal beliefs about guns, including scrutinizing your own relationship to guns so as to make informed choices about your own participation with and the place of guns in the communities in which you live.	(2) Writing Assignment
(3) Have begun to develop an attitude and the tools necessary to cultivate your sociological imagination with respect to guns for the rest of your life.	(3) Writing Assignment
<p>There are also two <i>auxiliary objectives</i>, both of which are meant to help you develop basic skills which are facilitated by, but also transcend, this particular subject matter:</p> <p>(4a) To provide you an opportunity to develop your <i>reading skills</i> through actively engaging and struggling with difficult primary texts written by professional social scientists; and</p> <p>(4b) To provide you an opportunity to develop your <i>critical thinking skills</i> through grappling with complex and challenging ideas both orally and in writing.</p>	<p>(4a) Reading Responses (4a) Writing Assignment</p> <p>(4b) Lead Class Discussion, Class Participation, Presentation of Writing Assignment (4b) Writing Assignment</p>

COURSE REQUIREMENT SUMMARY

1. Class Participation (20%)
2. Reading Responses (10%)
3. Lead Class Discussion (10%)
4. Writing Assignment (3 parts totaling 50%)
5. Presentation of Writing Assignment at Class Symposium (10%)
6. Firearms Course Field Trip (Course Failure for Noncompletion)

COURSE GRADES

The scale for grades based on the number of points earned over the course of the semester is as follows:

A	94-100	B	84-86	C	74-76	D	64-66
A-	90-93	B-	80-83	C-	70-73	F	Less than 64
B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69		

DETAILED COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There are 100 points total to be earning in this course, broken down as follows:

[1] CLASS PARTICIPATION (20 points): As in life, in this class you do not get credit just for showing up (though that is a necessary precondition). To do well in this component of the course, you must participate thoughtfully and actively in our class discussions. *“Thoughtfully”* here means that your participation is based not only on your own opinions and experiences but on your careful consideration of the course materials. Therefore, reading and thinking about the course materials is a prerequisite of thoughtful participation. Of course, the sharing of personal opinions and experiences are important in a class like this, but participation that is limited to that is inadequate. *“Actively”* here does not mean constantly. It means that you are regularly involved in the course discussions, can be expected to contribute, and do not go mentally AWOL for periods at a time. *“Listening actively”* is not a form of participation in this class. If you are not comfortable speaking in group settings, then this is a wonderful developmental opportunity for you (in the same way that it is a wonderful developmental opportunity for people who do not like to read and write).

Grading criteria:

- Inactive (0-8): Present but inactive. Beyond inactivity, disrespectful behavior like using your cell phone or doing work for other classes will land you in this category.
- Lowest level (9-11 points): Present, not disruptive. Responds when called on but does not contribute proactively. Demonstrates infrequent involvement in discussion.
- Low middle (12-14 points): Demonstrates adequate preparation: knows basic reading facts, but does not show evidence of trying to interpret or analyze them. Offers straightforward information proactively, but without elaboration or very infrequently. Demonstrates sporadic involvement.
- High middle (15-17 points): Demonstrates good preparation: knows reading facts well, has thought through implications of them. Offers interpretations and analysis of course material (more than just facts) to class. Contributes well to discussion in an ongoing way: responds to other students' points, thinks through own points, questions others in a constructive way, offers and supports suggestions that may be counter to the majority opinion. Demonstrates consistent ongoing involvement.
- Highest level (18-20 points): Demonstrates excellent preparation. Offers analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of course material. Contributes in a very significant way to ongoing discussion: keeps analysis focused, responds very thoughtfully to other students' comments, suggests alternative ways of approaching material, etc. Demonstrates ongoing very active involvement.

[2] READING RESPONSES (10 points): Over the course of the semester you will write five responses that analyze and reflect on an assigned reading for that day's class. Each reading response should have two paragraphs as follows:

- The first paragraph should identify the most important point or sentence in the reading and explain your rationale for identifying it--why your selection is the most vital to the reading.
- The second paragraph should pose at least one question designed to get to the heart of the assigned reading and offer an explanation of why you think your question(s) are significant.

These reading responses are designed to encourage you to read the course material more carefully and analytically so that you will be better prepared for class lecture and discussion. Although your audience for these reading responses is your professor, your writing can be more informal. The key is to demonstrate to your audience (me) that you have seriously read and thought about the course material.

Logistics:

- Responses should be at least 350 words in length, Times New Roman 12pt font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins. No huge header is needed, just your name and the date.

- Printed responses are due at the start of each class. They will not be accepted by e-mail. They will not be accepted during or at the end of class. If I have begun teaching, it is too late. Sorry. Printers can be notoriously unreliable. Plan ahead!
- Only one response will be accepted per class and you must attend the class and hand the assignment in yourself (no exceptions for illness, travel, etc.). Plan accordingly.

Grading Criteria: Each entry will be evaluated as very acceptable (+2 points), marginally acceptable (+1 point), or unacceptable (0 points) based on the description above. Because there are 15 opportunities to do reading responses during the semester, if you receive 0 or 1 on a reading response, you can do another to make up for it. Although you cannot do more than 5 very acceptable reading responses for extra credit, I expect everyone to receive the full 10% for this component of your course grade.

[3] LEAD CLASS DISCUSSION (10 points): The ability to cultivate, organize, analyze, and present information is important in college and beyond. This assignment is designed to allow you to practice this ability and also help you to engage the course materials that will be integrated into your writing assignment.

Once during the semester, you will be responsible for making a 10 minute presentation to the class. The presentation will focus on some aspect of the course material for the day you are presenting, hopefully in relation to your developing writing assignment.

The presentation should cover at least the following:

- (a) the main argument of the specific part of the course reading material you are focusing on;
- (b) what is interesting and/or important about that material; and
- (c) the questions the material raises for discussion. The first two parts will be the core of your presentation and should lead logically to a set of 3-5 questions you will pose to the class for discussion.

You must meet with Professor Yamane in advance of your presentation (face-to-face or by email), and the questions you pose for part “c” must be emailed to everyone by 9pm the day before class.

In preparing your questions, please keep in mind the distinction between different types of questions. Some questions are what we can call *inauthentic* or “test” questions. These questions have a single or a very limited number of “right” answers. For example, “What is a semi-automatic rifle?” They are OK as a starting point for discussion, but they do not in themselves generate much discussion because they limit the range of appropriate responses. Better questions are what we can call *authentic* questions. These questions potentially have an unlimited number of good answers. For example, “Where did the term ‘assault rifle’ come from and how has it been used in debates over guns in America?” Because they are more open-ended, authentic questions will be better at generating the kind of discussions we want to have in class.

[4] WRITING ASSIGNMENT (50 points): Full details provided at the end of this syllabus (see pp. 12-14). Note that the assignment is broken down into several smaller parts, each of which contributes to the whole:

- Paper 1 (0 to -5 points)
- Annotated Bibliography (15 points)
- Paper 2 (25 points)
- Paper 3 (10 points)

[5] PRESENTATION OF WRITING ASSIGNMENT (10 points): In the final week of class, each student will have an opportunity to present the results of their inquiry into the role of guns in society to their fellow students in a sort-of “symposium.” Students will have 10 minutes to explain why they chose the topic they did, describe what the literature says (and doesn’t say) about the topic, and discuss key conclusions and limitations of the work. A grading rubric for these presentations will be provided later in the semester.

[6] FIREARMS COURSE FIELD TRIP: As noted on the POI contract, this course includes a mandatory off campus field trip to an Introduction to Firearms course. If FOR ANY REASON you cannot complete this part of the course requirements, you should drop the course or you will receive a failing grade for the semester.

IMPORTANT NOTES ABOUT CLASS

1. Mas vale prevenir que lamentar: It is better to *prevent* problems than to *lament* them once they occur. Similarly, it is easier to *prevent* problems than to *undo* them once they are done. So please be in touch with me early and often and as much as necessary. My door is always open to you.

2. Electronics in class: Because students have abused this privilege in the past, computers are *not allowed* at all in this class unless I specifically say so. Similarly, there is *absolutely no* use of cell phones, PDAs, or other communication devices allowed in class. If you need to send or receive a message from someone, please step out of class momentarily and do so. That is not a problem. Disrupting class and being disrespectful to your instructor and classmates is a problem. The solution to the problem is in your diminished class participation grade (see grading criteria above).

3. Electronic mail communication: I check my e-mail regularly and you are welcome to contact me by e-mail with questions or comments. However, please be aware that e-mail is not an appropriate medium for highly personal or confidential correspondence. Finally, because I may not immediately receive or reply to your messages, pressing issues should be handled in person.

4. Back-up your work: Computers fail. Suggested protections against catastrophes include: save your work to an external drive or email it to yourself after each working session or consider saving your work in “the cloud.”

6. On disabilities: According to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, individuals with a physical or mental impairment (“disability”) are entitled to equal access, integration and the provision of reasonable accommodation by federally-supported institutions like Wake Forest. The university is required to make “*academic adjustments*” for qualified disabled persons. These adjustments may include modifications to *academic requirements* as are necessary to ensure that such requirements do not discriminate against a qualified handicapped student. If these protections apply to you, or you think that they might apply to you, please contact the Learning Assistance Center (758-5929) within the first two (2) weeks of the semester.

COURSE READINGS

In addition to selected academic articles, newspaper reports, and other readings (outlined below) that will be included in a course reader that you will purchase from the professor, we will read the following texts in their entirety:

(1) Angela Stroud. (2016). *Good Guys with Guns: The Appeal and Consequences of Concealed Carry*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

(2) Winkler, Adam. (2011). *Gun Fight: The Battle over the Right to Bear Arms in America*. New York: W.W. Norton.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Although I will try not to add any work beyond what is specified in the syllabus, I reserve the right to modify the course schedule or content as necessary and appropriate to meet course goals.

* = Days on which you can do a reading response (maximum of one response per day)

WEEK OF . . .	TUESDAY	THURSDAY
[1] August 29	WHAT ARE FIREARMS AND HOW DO THEY WORK?	
	First Class; Overview, Introductions, Organization, Pay for Course Readers and Intro to Firearms Course	Read: James D. Wright, "Ten Essential Observations on Guns in America," <i>Society</i> (March/ April 1995) [R]
[*] September 3	<i>MANDATORY FIELD TRIP: Saturday, September 3rd at 1pm, car pool to "Introduction to firearms" course to learn about different types of firearms and how they work, and gun safety. Optional range time after. VFW Post, 698 Sanford Avenue, Mocksville, NC.</i>	
[2] September 5	GUNS IN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE	
	Wright Point 10 <u>Read:</u> Winkler, <i>Gunfight</i> (pp. 1-91)	NO CLASS Work on Paper 1
[*] September 9	<i>Paper 1 (Personal View of Guns) Due by 5:00 pm</i>	
[3] September 12	GUNS IN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE (CONT.)	
	Wright Point 10 <u>Read:</u> Winkler, <i>Gunfight</i> (pp. 95-179)	Wright Point 10 <u>Read:</u> Winkler, <i>Gunfight</i> (pp. 181-300)

[4] September 19	WHO OWNS HOW MANY GUNS AND WHY?	
	<p>Wright Points 1 and 2</p> <p><u>Read:</u> *Cook and Ludwig, "Guns in America: National Survey on Private Ownership of Firearms" [R]</p> <p>*Legault and Lizotte, "Caught in a Crossfire: Legal and Illegal Gun Ownership in America" [R]</p>	<p>Wright Point 3</p> <p><u>Read:</u> *Abigail Kohn, <i>Shooters: Myths and Realities of America's Gun Cultures</i> (pp. xvii-xi, 3-38). [R]</p>
[5] September 26	LEGAL GUN MARKETS	
	<p>Wright Points 5 and 8</p> <p><u>Read:</u> *Cook and Goss, <i>The Gun Debate</i>, "Manufacture and Marketing of Guns" (ch. 5, pp. 73-82) [R]</p> <p>Excerpts from "Firearms Commerce in the U.S. Annual Statistical Update, 2015" [R]</p> <p>Guest: Richard Talbert, Manager, Pro Shots Range</p>	<p>NO CLASS (PROFESSOR TRAVEL)</p>
[6] October 3	CONCEALED CARRY AND ARMED SELF-DEFENSE	
	<p>In-Class Guest: Harel Shapira</p> <p><u>Read:</u> *Norbert Elias, <i>The Civilizing Process</i> (pp. 52-60; 103-109; 363-379) [R]</p> <p>Extra Credit: Lecture by Harel Shapira (4:00-5:00pm)</p>	<p>Wright Point 4</p> <p><u>Read:</u> *Angela Stroud, <i>Good Guys with Guns: The Appeal and Consequences of Concealed Carry</i> (pp. 1-82)</p>
[7] October 10	SELF-DEFENSE GUN USE	
	<p>Wright Point 4</p> <p><u>Read:</u> *Angela Stroud, <i>Good Guys with Guns: The Appeal and Consequences of Concealed Carry</i> (pp. 83-159)</p>	<p>Wright Point 4</p> <p><u>Read:</u> *Hemenway and Solnick, "The Epidemiology of Self-Defense Gun Use: Evidence from the National Crime Victimization Surveys 2007-2011," <i>Preventive Medicine</i> [R]</p>

[8] October 17	ILLEGAL GUNS AND GUN MARKETS	
	<p>Wright Point 6</p> <p><u>Read:</u> *Bernard Harcourt, "Hell no, you can't jack that fool. He stays strapped. He's strapped all the time.' Talking about Guns at an All-Boy Correctional Facility in Tucson, Arizona" [R]</p> <p>Cook and Goss, <i>The Gun Debate</i>, "Manufacture and Marketing of Guns" (ch. 5, pp. 82-88) [R]</p>	<p>NO CLASS (FALL BREAK)</p>
[*] October 21	Annotated Bibliography Due by 5:00 pm	
[9] October 24	GUN VIOLENCE	
	<p>Wright Point 6</p> <p><u>Read:</u> Cook and Goss, <i>The Gun Debate</i>, "Costs of Gun Violence" (ch. 3, pp. 34-54) [R]</p> <p>*Miller, Azrael, and Hemenway, "Firearms and Violent Death in the United States," in <i>Reducing Gun Violence in America</i> [R]</p>	<p>Wright Points 3 and 6</p> <p>*Papachristos, Wildeman, and Roberto, "Tragic, But Not Random: The Social Contagion of Nonfatal Gunshot Injuries," <i>Social Science & Medicine</i> [R]</p> <p>*Doucet, D'Antonio-Del Rio, and Chauvin, "(Il)legal Guns and Homicide: A Case Study of New Orleans" [R]</p>
[10] October 31	MASS SHOOTING AND SUICIDE	
	<p>Wright Point 9</p> <p><u>Read:</u> *Fox and DeLateur, "Mass Shootings in America: Moving Beyond Newtown," <i>Homicide Studies</i> [R]</p> <p>*Lankford, "Race and Mass Murder in the United States: A Social and Behavioral Analysis," <i>Current Sociology</i> [R]</p>	<p>Wright Point 9</p> <p><u>Read:</u> *Miller, Barber, White, and Azrael, "Firearms and Suicide in the United States: Is Risk Independent of Underlying Suicidal Behavior?" <i>Am. J. of Epidemiology</i> [R]</p>

[11] November 7	<i>GUN CONTROL AND ATTITUDES TOWARD GUNS, FINALE</i>	
	<p><i>Wright Point 7</i></p> <p>Read: *Kleck, Kovandzic, and Bellows, "Does Gun Control Reduce Violent Crime?" [R]</p>	<p><i>Wright Point 7</i></p> <p>*Braga and Weisburd, "Focused Deterrence and the Prevention of Violent Gun Injuries: Practice, Theoretical Principles, and Scientific Evidence," <i>Ann. Rev. of Public Health</i> [R]</p>
[12] November 14	<i>FINAL PAPER WEEK</i>	
	<p><i>Wright Point 9</i></p> <p>Read: *Kahan and Braman, "More Statistics, Less Persuasion: A Cultural Theory of Gun-Risk Perceptions," <i>U. of Pennsylvania Law Review</i> [R]</p>	<p>Paper workshop (in class, voluntary)</p>
[*] November 18	<i>Paper 2 (Final Paper) Due by 5:00 pm</i>	
[13] November 21	<i>THANKSGIVING WEEK</i>	
	NO CLASS	NO CLASS
[14] November 28	<i>PROFESSOR CONFERENCE TRAVEL</i>	
	NO CLASS	NO CLASS
[15] December 5	<i>CLASS SYMPOSIUM ON GUNS IN SOCIETY</i>	
	<i>Symposium Presentations TBD</i>	<i>Symposium Presentations TBD</i>
[*] December 16	<i>Paper 3 (Revisiting the Question) Due</i>	

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

What Role Should and Do Guns Play in (American) Society?

Goal: This writing assignment is designed to help realize the two main learning objectives for this course: (1) Be able to approach the issue of guns in society in a scholarly – that is, objective and nuanced – manner from a sociological perspective; and (2) Better understand your personal beliefs about guns, including scrutinizing your own relationship to guns so as to make informed choices about your own participation with and the place of guns in the communities in which you live.

Means: To this end, this assignment asks you to answer the question: What role should and do guns play in (American) society? (You can choose to examine another society if you wish.) You will answer this question in three different papers written over the course of the semester. Although each of the three papers should be comprehensible in and of themselves, the second and third parts will follow from the previous part(s). In this sense, they are like three chapters of a single book.

Audience: Your audience for this paper/mini-book is people like yourself who are trying to understand for themselves the role of guns in society. Your role as a writer is to add your informed and developing opinion to the ongoing conversation about this issue.

Format: Each of the three papers should be in Times New Roman 12pt font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins and page numbers. Lengths and due dates vary for each part and are explained below and noted on the course schedule.

Grading Criteria: Specific grading rubrics for each part of the writing assignment will be provided.

Paper 1: What role *should* guns play in society?

Assignment: In this first paper, you will explain your *personal* view of the role guns *should* play in society.

The arguments you make in this paper should be based on your own personal experiences, ideas, and beliefs. Although you can and should use concrete examples to ground your argument, do not draw on research studies or other formal evidence to support your position.

Although you are discussing your own experiences and beliefs, you still need to *stake out some position on the issue. Where do you stand and why?*

Length: 500-1,000 words

Due Date: End of 2nd week of class

Grading: This paper will be evaluated as very acceptable (0 points), marginally acceptable (-2 to -3 points), or unacceptable (-5 points) based on whether the paper meets the requirements described above and demonstrates that the author seriously and thoughtfully completed the assignment.

Paper 2: What role *do* guns play in society?

Assignment: In this second paper, you will move beyond the personal view you articulated in your first paper to a more scholarly approach to the question of the role of guns in society. Here the question is not what role *should* guns play, but what role *do* guns play?

You will consider the role guns actually play in society by systematically engaging sociological theories and studies of one James Wright's "Ten Essential Observations on Guns in America." The observation you choose to investigate is your "topic" and your goal is to update Wright's observation by bringing systematic sociological evidence to bear on it.

Logistics: To help keep you on track to your eventual submission of a final paper, you will complete an annotated bibliography as an intermediate step in the writing process.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Central to your assessment of the role guns actually play in American society will be to review and synthesize existing sociological studies (the "literature") on your topic. As an intermediate step in the process of writing your paper, you will provide an annotated bibliography of the sources you are using. Your sources must be scholarly books and/or articles. Your bibliography should include a minimum of 10 scholarly books and/or articles, no more than three of which can be on our course syllabus.

Length: 100+ words of annotation for each item in bibliography

Due Date: End of 8th week of class

FINAL PAPER

In the final paper you submit you will explain the role that guns actually play in American society based on your reading of the existing sociological “literature” (published theories and research) on the topic you are investigating.

In addition to explaining what the existing literature says on your chosen topic, you should also develop your own perspective on it in dialogue with James Wright’s observation. For example, does the scholarly literature differ from Wright’s observation? Do gun politics have a corrupting influence on what is studied or how? Does the literature not come to a single, clear conclusion? If so, what should scholars be studying to rectify that situation?

Our class discussions, as well as discussing your thoughts with the instructor as you go along, will be helpful in developing your perspective.

Length: 2,000 +/- 500 words

Due Date: End of 12th week of class

Paper 3: Revisiting the question: What role *should* guns play in society?

Assignment: In this final paper, you will revisit your personal view of the role guns *should* play in society (Paper 1) in light of your consideration of the role guns actually do play in American society (Paper 2). Reflecting on what you learned in researching and writing Paper 2, discuss how your mind has (and/or has not) changed. *Where do you stand now and why?*

Although the instructor has read Papers 1 and 2, do not assume he can remember your specific arguments in reading Paper 3. As you address where you started and what you learned, make specific reference to the ideas in your previous papers. (Remember: This is Chapter 3 of your 3 chapter mini-book.)

Finally, conclude this paper by considering what more you need to know in order to make informed choices about your own participation with and the place of guns in the communities in which you live and will live in the future.

Length: 1,000 +/- 250 words

Due Date: Last day of final exam period.