

UNST 220 Understanding Communities
Fall 2026 | M/W 9:00a-10:40a | KMC 255

Instructor: Steve Marotta, PhD (he/him)
Office: 370B (3rd Floor, Urban Center, through suite 350)
Office Hours: By appointment – please email to schedule
Instructor Email: smarotta@pdx.edu

Course Description

This is a Sophomore Inquiry Class (SINQ) - which means this is a class where you will work on improving your writing & professional skills within the topic Understanding Communities. In this course, we will look to explore the nature of the communities in which we live. 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 introduces and explores the concepts of community through sociology, anthropology, geography, history, community organization, and urban planning.

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.

Understanding Communities Cluster Learning Outcomes

UNST 220 is the first course in the Understanding Communities Cluster. Students in the Understanding Communities cluster will:

1. Better understand themselves, their own communities and how their communities fit into the larger world;
2. Employ multiple disciplines to learn about community and distinguish how different fields of study or ways of questioning impact the way a community is understood;
3. Focus on the different concepts, tools and techniques that can be used in practical application today to impact community formation, the power those communities have in society, & how changes can be made in the future.

Writing Intensive Course Requirements

This is a [Writing Intensive Courses \(WIC\)](#). WIC offers students an opportunity to engage deeply in course materials. Students learn the processes by which writers in the field develop and disseminate knowledge. In UNST 220 we will write as a process including both informal tasks and final drafts that:

- Frame writing tasks within their rhetorical situations.
- Integrate elements of the writing process en route to final products.
- Use writing as a tool for thinking and learning.
- Encourage transfer of writing knowledge and skills across contexts.
- Reflect current research on writing assessment.

Domestic RESR (Race & Ethnic Studies Requirement) Objectives for this Course

This course fulfills PSU's Domestic [RESR requirement](#) and is committed to these learning outcomes:

- Understand, compare, and accountably apply the multiple theories, principles, and methodologies of Ethnic Studies as pertaining to domestic and global realities.
- Discern how perspectives are deepened through centering the experiences, pedagogies and methods of Black, Indigenous, local and global communities of color into the curriculum.
- Develop relational understanding and consider social responsibility while collaborating with others to address topics of inquiry.
- Differentiate and apply a variety of perspectives regarding anti-racist, anti-white supremacist, and decolonial theories and practices, and understand the histories of these ideas and the communities they come from.
- Identify and clarify various contemporary forms of oppression and discrimination and their origins.
- Engage in anti-oppressive and non-discriminatory practices that reflect an awareness of interlocking dynamics of multiple identities and intersectionalities (e.g. race, ethnicity, nationalist, caste, religion, class, gender, sexuality, and ability).
- Understand how the interlocking dynamics of identity shape communication practices and learn best practices for engaging in accountable cross-cultural communication
- Define and learn to interpret co-existing, multiple perspectives, as well as intersectional and collective consciousness.

CUSP (Community Urban Studies and Planning) Degree Objectives for this Course

Students in UNST 220 are introduced to the ideas, topics, and theories that will be further developed in classes in the Understanding Communities Cluster and the majors and minors in Urban Studies and Planning. This course is the first class in the CUSP major and is designed to introduce students to the field.

- UNST 220 will introduce the topics of **redlining, urban renewal, and gentrification**
- Students in UNST 220 will recognize & discuss: **biases in institutional decisions, power, belonging, & social norms.**

- Students in UNST 220 will employ multiple disciplines to learn about community and focus on the different concepts, tools and techniques that can be used in practical application today to impact **community formation, the power those communities have in society**, & how changes can be made in the future.

NACE Career-Ready Workforce Objectives for this Course

- **Equity & Inclusion:** Demonstrate the awareness, attitude, knowledge, and skills required to equitably engage and include people from different cultures and backgrounds. Engage in anti-oppressive practices that actively challenge the systems, structures, and policies of racism and inequity.
- **Leadership:** Recognize and capitalize on personal and team strengths to achieve organizational goals.
- **Professionalism:** Knowing work environments differ greatly, understand and demonstrate effective work habits, and act in the interest of the larger community and workplace.
- **Teamwork:** Build and maintain collaborative relationships to work effectively toward common goals, while appreciating diverse viewpoints and shared responsibilities.

Class Materials

For this course, we will rely on articles, websites, and videos that will be posed to Canvas. We will use technology including Canvas, Email, Zoom and Google suite. You are responsible for accessing these technologies multiple times per week. You do need regular internet access and a computer/ laptop/ Chromebook for this class.

You will be asked to **acquire one book as part of a book group assignment**. This book can be bought, taken from the library; borrowed, etc. More information will be provided in class on your selection. (In general, the books are less than \$15.)

Class Format & Requirements

This is a 4-credit course that includes both the main session & a mentor session. This class will be an **in-person** course. The course will utilize an interactive lecture/ discussion format in the main session and a discussion format in the mentor session. Each week you will meet twice as a whole class in the main session & then once in a mentor session with Demetra and a small group of students.

Assignments for this course will be due in both main session and mentor session building towards a single grade. **Attendance and participation in both the main course and mentor session are required.** If you cannot regularly attend class, please select a different section of this course.

The materials for the course will be run through the Canvas site and all materials will be posted to that site. It is important to let the instructor know if you are not able to access information or if you are having problems with the technology. The class is held over 10 weeks & **there will be weekly deadlines & due dates**. For this class you will have **materials due on Thursday at the start of class & Sunday evenings**.

Expectations for Inclusivity

Building an inclusive learning environment requires us to work together to listen (reading carefully and reflecting in the online environment), and make room for all to have a say (asking questions and interacting in an encouraging way); to support each other to find our voice; and to recognize and anticipate a wide range of perspectives, backgrounds, experiences, identities, and ways of being in the world.

We can all promote safe and inclusive learning by listening deeply (including reading carefully and reflecting) and being ready to learn from those around us. In an online learning environment, it is important to work to write clearly, thoughtfully, and respectfully (take your time and consider the impact of your words). Please learn and use the correct pronouns for your classmates, please do not make assumptions. I hope that we can begin from a place of mutual respect and gentle personalism – taking each other where we are at each day, offering the benefit of the doubt, and being aware that the workings of power and privilege impact different communities and individuals in different ways.

ASSIGNMENTS

Class Participation (10%)

You are expected to show up (on time), take part in class discussions, pay attention during lectures and when other students are talking, and be respectful in your comments. We use the course's assigned readings/videos to organize our in-class activities, so showing up prepared is essential.

Weekly Journals (20%)

For this assignment, you will need to bring a notebook and pen/pencil to class. Each week in class I will give the class a prompt that you will answer in a journal. The goal is to write a good, chunky paragraph in your journal each week (about 200 words). This will account for your attendance as well as contribute to your overall word count for this writing intensive course.

Book Group Activities (30%)

Starting week 3, we will be forming student groups based around the selection of a book that you will read throughout the term. Thursdays from week 3 until the end of the term will include structured group discussions that you will be assigned a "role" in for each week, after which you will submit a write-up based on your role to Canvas. Your group will also give the class a short "book review" presentation during week 10. More detailed directions on the groups, the books, and the weekly assignments/presentation.

Term Project: "Look Again" Neighborhood Assessment (40%)

This three-part assignment will require you to identify a neighborhood that you would like to observe and document it in a variety of ways. It could be your neighborhood, it could be the neighborhood where you work or go to school, or it could be a neighborhood you are drawn to but know little about. It is important that the neighborhood is accessible to you, somewhere that you can physically go to, experience, encounter other people, take pictures, etc.

Once you've chosen your neighborhood, set up a slide deck (e.g., Google Slides) that you can update all term. The slide deck must be linkable/sharable (so that I can grade your progress). Once your slide deck is set up, add your shareable link to the Google Form in Canvas (in the Syllabus module). Please have this done before you submit part 1.

Detailed directions for parts 1&2 of the assignment are available on Canvas (in the Syllabus module); part 3 will be added later in the term (more details in class). Dues dates are as follows:

- Part 1 is due end of week 4 (10/25)
- Part 2 is due end of week 7 (11/15)
- Part 3 is due Wednesday 11:59pm of finals week (12/9)

COURSE SCHEDULE

*With the exception of your book group book (which you will have to acquire independently), all materials are linked/downloadable in the Weekly Modules on Canvas

Week 1	Course Intro / What is Community?
9/28-10/4	<u>Read/Watch</u> • What Does Community Even Mean? • Belonging & Community • Social Groups • Why are U.S. Cities Still so Segregated? • Kimberle Crenshaw on Intersectionality <u>Turn In/Prepare</u> • Choose your book group book and submit top three choices (on spreadsheet linked in Canvas) • Weekly Journal (in class)
Week 2	Community, Individuals, Societies
10/5-10/11	<u>Read/Watch</u> • Why Study Sociology? • The Sociological Imagination • Why Socialization Matters • Individualism • The Disturbing History of America's Highways • Saidiya Hartman, Literary Scholar <u>Turn In/Prepare</u> • Find Book for Book Group • Weekly Journal (in class)

Week 3 10/12-10/18	Belonging & Othering <u>Read/Watch</u> • From the Othering and Belonging Institute: ◦ What is Belonging? ◦ Belonging Design Principles • There is Room for All in this Circle • Othering: Fostering Belonging in our Society • Edward Said – Framed <u>Turn In/Prepare</u> • Weekly Journal (in class) • Book Group Planning (in class)
Week 4 10/19-10/25	Borders & Boundaries <u>Read/Watch</u> • The Racist History of Portland • [Watch or Read] Long Island, Divided • Division in Oregon Highlights Growing Rift Between Rural and Urban Areas • Native American Reservations, Explained • Sylvia Wynter: Beyond Man <u>Turn In/Prepare</u> • Weekly Journal (in class) • Prepare for Book Group (Thursday) • Turn in Role Document (to your group's Google Drive) • Part 1, "Look Again" Neighborhood Assessment
Week 5 10/26-11/1	Displacement, Segregation, Exclusion <u>Read/Watch</u> • Housing Segregation and Redlining in America • How Decades of Racist Housing Policy Left Neighborhoods Sweltering • Mapping Chicago's Racial Segregation • [Check out] Mapping Inequality • [Check out] Race and Ethnicity Mapping by Erica Fischer • W.E.B. DuBois: How Does it Feel to Be a Problem? <u>Turn In/Prepare</u> • Weekly Journal (in class) • Prepare for Book Group (Thursday) • Turn in Role Document (to your group's Google Drive)
Week 6 11/2-11/8	Class & Mobility <u>Read/Watch</u> • What is Social Stratification?

	• Social Mobility in the United States • How Does Class work in the US? It's Complicated • The American Dream Feels Impossible for Young Voters <u>Turn In/Prepare</u> • Weekly Journal (in class) • Prepare for Book Group (Thursday) • Turn in Role Document (to your group's Google Drive)
Week 7 11/9-11/15	Urban & Public Space <u>Read/Watch</u> • A New Way to Understand the City: Henri Lefebvre's Spatial Triad • Publicly Owned Private Spaces • Can Urban Design Have a Gender? • Reimagining Public Spaces: The Share-it-Square <u>Turn In/Prepare</u> • Weekly Journal (in class) • Prepare for Book Group (Thursday) • Turn in Role Document (to your group's Google Drive) • Part 2, "Look Again" Neighborhood Assessment
Week 8 11/16-11/22	Community Place(s) <u>Read/Watch</u> • What's Fueling Loneliness and Polarization in America Today? • Designing Urban Places That Don't Suck (A Sense of Place) • What America's Shopping Mall Decline Means for Social Space • Are We Living in Non-Places? • Placemaking and Community • The Gentrification Challenge: Placemaking as the Problem? <u>Turn In/Prepare</u> • Weekly Journal (in class) • Prepare for Book Group (Thursday) • Turn in Role Document (to your group's Google Drive)
Week 9 11/23-11/29	Community Economies <u>Read/Watch</u> • Understanding Community Land Trusts • The Queer-Led Groups Modeling a New Form of Land Access • Introducing Community Economies • LandBack: The Indigenous Liberation Movement <u>Turn In/Prepare</u> • Weekly Journal (in class) • Prepare for Book Group Presentations (Thursday)

Week 10 11/30-12/6	Mutualism/Mutual Aid <u>Read/Watch</u> • What is Mutual Aid? • Black Communities Have Known about Mutual Aid All Along • Underground Mutual Aid Group Helps Feed Hillsboro's Immigrant Families in Hiding • In Minneapolis, Community Care is the Model for Resistance <u>Turn In/Prepare</u> • Weekly Journal (in class) • Book Group Presentations (Thursday)
Finals Week 12/7-12/13	<u>Turn In/Prepare</u> • Part 3, "Look Again" Neighborhood Assessment

Resources & Information

Student Resources: Includes a wide range of resources, including various centers for students with different identities- e.g. Cultural Resource Center, Disability Resource Center, Queer Resource Center, Students with Children Resource Center, Women's Resource Center, and Veterans Resource Center; lots of academic resources like the Library, tutoring, and technical support (Office of Information Technology); and various counseling, financial, health and wellness services- including some that are culturally specific.

Access and Inclusion for Students with Disabilities/ DRC: PSU values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to fostering mutual respect and full participation for all students. My goal is to create a learning environment that is equitable, usable, inclusive, and welcoming. If any aspects of instruction or course design result in barriers to your inclusion or learning, please notify me. If you have, or think you may have, a disability that may affect your work in this class and feel you need accommodations, contact the Disability Resource Center, drc@pdx.edu, <https://www.pdx.edu/drc>.

If you already have accommodations, please contact me to make sure that I have received a faculty notification letter and discuss your accommodations.

Multicultural Student Services: Includes links to Multicultural Retention Services, Middle East, North Africa and South Asia (MENASA) Initiative, the Native American Cultural Center, and more, including some duplications from the above and some additional resources.

University Career Center: Job Search Resources, Networking, Resume Help, Interviewing Practice, and workshops with employers.

PSU is a Sanctuary Campus: Please note, I will protect the confidentiality of students and will not voluntarily participate or facilitate immigration actions.

Basic Needs at Portland State: It can be challenging to do your best in class if you have trouble meeting basic needs like safe shelter, sleep, and nutrition. Resource centers across campus are here to provide assistance, referrals, and support. Please contact anyone on this list for assistance:

- Basic Needs Hub:
 - basicneedshub@pdx.edu
- Portland State Food Pantry:
 - SMSU 325 pantry@pdx.edu
- Emergency/ Hardship Fund - emergency financial assistance
- C.A.R.E. Team:
 - askdos@pdx.edu (503) 725-4422
- Student Health and Counseling:
 - askshac@pdx.edu (503) 725-2800
- Housing Service

Generative AI

The assignments in this course are designed to be completed **WITHOUT** the use of generative AI and in most cases, using generative AI will not give you the “correct” answer. Factually correct (or incorrect) AI answers will not substitute for reflective answers in this course and you will not receive a passing grade.

If you feel that generative AI is helpful to you, please be sure to clearly attribute what text was generated by the AI tool (e.g., AI-generated text appears in a different colored font, quoted directly in the text, or use an in-text parenthetical citation). It is important to note that if AI tools like chatGPT/ similar tools are permitted to be used for an assignment, then they should be used with caution and proper citation. **AI is not a replacement for your own thinking and research.** As this is fast changing, please review the University’s Policy.

Writing Resources

This course does require you to stretch yourself as a writer. In order to be an effective communicator your writing needs to 1) meet the assigned task; 2) be designed for the intended audience; 3) convey all important information. Every writer needs to proof-read and revise their work to obtain the best finished product. If you need help with this process, PSU’s Writing Center (www.writingcenter.pdx.edu) has a variety of free services. This is a writing class and this is a great free resource for everyone to use. Please use this resource.

Discrimination, Violence, & Mandated Reporter/ Title IX Reporting Obligations

PSU is committed to fostering a safe, productive learning environment. Title IX and our school policy prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, which regards sexual misconduct — including harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. We expect a culture of professionalism and mutual respect. Please be aware that as a faculty member, I have the responsibility to report any instances of sexual harassment, sexual violence and/or other forms of prohibited discrimination to PSU’s Title IX Coordinator, the Office of Equity and Compliance or the Dean of Student Life and cannot keep information confidential. You may report any incident of discrimination or discriminatory harassment, including sexual harassment, to either the Office of Equity and Compliance or the Office of the Dean of Student Life. If you would rather share information about sexual harassment or sexual violence to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can contact a confidential advocate at 503-725-5672 or by scheduling on-line (psuwrc.youcanbook.me) or another confidential employee found on the sexual misconduct resource webpage. For more information about your obligations and resources for

sex/gender discrimination and sexual violence (Title IX), please complete the required student module Creating a Safe Campus in your Canvas.

Free Speech Policies & Guidelines

Portland State University has free speech policies and guidelines for the classroom environment. I will use the PSU Conduct policy: disruptive behavior will be asked to leave and discriminatory or harassing behavior will be reported.

Academic Honesty & Plagiarism

Students are expected to be ethical not only in the classroom, but also out of the classroom. It is in all students' interest to avoid committing acts of academic dishonesty and to discourage others from committing such acts. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following examples: engages in any form of academic deceit; refers to materials or sources or uses devices not authorized by the instructor for use during any quiz or assignment; provides inappropriate aid to another person in connection with any quiz or assignment; engages in Plagiarism. Cheating and or plagiarism will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the assignment which may result in a failing grade for the course as well. For more information, please look at the PSU Student Code of Conduct (www.pdx.edu/dos/psu-student-code-conduct)