

Sociology of Sport

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Course Introduction:

Welcome to Sociology 200: Sociology of Sport. Sport is often described through scores, personalities, traditions, and individual effort. Sociology asks another set of questions: How do people create the rules and meanings of sport? Who gets access to which activities, organizations, resources, and rewards? How do teams, schools, leagues, media companies, governments, and markets shape what sport becomes? What kinds of evidence support claims that sport builds character, improves health, causes harm, advances equity, or creates economic value?

This course treats sociology as a toolkit for studying sport scientifically. We will use concepts, theories, and research methods foundational to sociology to examine how sport organizes interaction, socializes participants, creates identities, reflects and reshapes culture, produces markets, and becomes a site of political conflict.

You do not need to be an athlete, sport fan, or a sociology major to excel in this class. Experiences with playing, watching, working in, avoiding, or feeling excluded from sport can all provide useful starting points. However, the course will repeatedly ask you to move beyond those starting points by comparing explanations to and examining systematic evidence.

Throughout the semester, we will discuss many specific issues and current debates in sport, but the primary goal of this class is to give you the tools to understand and critically evaluate the claims about sport you encounter in the world around you. We will accomplish this with the following course objectives and student learning outcomes:

1) *Understand sport as a social institution.*

- Increase your knowledge about how sport is organized, experienced, and represented as a social institution, and about its consequences for individuals and society.
- Examine how culture, social interaction, and social structure shape sport, and how sociologists use theory and evidence to explain patterns in sport and society.
- Explore the social processes through which sport socializes participants, distributes access and rewards, and becomes a site of inequality, identity, and social change.

2) *Improve your ability to critically analyze and evaluate scientific information about sport and society.*

- Learn how to comprehend complex material, summarize it in your own words, and apply it to real world examples.
- Critically evaluate empirical evidence presented to you in the media, by friends and family, and in academic discourse (especially that from professors!).
- Apply course material to specific, substantive topics that are of interest to you.

Required Text

Coakley, Jay and Jeffrey Montez De Oca 2025. *Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies*. New York: McGraw Hill.

*Additional materials (e.g., readings; videos; lectures; discussion board) will be available on the course's Canvas site (login at: <https://uncw.instructure.com/>).

Course Requirements

1) Exams (60%)

A total of 4 exams will test your knowledge and comprehension of course materials with a combination of multiple choice, true/false, and matching questions. Each exam is worth 15% of your grade. All four exams will cover the most recent material covered in lectures, readings, videos, and assignments. You will need to purchase and bring to class a scantron ([form 30423](#)) on the day of the exam in order to complete it.

2) Semester-Long Assignment (20%)

Comprised of three separate assignments (*Details provided in class*).

- Phase I – Choose your Starting Point (5%)
- Phase II – Exploring Sociological Theory via LLM (5%)
- Phase III – Critical Evaluation & Sociological Application (10%)

3) Assignments (20%)

We will regularly have in-class (and sometimes out-of-class) assignments and/or discussion activities for you to participate in. The goal of these assignments and/or discussions is for you to practice retrieving key information to help prepare for exams and to think critically about, reflect on, and apply knowledge related to the topics being covered in class. You must be present to complete most (if not all) of these assignments, and they **CANNOT BE MADE UP**.

Assignments will be excused for acceptable university approved absences and emergencies and at the instructor's discretion.

Grade Scale

A : 93-100%	B+ : 87-89%	C+ : 77-79%	D+ : 67-69%	F : < 60%
A- : 90-92%	B : 83-86%	C : 73-76%	D : 63-66%	
	B- : 80-82%	C- : 70-72%	D- : 60-62%	

Classroom Environment

I consider the classroom to be a professional environment, and students are expected to approach it as such. This includes completing work on time and being prepared to participate in class discussion and activities.

Throughout this class you will be asked to discuss some potentially sensitive and controversial topics. You are expected to engage in these discussions from an intellectual standpoint. As with any professional environment, students are expected to act respectfully towards others, especially when there is disagreement.

Late Work Policy

I generally **DO NOT ACCEPT LATE WORK**. However, given the weight assigned to the ***Personal Experience with Sport Project***, I am making an exception to my late work policy for this project only. Specifically, for each phase of the Personal Experience with Sport Project, you have a two-day grace period. That means that, while technically late, if you turn it in before the end of the day on Sunday (after the Friday on which it's due), it will be graded for full credit. Furthermore, if you turn in any phase of the personal experience with sport project late, but within one week of the day and time it is due, you will receive 80% credit on that phase of the project (i.e. your score on the assignment * 0.8). After a week, you can turn in any of the individual phases of the personal experience with sport project before the last day of classes (Wednesday, December 2nd) for 50% credit (i.e. your score on the assignment * 0.5). *Note: I make no guarantees that late work will be graded in a timely manner. All I guarantee is that it will be graded before grades are due at the end of the semester.*

Students with Disabilities

UNCW is open and accessible to students with disabilities and is committed to providing assistance to enable qualified students to accomplish their educational goals, as well as assuring equal opportunity to derive all of the benefits of campus life. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing accommodations of any type in order to participate in this class, you must notify the Disability Resource Center (#1033 DePaolo Hall, 910-962-7555), provide necessary documentation of the disability and arrange for the appropriate authorized accommodations. Once these accommodations are approved, please identify yourself to me so we can implement these accommodations.

Harassment

The role of all employees and students is to create and maintain a supportive and harassment-free working and learning environment for all members of the campus community. All faculty, staff and students are responsible for understanding and complying with harassment policies. These policies can be viewed at: http://uncw.edu/policies/documents/02.200_Unlawful_Harassment.050605.pdf.

Title IX Mandatory Reporting Policy

UNCW takes all forms of sexual harassment and sexual misconduct very seriously. When students disclose, first or third-hand, to faculty or staff about sexual harassment or misconduct, this information must be reported to the administration for follow-up. The purpose of this is to ensure that students' rights are insured, appropriate resources are offered, and further investigation is explored. Three offices are confidential, and thus do not need to make this report: UNCW CARE, the Student Health Center, and the Counseling Center. If you want to speak to someone in confidence, these resources are available, including CARE's 24-hour crisis line (910-512-4821). For more information, please visit www.uncw.edu/sexualmisconduct or www.uncw.edu/care.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is an important issue in higher education and will be treated as such in this class. You will also be required to submit major written assignments—PES Phase II & Phase III—via Turnitin on the course's Canvas page. As a result, I will not be lenient when it comes to issues of academic integrity. As an enrolled student, you are agreeing to abide by UNCW's Student Academic Honor Code (<http://www.uncw.edu/odos/honorcode/>).

Any time you turn in an assignment or exam, you are agreeing to abide by UNCW's honor pledge: "As a student at The University of North Carolina Wilmington, I am committed to honesty and truthfulness in academic inquiry and in the pursuit of knowledge. I pledge to uphold and promote the UNCW Student Academic Honor Code."

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy

You are permitted to use Generative AI (LLMs) as specifically instructed for the ***Personal Experience with Sport Project***, with the understanding of their limitations and necessary acknowledgements (which you may learn about during that assignment). However, for other assignments, you should default to assuming it is disallowed unless otherwise stated. For example, you are expected to read/watch all assigned readings/videos, complete exams, and draft assigned critical evaluation or reflection papers *on your own*. Using Generative AI to enhance learning is an emerging skill and it is to your advantage to learn how to use it well. Generative AI can be a valuable tool for complementing and enhancing human decisions and performance, but it is not a replacement for critical thinking and the intellectual work necessary to become professionals with basic intellectual skills (e.g., reasoning, problem-solving, synthesizing information, etc.) and a degree of expertise in the sociology of sport.

Campus Student Learning Resources

The University Learning Center (www.uncw.edu/ulc), DePaolo Hall 1056 & 1003

The University Learning Center's (ULC) mission is to help students become successful, independent learners. Tutoring at the ULC is NOT remediation: the ULC offers a different type of learning opportunity for those students who want to increase the quality of their education. ULC services are free to all UNCW students and include the following:

- Learning Services (University Studies) <http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/learning/index.html>
- Math Services <http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/math/index.html>
- Study Sessions <http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/includes/StudySessions.html>
- Supplemental Instruction <http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/si/index.html>
- Writing Services <http://www.uncw.edu/ulc/writing/index.html>

Randall Library (<http://library.uncw.edu>)

The Randall Library has a host of online and in-person tools and services to assist students throughout their time at UNCW. This includes research services that are relevant to your work in SOC 200 (http://library.uncw.edu/get_started).

Tentative Course Schedule

“SIS” refers to the *Sports in Society* textbook, by Coakley and Montez De Oca.

“TPS” refers to excerpts from *The Practical Skeptic* textbook, by Lisa McIntyre (available on Canvas).

*Indicates the reading or video is posted on the course's Canvas site (<https://uncw.instructure.com/>).

Date	Topic	Readings & Assignments
A Sociological Toolkit for studying Sports		
Week #1 (August 20th)		
8/20	<i>Course Introduction; Why Study Sport Sociologically?</i>	Optional: *Babbie (1994)
Week #2 (August 24th – 28th)		
8/25	<i>The Sociological Eye: What Is Sociology, and How Does It Apply to Sport?</i>	SIS Ch. 1 (3-21)
8/27		*TPS Ch. 2 (29-39)
Week #3 (August 31st – September 4th)		
9/1	<i>Producing Sociological Knowledge: How Are Theory & Research Used to Study Sport?</i>	SIS Ch. 2 (24-42)
9/3		*TPS Ch. 3 (40-48)
PES Project: Phase 1 (Due Friday, 9/4)		
Week #4 (September 7th – 11th)		
9/8	<i>Studying Sport Systematically: What Counts as Good Evidence?</i>	*Schwalbe (2001)
9/10		*TPS Ch. 6 (81-100) Optional: *TPS Ch. 5 (58-80)
Social Organization & Sport		
Week #5 (September 14th – 18th)		
9/15	Exam #1	In-Class – Bring Scantron (form 30423)
9/17	<i>Sport and Social Structure: Statuses, Roles, Groups, and Organizations in Sport</i>	*TPS Ch. 8 (121-135) Optional: *TPS Ch. 7 & 9 (101-120; 135-151)
Week #6 (September 21st – 25th)		
9/22	<i>Sport and Socialization over the Life-Course: What do We Learn from Sports?</i>	SIS Ch. 3 Optional: *TPS Ch. 10 (152-168)
9/24		*TBD

Date	Topic	Readings & Assignments
Week #7 (September 28th – October 2nd)		
9/29	<i>Youth Sports: How and for Whom is it Organized?</i>	SIS Ch. 4
10/1		*TBD
PES Project Phase 2 (Due Friday, 10/2)		
Week #8 (October 5th – 9th)		
10/6	<i>Sport and Social Deviance: The Sport Ethic & Overconformity</i>	SIS Ch. 5 (119-150)
10/8	FALL BREAK	NO CLASS
Week #9 (October 12th – 16th)		
10/13	<i>Violence and Abuse in Sports: Why do they Persist</i>	SIS Ch. 6 (158-196)
10/15	Exam #2	In-Class – Bring Scantron (form 30423)
Sport and Social Inequality, Inclusion, & Classification		
Week #10 (October 19th – 23rd)		
10/20	<i>Sex, Gender, & Sport: How do Sex & Gender shape sport participation & competition?</i>	SIS Ch. 7 (211-256)
10/22		*TBD
Week #11 (October 26th – 30th)		
10/27	<i>Race & Ethnicity: How do Status and Identity Matter in Sport?</i>	SIS Ch. 8 (263-301)
10/29		*TBD
Week #12 (November 2nd – 6th)		
11/3	<i>Social Class, Age and Ability: Pathways & Barriers to Sport Participation & Inclusion</i>	SIS Ch. 9 (309-341)
11/5		SIS Ch. 10 (348-387)
Commercial Sport, Media, and Governance		
Week #13 (November 9th – 13th)		
11/10	Exam #3	In-Class – Bring Scantron (form 30423)
11/12	<i>Sport & the Economy: What are the Characteristics of Commercial Sport?</i>	SIS Ch. 11 (394-433)
Week #14 (November 16th – 20th)		
11/17	<i>Sports and Media: Could They Survive Without Each Other?</i>	SIS Ch. 12 (440-472)
11/19	American Society of Criminology Conference	NO CLASS
PES Project Phase 3 (Due Friday, 11/20)		
Week #15 (November 23rd – 27th)		
11/24	<i>Sport, Politics & Governance: How Do Power and Policy Shape Sport</i>	SIS Ch. 13 (478-509)
11/26	UNIVERSITY HOLIDAY	NO CLASS
Week #16 (November 30th – December 3rd)		
12/1	<i>Sport & Education: How do They Shape Each Other?</i>	SIS Ch. 14 (516-555)
Finals Week (December 4th – 10th)		
12/10	Exam #4	Thursday, Dec. 10 th 3pm – 6pm

SOC 200: Personal Experience with Sport Project

Project Overview:

Throughout the semester, you will develop a project that begins with your own experience with sport(s) and moves toward an evidence-based, sociological explanation. This project is designed to help you:

- *Start with, but move beyond, your personal experience with sport, and reflect on how that experience shapes your views on sport and society.*
- *Find, read, and summarize peer-reviewed research so you can develop a critical eye toward what “the studies show.”*
- *Develop your ability to synthesize and evaluate research findings and theoretical arguments.*
- *Learn to use generative AI (an LLM) as a research aid, and to critically evaluate what it produces.*

You will complete portions of the project throughout the semester. This will ensure that you spend adequate time on each phase of the project.

Project Phases:

The entire project will be worth 20% of your grade. The work you do in the first phase will contribute to each subsequent phase. Unless otherwise noted (e.g., Phase 2 LLM prompt/response), you should generally write each phase in standard essay form (e.g., paragraphs and sentences) using appropriate punctuation and grammar. Each phase should be typed in 12-point, Times New Roman font and submitted electronically via Canvas.

- **Phase 1: Choose Your Starting Point:**

- **1A: *Personal Experience with Sport*** (5%) (~1-3 paragraphs, no longer than one page)
 - Describe in detail a meaningful personal experience with sport—e.g., playing, quitting, being cut, watching, coaching, working in, feeling excluded, etc. You may choose a recent experience or an experience from your childhood. Preferably, you will choose an experience that has ‘stuck with you’ for some reason (i.e., one that you can recall vividly, or that your parents, friends, or family are aware of and may be able to help you remember). However, please do not choose an experience that you feel uncomfortable either writing about or having me read about.
 - **Legal caveat:** In accordance with federal Title IX guidance and in compliance with the Clery Act and North Carolina law, UNCW faculty and staff must abide by the Student Sexual Misconduct Policy by reporting any first- and third-hand reports of sexual misconduct, dating violence and stalking between students to the University for investigation. Therefore, you should not discuss behaviors that fall under this policy in your PES project.
- **1B: *Public Case or Media Report on Sport***
 - Describe in detail a public case or media report on sport—e.g., a news story, a rule or policy change, a public controversy or scandal, an athlete's statement or protest, a viral moment, a recurring media narrative, etc. You may choose a current case or one from the past. Preferably, you will choose a case that has 'stuck with you' or caught your attention for some reason (i.e., one you followed closely, found surprising or unfair, or have talked about with friends or family). Choose a case that is public and documented well enough that you can locate media coverage of it, since you will build on it in the phases that follow.

- **Name a belief or claim.** Identify one belief or claim about sport and society that this experience shaped—e.g., “sports build character,” “hard work is what separates the athletes who make it from those who don’t,” “youth sports have become too expensive and intense,” etc.
- **Give your own explanation.** In your own words, explain why you hold that belief, or why you think the pattern happens. Then detail how your explanation is rooted in individuals (e.g., choices, talent, effort), culture (e.g., shared values, meanings, identities), social structure (e.g., resources, rules, institutions, inequality) or a combination of these factors.
- **Phase 2: *Exploring Sociological Theory via LLM* (5%) (~1-2 pages)**
 - Part A: LLM Interaction
 - Sign up/log into an LLM (“AI”) of your choice (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, Claude.ai).
 - Using only the general topic or claim from Phase 1 - **NOT** your personal details - use the following prompts to ask the LLM about theory and evidence surrounding the topic. Insert your specific [details] where there are brackets:
 - **Prompt 1:** “What sociological theory or theories best explain [sport topic or claim]? Explain why each theory you identify is well-suited to explaining it.”
 - **Prompt 2:** “Provide 3-5 **peer-reviewed empirical studies** (studies that collected and/or analyzed original data from participants, not review articles or theoretical essays) that support this explanation of [sport topic]. For each study, include a reference in APA format and summarize key details about the study (e.g., main findings, sample description, research methods and measures).”
 - **Prompt 3:** “Provide 2-3 **peer-reviewed empirical studies** ((studies that collected and/or analyzed original data from participants, not review articles or theoretical essays) whose findings challenge or fail to support this explanation of [sport topic]. For each study, include a reference in APA format and summarize key details about the study (e.g., main findings, sample description, research methods and measures).”
 - Save the entire LLM conversation as a PDF file and submit it.
 - ***Note:** You are specifically looking for empirical research articles—studies where researchers collected and/or analyzed original data. Review articles, meta-analyses, and purely theoretical essays do not count toward your two required sources in Phase 3, even if the LLM suggests them.*
 - Part B: Initial Reflection.
 - Write a reflection addressing (~ 1-2 pages):
 - Which explanations or theories did the LLM suggest? Are any familiar from this course or prior coursework?
 - Did the LLM provide genuinely different arguments for and against the explanation? Did the wording of the prompt affect the summary you received? For example, did asking for supporting versus challenging evidence change what you received? Explain.

- How do the LLM's explanations compare to your own explanation from Phase 1? In other words, you should describe whether the LLMs explanations are similar to your earlier beliefs, contradict your earlier beliefs, or perhaps add to your earlier beliefs in some way you had not considered.
- **Phase 3: Critical Evaluation & Sociological Application** (10%) (~2-4 pages)
 - Part A: Critical Evaluation of LLM Performance
 - Find and read two (2) *peer-reviewed empirical studies* cited by the LLM regarding *one* of the theories identified by the LLM in Phase 2.
 - If possible, pick one source that supports and one that challenges the explanation from Phase 2. your theory's explanation of the behavior you described in phase 1 and one source that contradicts or does not support the theory's explanation.
 - There are various ways to find sources cited by an LLM if it does not provide you with a direct link. One way is to search on Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/>). You can also search via the UNCW library (<https://library.uncw.edu/>).
 - LLMs routinely rely on non-peer-reviewed sources and sometimes make up (hallucinate) sources. If this happens, you will need to find two (2) peer-reviewed sources evaluating the program on your own. UNCW's library has access to multiple databases that allow one to limit their search only to peer-reviewed research (<https://libguides.uncw.edu/sociology>).
 - Critically evaluate the two articles
 - Of the two studies, which provides more compelling evidence either for or against the explanation? Why?
 - Identify one direct quote (with page number) from each article that illustrates a key finding or methodological choice. Explain in 2-3 sentences why you selected this quote and what it reveals about the study.
 - Critically evaluate the LLM's performance:
 - Did the LLM accurately summarize the theory or explanation it suggested?
 - Did the LLM accurately represent research evidence in the two studies you read? Explain and provide details—What did it get right, and what did it get wrong or oversimplify?
 - Part B: Sociological Application and Personal Reflection (~ 1-2 pages)
 - *Course Explanation:* Identify one concept or theory from this course that you think best explains your Phase 1 experience and/or belief:
 - Describe its basic argument in your own words.
 - Explain how it specifically applies to your Phase 1 experience (in your own words): identify the specific mechanism the theory proposes and describe how that mechanism operated in your case—what conditions were present or absent, and how did they shape what happened?
 - *Comparative Analysis:* How does your chosen course explanation compare to:
 - Your original Phase I explanation?
 - The explanation(s) suggested by the LLM?
 - The peer-reviewed research evidence you read?

- *Theoretical Reflection*: How has your understanding of this topic changed from Phase 1 to now? What role did the LLM suggestions, course content, and peer-reviewed research play in this evolution?
- Part C: Learning Reflection (~ 1 paragraph)
 - Include a final paragraph reflecting on:
 - What you learned from this project overall and about using LLMs for academic research.
 - How this experience might change how you use LLMs in future academic work.
- Include a reference list at the end of your paper using APA format citing both peer-reviewed sources and your LLM conversation. For citing LLM conversations, see:
<https://apastyle.apa.org/blog/how-to-cite-chatgpt>