Overview

This course combines experiential learning with sociological discourse and provides students of sociology doing internships in nonprofit organizations or businesses with a forum to discuss and reflect on their experiences. Internships have an obvious practical value for students who are exploring career options, but internships can also provide a “laboratory experience” for students of sociology—an opportunity for using our “sociological imagination” as we seek to understand the complexities of local work settings in the context of wider social-structural patterns. We will strive to bridge the gap between the abstract ideas of sociology and the concrete experiences of the internship, both by viewing the practical problems we encounter in sociological perspective and by constructing more detailed and nuanced sociological understandings from our observations of how work organizations really work.

Objectives for Individual Learning

1. To help students view their own internship experiences in sociological perspective.
2. To create an opportunity for doing informal sociological research by reframing the internship experience as sociological fieldwork.
3. To explore sociological and other academic literatures particularly relevant to each individual student’s internship.
4. To consider broader social policy issues which affect the work of the organizations in which students are interning.
5. To help students toward a more successful internship experience by discussing and sharing common problems that interns encounter, as well as solutions for those problems.

Course Requirements

1. Students will meet individually with the course instructor every two weeks to discuss their internships and relevant academic materials.
2. Students will meet with the instructor as a class every two weeks to discuss the common readings and to share perspectives on their experiences.
3. Students will keep an internship journal with entries for every workday. (This journal is to be turned in to the instructor for his review before each individual meeting with the instructor.)
4. Each student will take responsibility for choosing a set of common readings for one of our seminar sessions, then prepare discussion questions, give a presentation, and guide the discussion of the readings on that day.
5. Each student, with the instructor’s assistance, will compile a reading list of academic sources relevant to her or his own internship and will then locate and review these sources, preparing an annotated bibliography of relevant sources no later than the week before spring break (by March 14).
6. Each student, working with the instructor, will plan and complete an academic project for the internship, typically a long paper or series of shorter papers that combine academic information from library research with evidence from the student’s own internship experiences. A proposal for the final paper will be due on the third week of the semester (by February 8), a first draft of the paper will be on the eleventh week of the semester (by April 18), and the final draft of the paper will be due on the last week of classes (by May 9).
Summary of Course Requirements

- Class participation (including class attendance, individual meetings, the internship journal, and presentation and leading discussion on common readings) 30%
- Annotated bibliography 10%
- Final paper or papers (including proposal and first draft) 60%

Required Text


Course Schedule

Week 1  Jan 25  Class 1
Week 2  Feb 1  Class 2
- Sweitzer & King Ch 1 Laying the groundwork
- Sweitzer & King Ch 2 Framing the experience
- Sweitzer & King Ch 3 Understanding yourself
- Sweitzer & King Ch 4 Understanding yourself as an intern
Week 3  Feb 8  Individual meetings — Paper proposal due
Week 4  Feb 15  Class 3
- Sweitzer & King Ch 5 Experiencing the "what-ifs"
- Sweitzer & King Ch 6 Getting to know the clients
- Sweitzer & King Ch 7 Getting to know your colleagues
- Sweitzer & King Ch 8 Getting to know the placement site
Week 5  Feb 22  Individual meetings
Week 6  Feb 29  Class 4
- Sweitzer & King Ch 10 Taking stock and facing reality
- Sweitzer & King Ch 11 Breaking through barriers
Week 7  Mar 7  Individual meetings
Week 8  Mar 14  Annotated Bib Due
Spring Break
Week 9  Apr 4  Iowa Sociological Association Conference
Week 10  Apr 11  Individual meetings — First draft of paper due
Week 11  Apr 18  Class 5
- Sweitzer & King Ch 12 Riding high
- Sweitzer & King Ch 13 Considering the issues
Week 12  Apr 25  Individual meetings
Week 13  May 2  Class 6
- Sweitzer & King Ch 14 Traveling the last mile
Week 14  May 9  Final Paper Due
Finals week