Sociology of Crime: Mafia & the Media in Italy

Course Details

Course Designator & Number: FLOR 3346
Number of Credits: 3
Language of Instruction: English
Contact Hours: 45
Instructor: Marco Bracci, Ph.D.

Course Description

The course will deal with the most relevant sociological theories on crime as a particular form of deviance. The aim is to apply different theoretical perspectives to the study of the deep relation between crime and culture in our contemporary societies. Given that crime and culture are two complex and multilayered notions, a variety of materials will be used (sociological essays, newspapers, audiovisuals, TV shows, movies, music, among others) in order to analyze specific case studies both from the US and Italy using a cross-cultural comparative perspective and to stimulate active in-class participation.

Since the course is designed to take full advantage of the students' experience abroad and focuses on the Florentine/Italian context, on-site lectures and visits (i.e.: national newspaper "La Nazione" for crime news reports) will be a relevant part of the learning process.

The role of the media system will be emphasized (journalism, TV dramas, movies, music) for a deep understanding of the "media representation" and the "media amplification" of crime in Italian and US cultural contexts as well. Specific Italian case studies will be presented. Class schedule may remain flexible so as to take advantage of opportunities in the field of crime and culture as they become available in Florence.

The course will cover the following themes:

- Sociological theories on crime and deviance, such as: structural-functionalism, strain theory, symbolic interaction, labeling theory.
- Relations between culture(s) and crime(s)

- News media representation and amplification of crime in Italy. Visit at La Nazione, Florence
- Social groups, social contexts and the construction of criminal careers in Italy.
- Organized crime in Southern Italy: negative symbols of Italian culture represented by Italian cinema
- Representation of crime and culture in Sicily in Italian TV detective series
- Italian/Florentine focus on crime and deviance through media representation
- Music, crime and deviance in Italy and the US
- Football and violence: *Ultras'* culture in Italy.

Course Objectives

- Provide an overview of different sociological theories on crime and deviance
- Provide a comparative, multidimensional and cross-cultural perspective on crime and deviance
- Understand the role of different social and cultural contexts in relation to the definition of deviant behaviors
- Understand the importance of specific social groups and particular economic conditions related to the creation of a criminal career
- Take full advantage of students' experience in Florence using the city as a learning tool in order to have a higher impact cross cultural experience PAGE 2
- Exercise critical thought and learn to develop an argument through research and writing
- Acquire a deeper understanding of students' own behavior, establishing a connection between personal dimension and the whole society.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course the students will be familiar with:

- The most relevant sociological theories on crime and deviance
- The close relation between crime and culture under a cross-cultural perspective
- The relationship between crime, deviance and personal/collective identities
- A range of specific fields in which crime and deviance may perform a crucial role in our contemporary society

Students will be able:

- To critically apply concepts and theoretical perspectives to real-life situations and specific case studies
- To develop a multifaceted and critical approach to the study of societies through the lens of crime and deviance in the contemporary world, with a specific emphasis on the Italian and the Florentine contexts
- To identify and define problems related to crime and deviance

- To understand crime as a cultural process operating in different geographical contexts and in specific social groups
- To understand their role as "social actors" in relation to the main problems connected to the presence of crime and deviance in our communities.

Methodology

The course includes readings and discussion of a selection of primary sources (sociological documents, among others) and other materials such as movies and documentaries.

The learning process will happen in a variety of formats in this course, mainly through lectures, guest lectures on specific topics, homework assignments, videos, discussions, out-of-class and in-class activities.

Class discussions and active participation are extremely vital, as they are essential to develop critical skills. For this reason, the readings assigned weekly are accompanied by an **active discussion on a case study or on a topic to be dealt with in class.** This is the basis for the work that will be led in class. We will remain flexible enough to take advantage of other potential opportunities for learning as they develop over the course of the semester.

Course Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course, but a basic background in sociology could be helpful. At the start of the course, students will be asked to fill out a questionnaire to provide some background information, their study plan and their expectations about the course.

Required Reading / Materials

Selected chapters from P. A. Adler, P. Adler *Constructions of Deviance: Social Power, Context, and Interaction* (CengageLearning, 2012)

• H.S. Becker, *Culture: A Sociological View*, in S. Ferguson Mapping the social landscape: readings in sociology (McGraw Hill,2014)

• Y. Jewkes, *The Construction of Crime news*, in Y. Jewkes Media & Crime (Sage, 2011)

• R. Reiner, *Media made criminality. The representation of crime in the mass media*, in M. Maguire, R. Morgan, R. Reiner(edited by) *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology* (Oxford University Press, 2002)

• L. Paoli, *Crime, Italian Style,* Daedalus, Vol. 130, No. 3, Italy: Resilient and Vulnerable, Volume II: Politics and Society (MIT Press, 2001)

• M.S. Boyd, *Representation of Foreign Justice in the Media: The Amanda Knox Case,* in *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis across Disciplines*, Vol. 7 (1) (2013)

• M. Filippa, Posse and Rap, in D. Forgacs and R. Lumley, *Italian cultural studies. An introduction* (Oxford University Press, 1996)

• A. Testa, G. Armstrong, Chapter 8: *UltraS Society,* in A. Testa, G. Armstrong, *Football, fascism and fandom* (A&CBlack, 2010)

Movies & Documentaries:

American Beauty
Angel of Evil
Crime Novel
Amanda Knox: Murder on Trial in Italy
Gomorra
Montalbano
The U.S. vs John Lennon

Further readings and materials (such as newspaper and magazine articles) may be used on the basis of students' specific interests.

Readings will be available at Lory's copy store (for information ask the front desk) or will be e-mailed to students. The professor could give **homework assignments** (tasks to perform, documentaries to watch) when needed to facilitate class discussion and to integrate topics dealt with in class.

VISITS

The course visits to **places of sociological relevance** (see CLASS SCHEDULE) will enrich the students' knowledge of the topics dealt with in class and deepen their understanding of the Florentine/Italian culture they are living in.

Grading

Grading Rubric

Letter Grade	Score or Percentage	Description
A	93–100	Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
A-	90–92	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B+	87–89	
B	83–86	
B-	80–82	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C+	77–79	
C	73–76	
C-	70–72	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to fully meet the course requirements.
D+	67–69	
D	60–66	
F	0–59	Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I.

Summary of How Grades Are Weighted

Assignments	Percentage of Grade
Participation, in-class activities	10%
Homework, tasks, Out-of-class activities	15%
Students-led discussion	10%
Mid-term exam	25%
Take-home final exam	25%
Final presentation	15%
Overall Grade	100%

Assessment Details

Exams:

There are two scheduled exams for this course.

- Students will take a **mid-term written exam** with short answer questions based mainly on the general subject that will be dealt with in the first part of the course
- The written final exam will consist of a **take-home final project** (see description below)

Take-Home Final:

- For the final exam students will choose a specific commodity chain, company or products through which they will deal with certain aspects of the course program using specific tools and strategies developed in class.
- Students will hand in a written essay of around 2000 words.
- This project represents the occasion to originally elaborate on the readings and discussion conducted in class. It has to be an exercise in creativity and originality at the same time maintaining an analytic and critical perspective on the whole material studied during the semester.
- Guidelines will be given in class.

Final Presentation

- Students will conclude the course with a presentation of the topic chosen for the take-home final.
- Students will have to use **all the tools available** (such as: PowerPoint, handouts, surveys, extra information or evidence etc.) to reach the point. The aim of this assignment is to demonstrate their skills in presenting their ideas and perspective to the rest of the class, activating a discussion and being able to respond to the instructor's and other students' feedback.
- Guidelines will be given in class.

Students-Led Discussion:

● During the class after the midterm, there will be a student-led discussion: students will present a specific topic dealt with in class till then, trying to argue in favor of it. Feedback from the class is required in order to start a discussion.

Course Content

Unit 1

- Course presentation and distribution of the syllabus; course requirements and course expectations; methodology

- The sociological approach: introduction to crime and deviance

Unit 2

Culture: a sociological view
- Sociological theories on crime and deviance: the functionalist perspective

Unit 3

Robert Merton's strain theory
- American culture, American dream, and deviance
- Movie: *American Beauty*

Unit 4

Labeling theory & construction of criminal careers in Italy
Movie: Renato Vallanzasca
Movie: *Angel of Evil*
Romanzo Criminale/Crime Novel

Unit 5

News media representation & amplification of crime in Italy
Visit *La Nazione*, Florence

Unit 6 (two hours)

Review, midterm exam
- Spring break

Unit 7

Amanda Knox case: comparative narration of a crim.
- US vs Italy

Unit 8

Organized crime in Southern Italy & negative symbols of Italian culture
- Mafia and Camorra
- Movie: Gomorra
- The representation of Sicilian culture in *Montalbano* (Italian TV detective series)

Unit 9

Student-led discussions
- Illustration of Taormina assignment

Taormina study tour

Students complete Taormina assignments

Unit 10

Music, crime & deviance in Italy
- Fabrizio De André and the narration of outsiders
- Hip hop, "posse" and cultural resistance

Unit 11

When an artist becomes a criminal… The U.S. Vs John Lennon

Unit 12

Football & violence in Italy
- Ultras' culture
- Take-home final due

Unit 13
- Presentations of take-home finals

Policies

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to be on time and attend all classes while abroad. Many instructors assess both attendance and participation when assigning a final course grade. Attendance alone does not guarantee a positive participation grade; the student should be prepared for class and engage in class discussion. See the on-site syllabus for specific class requirements.

University of Minnesota Policies & Procedures

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

Scholastic Dishonesty

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

Student Conduct

The University of Minnesota has specific policies concerning student conduct. This information can be found on the Learning Abroad Center website.