OVERVIEW

The idea behind social capital is that relations between people can be productive—that they can be a resource on which individuals and groups can draw to solve collective action problems. The concept has come to dominate both social science research, as well as discussions among policy makers, since the 1990s. This course will focus a critical eye on social capital. Our goal will be to deepen our understanding of how social interactions—and the externalities these create—might affect societal outcomes. We will look at how scholars have defined social capital, how they measure it, where it comes from and what it leads to. While our approach will be that of the political scientist, we will borrow generously from other disciplines such as sociology, economics, psychology and even biology. Most of the readings will deal with social capital in developed countries, but we will also draw on readings and examples from other parts of the world.

EVALUATION

Your grade will be based on a combination of exams, written work and class participation. The breakdown is as follows:

- Midterm exam 20%
- Final exam 30%
- Research paper 35%
- Paper proposal 5%
- Class participation 10%

The midterm exam will cover material from the 1st half of the course; the final will be cumulative and will be a take-home exam in which you will answer two essay questions of 5–7 pages each. The research paper should be 10–15 double-spaced pages in length and cover some aspect of the topics we deal with in the course. I will provide more details on the paper in the 1st week of class. You will also be required to produce a 1–2 page research proposal for your paper, due in week 6. This brief proposal should outline the question you want to answer in your paper, provide a preliminary guess of the answer to this question and a sketch of the arguments you will use to defend yourself. You should also provide a short bibliography of the sources you intend to use. Work handed in late will incur a penalty of 5 points per day; papers submitted after the final day of classes will not be accepted. Finally, your active participation in class discussions is expected.
Books, coursepack and online resources:

There will be one required book for this course:


There will also be a course reader, available from the bookstore. In order to keep costs down, I will try to provide links to electronic versions of readings whenever these are available. You can access these simply by clicking on the relevant (red) link embedded in the syllabus—in other words you need an electronic version of this syllabus—or by going to electronic journals on the McGill library website. Some readings will also be available through the WebCT site for the course.

**Schedule:**

**Week 1—Introduction**

**Week 2—Collective action problems**


**Week 3—Theoretical perspectives and a few definitions**

MDW chapter 6.


**Week 4—Trust**


Week 5—Generating Social Capital I: Voluntary Associations

MDW, chapter 5.


Week 6—Generating Social Capital II: Institutions

Midterm exam and paper proposal deadline


Week 7—Generating Social Capital III: The Role of Religion


Week 8—Is There a Decline?


Week 9—Critical Voices


Week 10—Political Consequences of Social Capital

MDW, chapters 2–3, skim chapter 6 again.


Week 11—Economic Consequences of Social Capital


Week 12—The Puzzle of Diversity

Research paper deadline


Week 13—Conclusion and Review