COURSE DESCRIPTION AND PROMISES

How has capitalism made children both “economically worthless” and “priceless”? How does market competition discourage racism and sexism? Would a market for human organs help patients or dehumanize donors? What happens when we pay men for sperm and women for their eggs? How do hospitals respond to market pressures and how does this affect patient care? Is it immoral for me to take a bet that my baby daughter will die? Does the pursuit of profit poison science? What is the proper way to value nature?

In his classic 1982 paper, economist Albert Hirschman explored what he called “rival interpretations of market society”. Hirschman wondered: Are markets civilizing, destructive, or feeble forces within society? This course will explore that same question through the lens of both abstract philosophy and empirical sociological research by exploring puzzles like the ones mentioned here. Students will grapple with a number of issues including commodification, the effect of markets on social relations, the trifecta of class, race, and gender, and the place of markets in a free and fair society.

At the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- Analyze and compare the strengths and weaknesses of several approaches to the relationship between markets and morality.
- Understand and critique various methodological approaches to the study of markets.
- Gain in depth knowledge of several taboo markets including one of your own choosing.
- Apply sociological insights to both historical and contemporary organizations and use this knowledge to solve social problems.

READINGS

There is no textbook for this course. In an effort to save you money and get you to think more critically, we will be reading original journal articles and a number of books or chapters from books. All journal articles will be available on Sakai. All books will be available as eBooks from the library.

FULFILLING YOUR END OF THE DEAL AND GRADING

There are five broad ways in which you will demonstrate your ability to think critically about the topics we cover and apply them to your world. All written work should be submitted via Sakai.

Research Question (25%) Reading Memos (10%)
Literature Review (25%) Participation (15%)
Research Proposal (25%)
The first is Participation. In addition to active participation in class discussions, I would like you to attend at least one sociology-related event outside of the classroom. This can be on or off campus. I will announce relevant events throughout the semester and post them to Sakai. After the event, make a 10-15 minute office hour appointment with me to tell me about it. If you went with other people, you can all sign up as a group. I don’t have time to attend all these events so I love hearing about them from you. The event and visit must take place by last day of class.

The second is a series of ten weekly Reading Memos. I think these are really interesting and compelling readings but I want to hear what you think about them. The memos should be two-page (500+ words) reflections on the week’s assigned reading(s). What did you find interesting? Were you convinced by their argument/evidence? Can we apply it elsewhere? Was anything unclear or confusing? Summaries are boring. The word count gets you full credit. Saying something honest or interesting gets my attention. This must be uploaded to Sakai before the first class each week.

The third is a Research Question (1000+ words) on the topic of your choice related to the relationship between morality and markets, money, or commodification. What is the puzzle you are trying to solve? How do you know it exists? Why is this topic important? The point is not to start with a particular argument or POV. Rather, you want to explore topic on which you don’t have all the answers. You may work in in groups of up to three people. This is due on Sunday, February 28th.

The fourth is a Literature Review (2000+ words including revised research question) that builds off the first paper. You will discuss at least three theories and their supporting evidence for possible answers to the question you raised in your first paper. You may work in in groups of up to three people. This is due on Sunday, March 27th.

The fifth is a full Research Proposal (3000+ words including revised research question and literature review) building on the topic selected in the previous papers in which you will design a study with appropriate research methods and data to answer your original research question. You may work individually or in groups of up to three people. This is due on Wednesday, May 4th.

Please do not ask me about extra credit. Assignments are spread evenly throughout the course giving you enough time to bring up your grade in subsequent assignments without the need for extra credit.

The grading scale for the course is as follows:

- A 94-100%
- A- 90-93%
- A+ 87-89%
- B 83-86%
- B- 80-82%
- B+ 77-79%
- C 73-76%
- C- 70-72%
- C+ 67-69%
- D 63-66%
- D- 60-62%
- D+ 57-59%
- F Under 60%

OTHER CLASS POLICIES

Attendance Policy: Attending class is vital for the learning process. Much of the time spent in class will consist of discussions among students about the material you’ve read. Therefore, attendance is mandatory. I take attendance at the beginning of each class and reserve the right to mark unexcused tardiness as an absence. Students with more than three unexcused absences at the end of the semester will be bumped down a full 1/3 letter grade for each absence after the first three.

Missed assignments: Students may make up assignments or exams only with documentation of a legitimate excuse for missing the assignment or exam, such as serious illness or death in the family.
Academic integrity: The student handbook states “As a Wellesley College student, I will act with honesty, integrity, and respect. In making this commitment, I am accountable to the community and dedicate myself to a life of honor.”

Cellphones/Laptops: Cellphone use is not permitted during class. It is distracting to me as well as many of your fellow students. Please make sure you turn the ringer off before you come to class. Students are welcome to use laptops during class if they are used for taking notes and other activities related to the class – this does not include Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, or whatever hip new app the kids are using these days. If I catch you using your laptop for non-class related reasons, you will be banned from using it in class for the rest of the semester.

Office Hours: Students are encouraged to visit me during office hours for any reason at all. I am not always quick to respond to emails so this is the best way to get the help you may need. Students are also encouraged to visit me during office hours simply to discuss interesting things that they may have read in class or elsewhere. I am a nerd and love chatting anything sociological.

PART I – RIVAL VIEWS OF MARKETS

Week 1  Introduction (1/26, 1/29)


Week 2  Destructive markets: commodified nightmares (2/2, 2/5)


Week 3  Civilizing markets: liberal dreams (2/9, 2/12)


Week 4  Moralized markets (2/16, 2/19)


Week 5  Feedback session #1 (2/23, 2/26)

No readings. We will be reviewing each other’s research questions and giving constructive feedback on Friday.

Research Question due on Sunday, February 28 at 11:59pm.
PART II – NEW DIRECTIONS IN MORALIZED MARKETS

Week 6

**Betting on (your child's) death (3/1, 3/4)**


Week 7

**Brother, can you spare a kidney? (3/8, 3/11)**


Week 8

**Feedback session #2 (3/15, 3/18)**

No readings this week. We will be reviewing each other's literature reviews and giving constructive feedback. Class is cancelled on 3/18.

Week 9

**Spring break (3/22, 3/25)**

No classes this week. Work on your literature review and get a head start on the reading for next week.

*Literature Review due on Sunday, March 27th at 11:59pm.*

Week 10

**Selling genes, selling gender (3/29, 4/1)**


PART III – EXPLAINING VARIATION IN MORALIZED MARKETS

Week 11

**Putting a price on nature (4/5, 4/8)**


Week 12

**Science for a profit (4/12, 4/15)**

Week 13  
**Feedback session #3 (4/19, 4/22)**

No readings this week. We will be reviewing each other’s methods and data designs and giving constructive feedback. No class on 4/19 (Monday schedule).

Week 14  
**Is the market’s expansion inevitable? (4/26, 4/29)**


Week 15  
**Wrap up (5/3)**

*Research proposal due on Wednesday, May 4th at 11:59pm.*