



The University of Western Ontario
Department of Sociology
SOCIOLOGY 2279A-001
Unequal Cities
Fall 2026

Thursday, 2:30 to 5:30, Room SSC 2032
Delivery Method: In-Person

Instructor: Dr. Lora A. Phillips
Office Hours: Fridays, 1 to 2pm, or by appointment
Department of Sociology, Office: SSC 5401
Email: lphill33@uwo.ca

Course Description: This course examines inequality by exploring how it occurs across cities and how different social groups experience cities unequally by examining class, race, ethnicity, immigration status, gender, and sexuality. It also examines how urban social problems, such as poverty, homelessness or gentrification reflect and generate urban inequality.

Prerequisite(s): None.

Anti-requisite(s): None.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:

The public often thinks of the city in terms of its built environment (i.e., the buildings, roadways, landscaping, signature structures, housing patterns, transportation patterns). In many ways, these elements of the built environment shape the nature of urban life. But humans have created the built environment. Theoretically, we call this process externalization, because the city becomes what we make it. On the other hand, the city shapes us, and we are forced to adapt and fit in. We call this side of the process internalization. The relationship between these two processes of internalization and externalization is one of constant tension, which we call a dialectic. Understanding this dialectic is at the heart of urban sociology, because we try to discern both how urban life is shaped by processes of human action and how human action is constrained by urban processes themselves. (Hiller 2014:xiv-xi)

Put simply, in this course we will explore how humans create unequal cities while, at the same time, cities create unequal humans. In doing so, we will focus primarily on the contemporary Canadian context; however, the key frameworks and concepts presented may also be applied to other periods and contexts.

Students who complete this course successfully will be able to:

- Identify, describe, compare, and apply key theoretical concepts related to urban sociology and inequality.
- Understand the dialectic between cities and identity, as well as between cities and social problems.
- Demonstrate an ability to present and discuss ideas using effective oral and written communication.

Course Materials:

1. Readings listed on the detailed reading list, which are posted to OWL.

Communication:

Office hours: Fridays from 1 to 2pm or by appointment (SSC 5401). Email: lphil33@uwo.ca. Emails received after normal business hours (i.e., 9am to 4pm, Monday through Friday) may not be replied to until the next business day, and students should plan accordingly ahead of evaluation dates. Additionally, email is not suitable for questions requiring considerable exposition; these questions are suited for in-person exchange during office hours. Office hours are drop-in and first come, first serve. Students are responsible for checking the course [OWL Brightspace](#) site on a regular basis for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class.

Course Schedule and Readings:

The reading list and weekly schedule are at the end of this document.

Method of Evaluation:

The evaluation methods described in the course outline are essential requirements for the course.

Midterm	October 29, 2026	35%
Reading Checks	Throughout term*	15%
Group Discussions	Throughout term*	15%
Final	Exam period	35%

*See below for additional information regarding due dates and grading.

Midterm

The midterm will be administered **during the first 90 minutes of class on Thursday, October 29**. Students will have 90 minutes to answer 90 questions, predominantly in a multiple-choice format (with four response options per question). The midterm may also contain true or false questions, not to exceed one-fourth of all questions. Course material from Weeks 1-7 will be eligible for testing, with 75% of questions coming from lectures and 25% of questions coming from readings. No electronic devices, books, cheat sheets, dictionaries or aids are permitted during the examination.

Per university policy on academic considerations (found [here](#)), requests for academic consideration related to the midterm **must** follow the procedures enumerated in the Absence from Course Commitments section of the Course Policy Document. Instructors are permitted to designate one assessment, per course, per term as requiring supporting documentation to receive academic consideration. For this course, the midterm has been designated as **requiring supporting documentation**. Students with an approved absence from the midterm will be required to write a makeup exam during the departmental midterm make-up exam period (location and date TBD).

Final

The final will be administered **during the Final Exam period**, with the date and location determined by the registrar's office. Students will have 90 minutes to answer 90 questions, predominantly in a multiple-choice format (with four response options per question); however, the exam may also contain true or false questions, not to exceed one-fourth of all questions. The final will be cumulative, but there will be a greater focus on material covered after the midterm, with 75% of questions coming from lectures and 25% of questions coming from readings. No electronic devices, books, cheat sheets, dictionaries or aids are permitted during the examination.

Per university policy on academic considerations (found [here](#)), requests for academic consideration related to the final **must** follow the procedures enumerated in the Student Absences section of this syllabus. Please note that: "Requests for examinations scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during official examination periods . . .

ALWAYS require formal supporting documentation.” Students with an approved absence from the final will be required to write a makeup exam during the departmental final make-up exam period (location and date TBD).

Reading Checks

This course has ten (10) **in-class** reading checks, which will be administered at the beginning of each class in an analog (i.e., pen or pencil and paper) format. Each reading check will consist of one (1) multiple-choice question related to the materials assigned for that class period. Students are expected to work independently and without the use of electronic devices, books, cheat sheets, dictionaries or aids.

Of the ten (10) in-class reading checks, the **eight (8)** with the highest mark will be counted towards the final grade. If a student misses more than two (2) reading checks, they will receive a grade of zero on each additional missed reading check. No other academic consideration will be granted for missed reading checks.

Group Discussions

This course has ten (10) **in-class** discussions, which will take place at the end of class. Working in groups of three to five (3-5) students, you will discuss a prompt designed to extend your knowledge of course material through direct application of sociological ideas. During the first 15 minutes of each discussion, students are prohibited from using any electronic devices. One group member must submit the group’s response to OWL Brightspace **by the end of class**.

Of the ten (10) group discussions, the **eight (8)** with the highest mark will be counted towards the final grade. If a student misses more than two (2) group discussions, they will receive a grade of zero on each additional missed discussion. If a group experiences a technological issue with OWL Brightspace that prevents them from submitting their response, members of the group **must** speak to the instructor prior to the end of the same class period. No other academic consideration will be granted for missed group discussions.

Course Policies:

Artificial Intelligence

Within this course, students are permitted to use AI tools exclusively for information gathering and copy-editing purposes. Group discussions and their associated written responses should reflect students’ own ideas and critical thinking skills. If AI is used, students are expected to report which platform was used and in what capacity.

Lectures and Course Materials

Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions, etc.) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. Note that infringement of copyright is an academic offence.

Recording Lectures

Recording lectures is not permitted. If you require a recording device for medical or other reasons, please see me.

Electronic Devices

All types of technology are welcome in class, but they must not interfere with lecture or distract other students. If your electronic device distracts me or another student, you will be asked to put it away and not permitted to use it for the remainder of the class. Cell phones should be turned to silent at the beginning of class.

Extra Credit

Extra credit will be offered at my discretion. In the rare event that extra credit is offered, it will never be offered on an individual basis; all extra credit opportunities will be offered to the entire class.

Course Schedule and Readings:

Week 1 – September 10, 2026: Introduction

Week 2 – September 17, 2026: Unequal Cities

Read: Wright, “Two Approaches to Inequality and their Normative Implications”

Week 3 – September 24, 2026: Inequality within Cities – Over Time

Read: Wikipedia, [“London, Ontario”](#)

Week 4 – October 1, 2026: Inequality within Cities – Intersectionality and Social Class

Read: Harris, “Plus ça Change: Neighbourhood Inequality in Canadian Cities since 1900”

Week 5 – October 8, 2026: Inequality within Cities – Race, Ethnicity, and Nativity

Read: Ansari, “Everybody Fits In”

Week 6 – October 15, 2026: Reading Week – No Class

Week 7 – October 22, 2026: Inequality within Cities – Gender and Sexuality

Read: Hayden, “What Would a Non-Sexist City Be Like?”

Week 8 – October 29, 2026: MIDTERM EXAMINATION

Week 9 – November 5, 2026: Urban Social Problems – Income Polarization and Income Extremes

Interact: Statistics Canada, [“Income Explorer, 2021 Census”](#)

Week 10 – November 12, 2026: Urban Social Problems – Housing

Read: Government of Canada, “Solving the Housing Crisis: Canada’s Housing Plan”

Week 11 – November 19, 2026: Urban Social Problems – Crime and Social Control

Read: Loughran, “Parks for Profit”

Week 12 – November 26, 2026: Urban Social Problems – Climate Change and Health

Read: Cohen, “Urban Policy and Planning for the Climate Crisis”

Week 13 – December 3, 2026: Urban Inequality – Reproduction and Social Change

Watch: [“Jane Jacobs vs Robert Moses: Urban Fight of the Century”](#)

FINAL EXAMINATION – Exam Period (Scheduled by Registrar’s Office)