

SOC 346: THE SOCIOLOGY OF GUNS

Fall 2020

Tuesday, 3:30-6:00 pm, 101 Kirby Hall

Instructor: David Yamane, Professor of Sociology

Contact Information: 004F Kirby Hall, 336/758-3260, yamaned@wfu.edu

Office Hours: Zoom 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 Parkland High School 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, including the prevalence and distribution of guns, lawful possession and use of firearms, gun crime and injuries, and a special topic of police use of force.



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, Major Writing Assignment and Presentation of 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) Field Trip Reflection Essay, Final Reflection Essay
(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) Major Writing Assignment, Class Participation

COURSE REQUIREMENT SUMMARY

1. Class Field Trip to Gun Range (*automatic course failure* for not completing)
2. Field Trip Reflection Essay (5%)
3. Class Participation (25%)
4. Major Writing Assignment (50%)
5. Presentation of Writing Assignment at Class Symposium (10%)
6. Final Reflection Essay (10%)



COURSE GRADES

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

Exceptionally High

A 94-100

Superior

A- 90-93

B+ 87-89

B 84-86

Satisfactory

B- 80-83

C+ 77-79

C 74-76

Unsatisfactory

C- 70-73

D+ 67-69

D 64-66

Failure

F Less than 64

DETAILED COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Further information (including length, due dates, etc.) will be provided in Canvas. There are 500 points possible for this course, broken down as follows:



[1] CLASS FIELD TRIP (*automatic course failure for not completing*):

On Tuesday, August 25th we will take a FIELD TRIP to Veterans Range in Mocksville where students will have the opportunity to shoot. Although the range visit is mandatory, shooting is optional but encouraged.

Failure to complete the field trip will result in a course grade of "F." There is no opportunity to make up the trip. Please plan accordingly.

[2] FIELD TRIP REFLECTION ESSAY (25 points): In this essay, you will describe your experience participating in the introduction to firearms class and range visit. The essay is a subjective recollection of your experience at the range, so the content is largely up to you, but it must answer the following question: *How did the experience fit with your prior understanding of guns in the US?*

To answer this question you might benefit from thinking about the following related questions: What did you find surprising? What did you learn? What did you find appealing (or disturbing)? Although you can (and should) reference particular events, processes, or experiences, this essay should not be a mere "play-by-play" of what you did during the field trip. [Assignment from Brett Burkhardt, Oregon State University]

[3] CLASS PARTICIPATION (125 points): Throughout the semester, you will be given opportunities to participate in the communal life of this course. Collectively this will constitute this portion of your grade. There is nothing preventing you from earning all of these points other than your own (lack of) effort and initiative.

[4] MAJOR WRITING ASSIGNMENT (250 points): This major writing assignment is broken down into several smaller parts, each of which contributes to the whole:

- Topic Selection Proposal (25 points)
- Annotated Bibliography (50 points)
- Final Paper (175 points)

In this assignment, you will move beyond the personal view you articulated in your field trip reflection essay and adopt a scholarly approach to the question of guns in society. Here the issue is not your experience or beliefs about guns but the empirical research on guns. You will consider the role guns actually play in society by systematically engaging sociological theories and studies (called “the scholarly literature”) on one specific aspect of the broader phenomenon (e.g., concealed carry, homicide, self-defense, hunting, sport). You should choose a topic that is of interest to you that you want to investigate further.

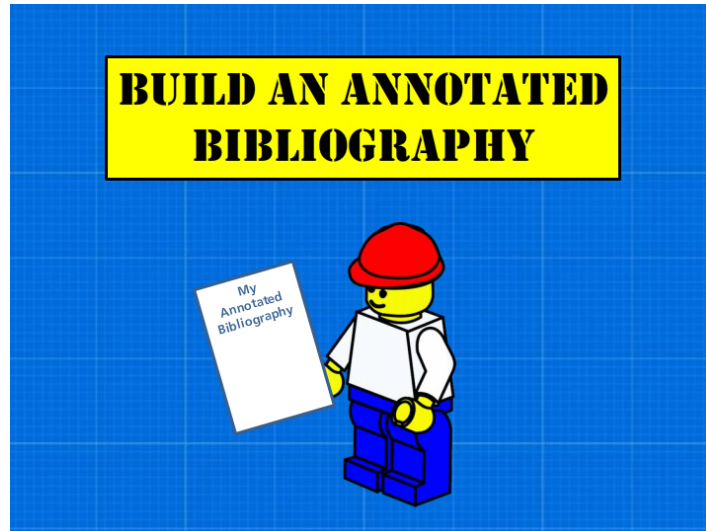


Logistics: To keep you on track to your eventual submission of a final paper, there are two intermediate assignments you must complete: a topic selection proposal and an annotated bibliography.

[A] Topic Selection Proposal (25 points): In this proposal, you will detail and explain the topic you have chosen and why it is important to understand better. Professor Yamane must approve your general topic before you proceed to your proposal.

[B] Annotated Bibliography (50 points): Central to your assessment of the role guns actually play in American society will to review and synthesize existing sociological studies (“the scholarly 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. These should primarily be *social scientific books and/or articles based on original empirical research*, but you may also include one or two relevant legal cases, law review articles, synthetic essays, and the like. 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.



According to the Cornell University library guide:

“An annotated bibliography is a list of citations to books, articles, and documents. Each citation is followed by a brief (usually about 150 words) descriptive and evaluative paragraph, the annotation. The purpose of the annotation is to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the sources cited.”

More info: <http://guides.library.cornell.edu/annotatedbibliography>

[C] Final Paper (175 points): In the final paper, 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. For example, does the scholarly literature differ from popular perceptions? Do gun politics have a corrupting influence on what is studied or how? Does the literature come to a single, clear conclusion or not? If not, what should scholars be studying to rectify that situation?

[6] PRESENTATION OF WRITING ASSIGNMENT (50 points):

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 “Celebration of Learning Symposium.” In 8 minutes (max.), students will describe what the literature says (and doesn’t say) about their topic and discuss key conclusions and limitations of the work.



[7] FINAL REFLECTION ESSAY (50 points): In this final essay, you will revisit your previous personal experience with and understanding of guns in the U.S. (as expressed, e.g., in the field trip reflection essay) in light of your consideration of the role guns actually do play in American society. Reflecting on what you learned from completing your major writing assignment, as well as the class more generally, discuss how your mind has (and/or has not) changed. 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.

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS

Philip J. Cook and Kristin A. Goss, *The Gun Debate: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

Jonathan Obert, Andrew Poe, and Austin Sarat (Eds.), *The Lives of Guns* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

Other readings available in Canvas

COURSE SCHEDULE

Available in Canvas under “Modules.”