

## Understanding Communities

*UNST 220C // Spring 2024*

**Instructor:** Sarah Mercurio | **Email:** [mercur2@pdx.edu](mailto:mercur2@pdx.edu) | **Pronouns:** she/her

**Main sessions:** Tuesday & Thursday, 4:00 - 5:15 pm, Cramer Hall 103, CRN 64082

**Office hours:** Tuesdays 1:00 - 3:00 pm and by appointment (via email). My office is in the Urban Studies department (Urban Center 370B).

**Peer mentor:** Mohamed Al Braiki | **Email:** [albraiki@pdx.edu](mailto:albraiki@pdx.edu) | **Pronouns:** he/him

**Mentored inquiry sessions (students must attend the session for which they are enrolled):**

- Tuesday, 5:30 - 6:20 pm, Cramer Hall 187, CRN 64083
- Thursday, 5:30 - 6:20 pm, Cramer Hall 187, CRN 64084
- Thursday, 6:30 - 7:20 pm, Cramer Hall 187, CRN 64086

### Course Description

This course explores the nature and meaning of the communities in which we live. Drawing on interdisciplinary concepts, we will develop an understanding of how communities have been conceptualized, as well as explore how we individually and collectively make sense of communities in our own lives.

Within the university structure, this course is an introduction to the Understanding Communities Cluster. The understanding communities cluster provides an opportunity to gain the skills and knowledge required to explore the balance of individualism and social responsibility in communities.

This course is supported by the online forum *Canvas*, the learning management system adopted by PSU, as well as *Google Drive*. Following is a brief orientation on how to navigate Canvas.

### Canvas Dashboard

This is the first page you will see when you log in to Canvas. This is where you access your individual courses. On this homepage you will find general Canvas announcements, such as system maintenance updates.

### *Course Home*

This is the page you will see when you open our course. Here you will find course specific announcements and an overview of the course.

### *Syllabus*

This will link you to the course syllabus.

### *Modules*

Modules will include materials for your review and assignments descriptions. All assignments will be delivered through Google Drive (see below)

### Google Drive

Each of you will have access to a shared folder for the entire class as well as a private folder for delivering assignments in Google Drive. Course materials will be available in the shared folder and will be duplicated on Canvas so that you can access materials in whichever way is more familiar to you. Because we are not using Canvas as a grading system, I will be reviewing your assignment submissions in Google Drive and providing feedback via email.

### **Course Expectations**

- **Attendance** is mandatory at both main and mentor sessions. Habitual lateness or leaving early will count as being absent. You will start the term with 25 attendance points. For each main class or mentor session you miss, you lose one point. Each time you are tardy to class or mentor session, you lose 1/2 point. To be eligible for an A in the class, you must keep at least 21 attendance points, 19 points for a B, 17 for a C, and 15 for a D. You must keep at least 14 attendance points to pass the class. Make arrangements to get notes and materials from a peer when you must miss class.
- **Electronic communication:** you are expected to check your PSU email address at least once a week! All course materials will be sent out via email in addition to being uploaded onto Canvas and Google Drive.
- **Plagiarism and student conduct:** a productive learning environment relies on our adherence to PSU Codes of Conduct: <http://www.pdx.edu/dos/policies-codes-of-conduct-at-psu>. In particular, please note that **plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course.** If you are quoting or relying heavily on someone else's work in your written assignments or in-class work, you must acknowledge the source appropriately through in-text citations and a citation page.

Please contact us (the instructor and/or mentor) at any time with any questions or concerns you may have.

- **Disability/accessibility:** please let us know **before the end of the first week of class** if you require any accommodations based on a disability registered with the [Disability Resource Center -- https://www.pdx.edu/disability-resource-center/](https://www.pdx.edu/disability-resource-center/). If you have a barrier to learning (registered or not) we will be more than eager to discuss this with you.

### **University Studies: Vision & Goals**

The University Studies vision is to challenge us to think holistically, care deeply, and engage courageously in imagining and co-creating a just world. Each course theme is an opportunity to explore learning topics outside of your selected major, cross disciplinary boundaries, and collectively create an interdisciplinary learning environment where everyone brings a different set of knowledge and experiences.

We will pursue the [four University Studies goals](#) (Critical Thinking; Communication; Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice; Ethics and Social Responsibility), specifically connecting our inquiry into popular culture with our progress on each of the four UNST goals.

### UNST Objectives – The Objectives for this Course

#### *Inquiry and Critical Thinking*

Students will learn various modes of inquiry through interdisciplinary curricula — problem-posing, investigating, conceptualizing — in order to become active, self-motivated, and empowered learners.

#### *Communication*

Students will enhance their capacity to communicate in various ways—writing, graphics, numeracy, and other visual and oral means — to collaborate effectively with others in group work, and to be competent in appropriate communication technologies.

#### *Ethics, Agency, & Community*

Students will examine values, theories and practices that inform their actions, and reflect on how personal choices and group decisions impact local and global communities

### *Diversity, Equity and Social Justice*

Students will explore and analyze identity, power relationships, and social justice in historical contexts and contemporary settings from multiple perspectives.

### **Agency and Co-Learning: Collaborative Teaching and Learning Philosophy**

Sophomore Inquiry is a quarter-long course based on a philosophy that faculty, peer mentors, and students should collaborate to form an interdisciplinary classroom environment in which we all learn from one another.

This course's teaching and learning philosophy highlights the interdependent qualities of learning (co-learning or learning with/from your peers) and attempts to foster collective accountability and individual agency for claiming your education. After all, it is our belief that your education belongs to you. The course facilitators come to the classroom with an understanding that students have previous knowledge and life experiences and that these are just as important as our academic and formal training. Our goal is to make space for the full spectrum of knowledge in order to tie our experiences to larger social and global cultures and realities. The main session instructor and the mentor's roles will be to act as facilitators, community builders, listeners, timekeepers, and discussion participants. We will strive to make our learning experiences as student-led as possible by offering our community opportunities to not only facilitate discussions and activities related to the class content, but also to both individually and collectively determine what you want to learn about. Feel free to email us if you have any questions or concerns about this philosophy.

In the spirit of reclaiming your own education this course is designed as a self-graded course. We will give you plenty of qualitative feedback along the way but the final grade for the term will be determined by you. The "Self Grading Criteria" section of the syllabus will describe this process in detail.

### **(Sarah's) Suggested Email Etiquette**

E-mail is the best way to reach out to the instructor and ask questions concerning the course material, content, assignments, and absences. Please consider the following prior to emailing Sarah:

- Do not expect her to respond to your inquiries in less than 24 hours. While she does usually respond more quickly, that will not always be the case.
- She will not respond to emails received after 5 pm until the following day, nor will she generally respond to emails sent after 5 pm on Friday until the following Monday.
- Please identify yourself, state your query as clearly as possible, and do not forget to proofread your email.

## Mandatory Reporting

If a PSU employee has any oversight over students, including student employees, then they are mandatory reporters of discrimination, discriminatory harassment, and interpersonal violence (sexual misconduct, sexual assault, sexual exploration, stalking and domestic violence) at all times. Mandatory reporters are expected to report any incident even if it does not occur in the scope of their employment.

## Campus Resources

The Cultural Resource Centers (CRCs) create a student-centered inclusive environment that enriches the university experience. We honor diversity, explore social justice issues, celebrate cultural traditions, and foster student identities, success, and leadership. The centers include the Multicultural Student Center, La Casa Latina Student Center, Native American Student & Community Center, Pan African Commons, and Pacific Islander, Asian, Asian American Student Center and the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia Student Center. They provide student leadership, employment, and volunteer opportunities; student resources such as computer labs, event, lounge and study spaces; and extensive programming. All are welcome!

- ❖ [www.pdx.edu/cultural-resource-centers](http://www.pdx.edu/cultural-resource-centers)
  - ❖ [cultures@pdx.edu](mailto:cultures@pdx.edu), 503-725-5342
  - ❖ <https://www.facebook.com/psuculturalcenters/>
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- PSU Library's Ask a Librarian webpage: <https://library.pdx.edu/services/ask-a-librarian/>  
At Ask a Librarian they offer different types of access to inquiry for different types of learners. They can help you with your research needs and strategies, as well as help you find books for your courses, or direct you to campus resources, or how to get a public library card.
  - The Basic Needs Hub: <https://www.pdx.edu/basic-needs-hub/>  
The Basic Needs Hub provides students with one place to stop for all concerns related to providing for basic needs support. Our mission is to connect PSU students to resources in the moment of need so students can focus on academics, career goals, and interpersonal relationships.
  - Undergraduate Advising: 503-725-3822 // email: [askacs@pdx.edu](mailto:askacs@pdx.edu)  
<https://www.pdx.edu/advising/>
  - Writing Center: Cramer Hall rm.188, 503-725-3570 // email [wrcntr@pdx.edu](mailto:wrcntr@pdx.edu)  
<https://www.pdx.edu/writing-center/>
  - Child Care: Children's Center, Smith Memorial Student Union, First floor, (503) 725-2273
  - Student Health & Counseling (SHAC): 1880 SW 6th Ave. (UCB 200) (503) 725-2800 or <https://www.pdx.edu/health-counseling/>

- Mind Spa, a space on campus for students to relax and rejuvenate at no charge. Engage in light therapy, meditation, yoga, biofeedback, or a massage.  
<https://www.pdx.edu/health-counseling/mind-spa>
- Registrar's Office: <https://www.pdx.edu/registration/>
- Multicultural Center: Smith 235, 503-725-5342, [cultures@pdx.edu](mailto:cultures@pdx.edu),  
<https://www.pdx.edu/cultural-resource-centers/multicultural-student-center>
- Women's Resource Center (WRC): Smith 439, 503-725-5672 or [wrc@pdx.edu](mailto:wrc@pdx.edu),  
<https://www.pdx.edu/womens-resource-center/>
- Queer Resource Center/QRC: Smith 458, 503-725-9742 or [qrc@pdx.edu](mailto:qrc@pdx.edu),  
<https://www.pdx.edu/queer-resource-center/>
- Disability Resource Center, Smith 116, 503-725-4150 or [drc@pdx.edu](mailto:drc@pdx.edu),  
<https://www.pdx.edu/disability-resource-center/>
- Financial Wellness Center: 503-725-3449, FMH 130, [fwc@pdx.edu](mailto:fwc@pdx.edu),  
<https://www.pdx.edu/student-finance/financial-wellness-center>
- Student Legal Services, Smith M343, 503-725-4556 or [SLMS@pdx.edu](mailto:SLMS@pdx.edu),  
<https://www.pdx.edu/student-legal-services/>
- Student Rights and Responsibilities are located in the Student Code of Conduct which, in turn, is located at  
<https://www.pdx.edu/dean-student-life/psu-code-student-conduct-and-responsibility>
- Veterans Services: Smith 425, 503-75-3876 or <http://dx.edu/veterans/current-students>
- PSU Library (online databases and other resources) <http://library.pdx.edu>; for an online tutorial on conducting library research go to:  
<http://www.lib.pdx.edu/instruction/survivalguide/index.htm>
- Learning Center: 2nd floor, PSU Library, <https://www.pdx.edu/learning-center/>
- C.A.R.E Team: PSU CARES connects students with resources when they are experiencing distress or other concerns that might impact their personal or academic success. CARE Advocates meet with students to hear about their concerns and collaborate on a plan to optimize their ability to continue and succeed at PSU.
  - Website: <https://www.pdx.edu/dean-student-life/psu-cares>
  - For students in distress or if you notice a student in distress:  
[https://pdx-advocate.symplicity.com/care\\_report/index.php/pid831629?](https://pdx-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report/index.php/pid831629?)
- Multnomah County Crisis Line (available 24/7): 503-988-4888: Provides brief crisis phone counseling and information on where to go for help.  
<https://www.pdx.edu/health-counseling/crisis>
- Trans Lifeline, a 24/7 hotline available in the U.S. and Canada staffed by transgender people for transgender people. [Trans Lifeline](#) is primarily for transgender people in a crisis, from struggling with gender identity to thoughts of self-harm. Contact information: 1-877-565-8860. Available 24/7

## Writing Websites and Online Resources

- PSU Writing Center Resources: <https://www.pdx.edu/writing-center/student-resources>
- Owl Purdue: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>
- Grammar Girl: <http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com>
- Macmillan Dictionary and Thesaurus: <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/us>
- [They Say I Say](#) by Gerald Graff (online textbook)
- Using resources for Academic Purposes: <http://www.uefap.com>

## Proposed Assignments & Projects

### *Module 1*

- Intro to course / learner inventory
- Learner contract
- Self-care planner
- Reflections on your own sense of community, identity, and belonging

### *Module 2*

- Neighborhood photo essay

### *Module 3*

- (Design) Your own project

### *Module 4*

- Teach-in proposal
- Community intervention teach-ins

### *Self-grading reflection*

- Self grading assessment
  - Potential meeting w/ instructor to discuss grade, as requested by instructor

## Course Materials

All the materials utilized in the course will be shared electronically (via Google Drive and available on the Canvas course page).

## Self-Grading Criteria (Adapted from Celine Fitzmaurice's self-grading system)

In line with the aim of taking agency over your education, you will determine your own grade at the end of term, with input from the course facilitators. We will collect and comment on all of your assignments but we will not assign a grade to these papers. Instead, at the end of the term we will give you an itemized handout of all aspects of your participation in the class (i.e. attendance record, checklist of assignments turned in, etc.), which you will use to determine the grade you have earned over the course of the term.

You will use all of this information to determine a final grade for yourself using the breakdown proposed below. If this form of self-grading is a new experience for you, be mindful and aware of how this may change or impact your relationship to learning and participating in an educational environment in general. Be aware of what does and doesn't motivate and influence you to produce quality academic work.

### **Proposed Final Grade Breakdown**

Full involvement in this course—in other words, an absolutely clear and incontrovertible “A”—looks like this:

- You have come to at least 90% of our classes on time (and stayed the full time), prepared to participate in our work for the day and you have been present during that time (meaning: no texting or other distractions to yourself and/or others).
- You have completed all of the required assignments, and been a full participant in all aspects of the course – main session, mentor session, group work, and individual work.
- You have committed yourself to working in the spirit of this course—including the claiming of your own education—in accordance with the “Agency and Co-Learning” section above.

We will assume a flexible rubric to provide an additional framework for your decision-making about your grade. These parameters will align with the “spirit” of the grading system more than with a rigid quantitative breakdown:

- A = Outstanding; consistently did your best work/made your best effort
- B = Good; regularly did your best work/made your best effort
- C = Average; occasionally did your best work/made your best effort
- D = Below average; rarely did your best work/made your best effort
- F = Little or no effort put forth

**There's one important caveat here:** we reserve the right to require you to negotiate your final grade with us if your assessment in your self-evaluation seems either high or low.

\*Note #1: Please save all of your assignments until the end of our course as you will be using these to determine your final grade -- Google Drive will help with this.

**\*\*Note #2: By remaining in this course, you agree to the conditions set forth here, including the course requirements and the terms for self-grading outlined above.**



### Tentative Calendar

Date – Focus of Class	Guiding Questions	Due
<p><b>Week 1 - Intro to the course</b> (Module 1: Identity &amp; Belonging in Communities)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How do we define communities?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Week 2 – Communities and belonging</b> (Module 1 continued)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What is a “sense of belonging”?</li> <li>● Why is sense of belonging important for communities?</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Module 1 assignment due</u></b> <b>Reflective response on Identity and belonging in communities.</b> <b>(Monday, April 15th)</b></p>
<p><b>Week 3 – Communities and place</b> (Module 2: Place, memory, and power)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What is a sense of place, place identity, and place attachment?</li> <li>● Why are these concepts significant for understanding communities?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Week 4 - Communities and power</b> (Module 2 continued)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How have communities been impacted by techniques of power?</li> <li>● In what ways are communities powerful?</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Module #2 Assignment</u></b> <b>Neighborhood Photo Essay</b> <b>(Monday, April 29th)</b></p>

<p><b>Week 5 - Work week and midterm feedback</b> (Midterm: Start designing module 3 and teach-ins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is the course going thus far?</li> <li>• What does it mean to “design your own module”?</li> <li>• What are teach-ins all about?</li> </ul>	<p>No assignments/readings -- all work to be completed in class (main and mentor sessions)</p>
<p><b>Week 6 - Design your module</b> (Module 3: Student’s choice)</p>	<p>You will create your own guiding questions</p>	<p>Select and study materials to help you complete your module</p>
<p><b>Week 7 - Complete your module</b> (Module 3 continued)</p>	<p>You will create your own guiding questions</p>	<p><b>Module 3 Assignment: (Design) Your own project (Friday, May 17th)</b></p>
<p><b>Week 8 – Communities of the future</b> (Module 4: futurism, community transformation)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the futures of communities?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Week 9 – Communities of the future</b> (Module 4 continued)</p>	<p>Each group will have their own set of guiding questions</p>	<p><b>Module 4 Assignment: Teach-in proposals (Friday, November 22nd)</b></p>
<p><b>Week 10 - Cultural intervention teach-ins</b></p>	<p>You will share your own vision of community futures</p>	<p><b>Teach-ins (in class, both Tuesday and Thursday)</b></p>

<b>Week 11 - Self grading conferences (if needed)</b>		<b>Self-grading reflection (due Monday, June 10th) -- email it to Sarah (<a href="mailto:mercur2@pdx.edu">mercur2@pdx.edu</a>)</b>
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