We live our lives in social institutions, from those that are formally organized, such as schools, courts, and hospitals, to those that do not have a fixed organizational structure, such as language or norms of exchange. We may think of social institutions as complex social forms that reproduce and transform themselves. Each is shaped by norms or rules, but people do not simply “follow rules”: they develop strategies, draw on cultural repertoires and schemas for action, and form social networks.

Anthropologists and sociologists (and others in related fields) study institutions through ethnography, the close study of everyday interactions, albeit also incorporating approaches from politics and economics, and they do so influenced by the traditions of social pragmatism. We explore the theoretical and empirical dimensions of an ethnographic and pragmatist approach, as applied to schools, courtrooms, science laboratories, art, and other institutions.

The course is about closely reading and discussing certain texts. Therefore, the main requirement is that you read all the materials prior to class, and come ready to discuss them. To encourage this practice, on each week beginning with Week 2, you will post on a discussion thread your thoughts and questions regarding the week’s readings. You will do this by 2 PM on the Monday before class. Posting is done by starting a thread on the Forum for that week in Blackboard: first one there, start a thread using the class meeting date as the Name. In addition, pairs of students will lead class discussion in each session, and their joint posting will contain a more extensive list of questions and points for discussion. During the course, you will each make an informal presentation of how your work can draw from this literature. There is no other work required.

The articles are posted on the Blackboard site under “shared files”.

Aug 25, Introduction

Sept. 1, Pragmatism and sociology

Sept 8, Interaction and communication
**Sept 15, Critique and justification**

**Sept 22, Repertoires and evaluation**

**Sept 29, Frames and schemas**

**Oct 6, No Class**

**Oct 13, Performativity**

**Oct 20, Finance**

**Oct 27, Science**
Nov 3, Clinics

Nov 10, Government

Nov 17, Law

Nov 24, Student presentations
[Thanksgiving]

Dec 1, Student presentations