

SOC 3090: Sociology of the American Housing Crisis

Lecture time: Tues/Thurs 9:45-11:00am

Lecture location: [317 Blegen Hall](#)

Instructor: Nick Graetz (he/him/his)

Email: ngraetz@umn.edu

Office hours: Tues 11:00-1:00pm

Office location: [1172 Social Sciences Building](#)

Course Description

Why is housing important?

1. We all need shelter. Access to basic shelter is a human need, but fulfilling that need is not straightforward. In the world of modern housing markets, most of us will inevitably enter complex legal, financial, and personal relationships with banks, landlords, courts, governments, and other actors involved in our housing.
2. We all live in communities. Housing is more than walls and a roof. Our housing is often entangled with cultural and collective meanings of place, land, stewardship, and belonging. We all experience social processes shaped by housing, including segregation, gentrification, and community building.
3. We are all affected by the American economy. The government structures how the private costs of housing are publicly shared by shaping how housing is taxed or exempted from taxation and how housing is subsidized by public spending or lending.
4. We are all affected by the global economy. Real estate now represents 60% of the value of all global assets. Housing finance has been at the center of recent global economic shifts (e.g., Great Recession) and will continue to take center stage in the coming decade (e.g., climate change).

This course guides students through developing a critical sociological understanding of American housing, including key concepts, historical perspectives, political economy, social policies, and the latest empirical data.

We will engage with empirical data and scholarly work, but we will also engage with essays, policy reports, podcasts, and more from community organizers, journalists, and think tanks—including examples of how the larger housing issues we discuss manifest locally here in Minneapolis (I have highlighted items on the syllabus that are specifically about Minneapolis in [blue](#)).

Motivating questions and course goals

Open any news source today and there will be a headline related to housing. By many accounts, we are experiencing a national crisis as rents and the costs of homeownership remain unaffordable for many Americans. In this course, we will consider key empirical facts about the historical and contemporary landscape of housing and review theoretical frameworks for explaining these facts

from a sociological perspective. Developing our understanding of housing will revolve around these questions:

1. What is housing? Students will develop a framework for considering different meanings of housing—as shelter, commodity, investment, home, community—and how these meanings diverge and intersect across common narratives of housing and the goals of different social policies.
2. Is there a housing “crisis” today? Equipped with various definitions and goals for housing, students will develop the ability to evaluate different sources of data on the housing crisis today.
3. How did we get here? Students will engage with historical work on key periods that have shaped the modern American housing system, allowing them to contextualize and historicize data on the current crisis.
4. Where are we going? Putting everything together, students will leave the course equipped with a framework for making sense of where we are headed in the coming decade—including an understanding of the latest trends, policies, and challenges in housing.

Beyond helping students to develop a framework for understanding these questions, this course may also help guide students in thinking about career paths. The most pressing housing issues today intersect with careers in academia, non-profits, community organizing, journalism, think tanks, government, and private industry.

Course materials

The course materials reflect a key goal of this course: developing a critical framework for understanding housing. How do we learn about and understand the housing crisis? Who is producing knowledge and evidence on housing? Who is setting the agenda, and what is being prioritized? Different actors disagree on how to define the housing crisis and what to do about it. There are many different actors producing knowledge and evidence related to housing, including but not limited to:

Source	Examples
Government	• US Census Bureau and HUD • Local government
Academia	• Sociologists • Economists • Historians
Think Tanks	• Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies • Urban Institute
Journalism	• The New York Times • ProPublica
Tenant Organizations	• Tenant Union Federation • United Renters For Justice/Inquilinxs Unidxs por Justicia (IX)
Private Industry	• Zillow • Redfin

Our exploration of housing issues throughout the course will revolve around empirical facts (e.g., “Roughly two thirds of Americans own their homes”)—but there are many ways to think about which facts are most important for which questions, and how we understand the implications of these facts. As we will discuss, each of the actors above comes to housing from a different perspective, which affects how they frame housing issues, how they collect data, how they choose which data to collect, how they explain these data, and which data they think are most important for understanding any given issue. We will center this complexity throughout the course, reading widely and considering perspectives from nearly all these sources.

Evaluation

- **Weekly reflections (40%):** Students will submit weekly reflections through Canvas based on readings and lectures; reflections each week are due the following Sunday at midnight. Reflections must include reference to **at least one piece of material assigned for that week.** I will provide prompts, including questions about which topics were particularly interesting, boring, or confusing. The material I cover in the following week will incorporate students’ responses.
- **Participation in interactive sessions (30%):** For several weeks evenly spaced across the semester, we will have interactive sessions during class time. These will typically involve engaging with an interactive resource during class, participating in discussions, and very brief written reflections submitted during class time.
- **Final project (30%):** By the end of the semester, students will complete a written project on a housing issue of their choice. I will also provide prompts for final project ideas, but it is not necessary that students use one of these. Students have the following options, which I will describe further in class: 1) op-ed, 2) policy brief, 3) academic conference abstract, 4) grant proposal.

Final letter grades will be assigned according to the following scale:

Grade	%
A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	88-89
B	83-87
B-	80-82
C+	78-79
C	73-77
C-	70-72
D+	68-69
D	63-67
D-	60-62
F	0-59

Course Policies

- *Office Hours:* Office hours will be held on Tuesdays from 12:30 to 2:30 PM. Students are strongly encouraged to see me during this time with anything that they would like to discuss. Importantly, this is not limited to just questions or concerns regarding the course: please stop by to discuss your research ideas; to expand on concepts covered in class; to generate new ideas; etc. This time slot is held wide-open, to be used in any way that you find helpful! Note that if you happen to have conflicts during this time slot, contact me so that we can accommodate you.
- *Difficult Subjects:* The content of this course includes topics that can be difficult for some people to consider and discuss. Some key events we will read about and discuss, for example, involve violent racism and removal of individuals from their homes. While I cannot always predict which topics may be most challenging, I can try to be as accommodating as possible. If there is a topic that you are unable to discuss or are otherwise particularly sensitive to, let me know, and we can work together to plan. Please note, however, that I am unable to prevent all students from being exposed to topics that they might find challenging or difficult.
- *Holiday Absences:* Please contact me within the first week of class if you observe a religious holiday during the semester that overlaps with lecture, so that we can make the appropriate accommodation.
- *Late Work:* Reflection assignments may be turned in the week after the due date for half credit. Students may miss one interactive session over the course of the semester and submit a makeup assignment for full credit (please email me ahead of time if you know you'll miss one of the interactive sessions); any additional missed interactive sessions will receive no credit.

Course Schedule

I will potentially make changes to this schedule depending on student interest, unforeseen circumstances, etc. I will announce any changes to the schedule in class and keep the syllabus updated on Canvas. **I have highlighted days with no class in yellow and material specifically about Minneapolis in blue.**

There is only one book that you should get for this course: *The Sociology of Housing: How Homes Shape Our Social Lives* edited by Brian McCabe and Eva Rosen (I refer to this book as **SoH** in the schedule below). I will provide all other material on the course website. I have included a few bonus materials (**) for students who are particularly interested in certain subjects; these readings are optional and more advanced than the required materials.

Week	Topic	Reading, etc.
1	(9/3) Introduction to the Course and Motivating Facts	No reading.
	(9/5) What is Housing?	Article: Pattillo, Mary (2013). “Housing: Commodity versus Right.” <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i>. (Focus on p. 509-518). Book: “Housing is Under Attack” excerpt from <i>In Defense of Housing</i> by Madden & Marcuse. SoH: “Introduction: How Homes Shape Our Social Lives” by McCabe, Rosen.
2	(9/10) No Class	
	(9/12) No Class	
Part 1: The History of American Housing		
3	(9/17) Property, Law, and Indigenous Dispossession	SoH: “Chapter 5. Unsettling Native Land: Indigenous Perspectives on Housing” by Darrah-Okike, Riley, Garboden, Rita. Book: “Creating America’s First Native Public Housing Complex” excerpt from <i>American Indians and the American Dream: Policies, Place, and Property in Minnesota</i> by Keeler. **Book: Park, K-Sue (2021). “Race, Innovation, and Financial Growth: The Example of Foreclosure” in <i>Histories of Racial Capitalism</i>. **Book: <i>American Indians and the American Dream: Policies, Place, and Property in Minnesota</i> by Keeler.

	(9/19) The New Deal	SoH: “Chapter 1. Housing as Capital: US Policy, Homeownership, and the Racial Wealth Gap” by Rucks-Ahidiana. **Book: <i>Modern Housing</i> by Radford. **Book: <i>New Deal Ruins</i> by Goetz.
4	(9/24) Racial Covenants and Redlining (9/26) Race for Profit	Video: “Housing Segregation and Redlining in America: A Short History” by NPR’s Code Switch. Podcast: “Episode 43: Reexamining Redlining with Todd Michney.” UCLA Housing Voice. Essay: Gioielli, Robert (2023). “The Tyranny of The Map: Rethinking Redlining.” <i>The Metropole</i>. Blog: Law and Political Economy Project: <i>Race for Profit</i> Symposium. Read essays by Kecanga-Yamahtta Taylor, Rasheedah Phillips, and K-Sue Park. Video: “Inside the Battle for Fair Housing in 1960s Chicago,” <i>The Atlantic</i>. **Book: <i>Race for Profit</i> by Taylor.
5	(10/1) Interactive: Redlining and Racial Covenants in Minneapolis (10/3) Interactive: Redlining and Racial Covenants in Minneapolis	Activity: Presentation from Mapping Prejudice. Activity: Mapping Inequality. Activity: Mapping Renewal. Activity: On Stage actors visit to discuss their play Behind the Sun.
Part 2: Who Shapes Housing Markets?		
6	(10/8) The Government (10/10) Housing Market Intermediaries	SoH: “Chapter 18. How We Pay to House Each Other” by Martin. Journalism: Desmond, Matthew (2017). “How Homeownership Became the Engine of American Inequality.” <i>The New York Times</i>. SoH: “Chapter 14. Housing Market Intermediaries” by Korver-Glenn, Bartram, Besbris. **Book: Besbris, M. (2020). “Introduction: Value, Preferences, and Inequality in the Housing Market” in

		<i>Upsold: Real Estate Agents, Prices, and Neighborhood Inequality.</i>
7	(10/15) Land Use, Zoning, and Housing Supply	SoH: “Chapter 13: Housing supply as a social process” by Labriola. Video: “How the US made affordable homes illegal.” <i>Vox.</i> Journalism: Mervosh, S. (2018). “Minneapolis, Tackling Housing Crisis and Inequity, Votes to End Single-Family Zoning.” <i>The New York Times.</i> **Article: Manville, M., Monkkonen, P., and Lens, M. (2020). “Viewpoint: It’s Time to End Single-Family Zoning.” <i>Journal of the American Planning Association.</i> **Article: Brouwer, N. R. and Trounstein, J. (2023). “NIMBYs, YIMBYs, and the Politics of Land Use in American Cities.” <i>Annual Review of Political Science.</i>
	(10/17) Homeowners and Local Control	Journalism: Dougherty, Conor (2017). “The Great American Single Family Home Problem.” <i>The New York Times.</i> Journalism: Demsas, Jerusalem (2022). “Community Input is Bad, Actually.” <i>The Atlantic.</i> **Podcast: “The Problem We All Live With.” <i>This American Life.</i> **TV: Show Me a Hero.
8	(10/22) Interactive: Place and Opportunity	Activity: Opportunity Atlas.
	(10/24) The Rental Market	Report: Joint Center for Housing Studies (2024). “ America’s Rental Housing 2024. ”
Part 3: Renting in America		
9	(10/29) No Class	
	(10/31) Housing Choice Vouchers	Video: “The Voucher Promise: A Book Talk with Eva Rosen.” UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies. Journalism: DeParle, Jason (2023). “As Need Rises, Housing Aid Hits Lowest Level in Nearly 25 Years.” <i>The New York Times.</i>

10	(11/5) Landlords and Eviction	SoH: “Chapter 8: Centering the Institutional Life of Eviction” by Nelson and Lens. Journalism: Desmond, Matthew (2020). “The Tenants Who Evicted Their Landlord.” <i>The New York Times</i>. Journalism: Vogell, Heather (2022). “Rent Going Up? One Company’s Algorithm Could Be Why.” <i>ProPublica</i>. **SoH: “Chapter 17: Moving beyond ‘Good Landlord, Bad Landlord’” by Garboden.
	(11/7) Homelessness	SoH: “Chapter 12: Housing Deprivation: Homelessness and the Reproduction of Poverty” by Herring. Video: “Who’s most likely to become unhoused in California? New study provides insights” PBS NewsHour.
11	(11/12) Interactive: Eviction	Website: Eviction Lab
	(11/14) Segregation and Gentrification	**SoH: “Chapter 21: All in the Family: Social Connections and the Cycle of Segregation” by Cuddy, Spring, Krysan, Crowder.
Part 4: Contemporary Issues and Solutions		
12	(11/19) The Financialization of Housing	Report: UN Human Rights Council (2017). “Financialization of Housing.” Movie: PUSH. **Report: LISC, UNHP, NSU (2022). “Gambling with Homes, or Investing in Communities.” **Movie: The Big Short.
	(11/21) Housing and Climate Change	Report: Gourevitch, Ruthy (2024). “Decarbonization without Displacement.” <i>Climate and Community Institute</i>. Journalism: Demsas, Jerusalem (2024). “The Culture War Tearing American Environmentalism Apart.” <i>The Atlantic</i>.
13	(11/26) No Class	
	(11/28) No Class	

14	(12/3) Policy and International Comparisons	Journalism: Mari, Francesca (2023). “Imagine a Renters’ Utopia. It Might Look like Vienna.” <i>The New York Times</i>. Journalism: Zaveri, Mihir (2024). “A New Bill Could Bring ‘Social Housing’ to New York.” <i>The New York Times</i>.
	(12/5) Social Movements and Community Organizing	Journalism: Dougherty, Conor (2023). “The Rent Revolution is Coming.” <i>The New York Times</i>. Article: Raghuveer, T. and Washington, J. (2023). “The Case for the Tenant Union.” <i>Poverty and Race Research Action Council</i>. Article: Pattillo, Mary. 2013. “Housing: Commodity versus Right.” <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i> 39: 509-31. (Revisit, focusing on p. 518-524). **Article: Dantzler, P. and Rodriguez, A.D. (2023). “Racial Capitalism in the City of Brotherly Love.” <i>Poverty and Race Research Action Council</i>. **Article: Michener, Jamila, and Mallory SoRelle (2022). “Politics, Power, and Precarity: How Tenant Organizations Transform Local Political Life.” <i>Interest Groups and Advocacy</i>.
15	(12/10) Social Movements and Community Organizing	Activity: Organizers visit from United Renters For Justice/Inquilinxs Unidxs por Justicia (IX).

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS POLICIES

GRADES: University academic achievement is graded under two systems: A-F (with pluses and minuses) and S-N. Choice of grading system and course level (1xxx/3xxx/4xxx) is indicated on the registration website; changes in grade scale may not be made after the second week of the semester. Some courses may be taken under only one system; limitations are identified in the course listings. The Department of Sociology requires A-F registration in courses required for the major/minor. University regulations prescribe the grades that will be reported on your transcript.

- A Represents achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements (4.00 grade points)
- A- 3.67 grade points
- B+ 3.33 grade points
- B Achievement significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements (3.00 grade points)
- B- 2.67 grade points
- C+ 2.33 grade points
- C Achievement that meets the basic course requirements in every respect (2.00 grade points)
- C- 1.67 grade points
- D+ 1.33 grade points
- D Achievement worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements (1.00 grade point)
- F Performance that fails to meet the basic course requirements (0 grade points)
- S Represents achievement that is satisfactory, which is equivalent to a C- or better.
- N No credit. Its use is now restricted to students not earning an S on the S-N grade base
- I Incomplete, a temporary symbol assigned when the instructor has a "reasonable expectation" that you 1) can successfully complete unfinished work on your own no later than one year from the last day of classes and 2) believes that legitimate reasons exist to justify extending the deadline for course completion. The instructor may set date conditions for make-up work
- W Official withdrawal from a course after the end of the second week of the semester.

CLASS ATTENDANCE: As a student, you are responsible for attending class and for ascertaining the particular attendance requirements for each class or department. You should also learn each instructor's policies concerning make-up of work for absences. Instructors and students may consult the CLA Classroom, Grading, and Examination Procedures Handbook for more information on these policies (<https://policy.umn.edu/education/makeupwork>).

COURSE PERFORMANCE AND GRADING: Instructors establish ground rules for their courses in conformity with their department policies and are expected to explain them at the first course meeting. This includes announcement of office hours and location, the kind of help to be expected from the instructor and teaching assistants, and tutorial services, if available. The instructor also describes the general nature of the course, the work expected, dates for examinations and paper submissions, and expectations for classroom participation and attendance. Instructors determine the standards for grading in their classes and will describe expectations, methods of evaluation, and factors that enter into grade determination. The special conditions under which an incomplete (I) might be awarded also should be established. The college does not permit you to submit extra work to raise your grade unless all students in the class are afforded the same opportunity.

CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR: You are entitled to a good learning environment in the classroom. Students whose behavior is disruptive either to the instructor or to other students will be asked to leave (the policies regarding student conduct are outlined on-line at <https://communitystandards.umn.edu/policies-and-procedures/what-kind-consequences-could-i-face>

ELECTRONIC DEVICES: University instructors may restrict or prohibit the use of personal electronic devices in his or her classroom, lab, or any other instructional setting. For the complete policy, visit: <http://policy.umn.edu/education/studentresp>

SCHOLASTIC CONDUCT: The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows: 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. **Students cannot evade (intentionally or unintentionally) a grade sanction by withdrawing from a course before or after the misconduct charge is reported. This also applies to late withdrawals, including discretionary late cancellation (also known as the "one-time-only drop").** For the complete policy, visit: http://regents.umn.edu/sites/default/files/policies/Student_Conduct_Code.pdf

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND STRESS MANAGEMENT: As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. University of Minnesota services are available to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via <http://www.mentalhealth.umn.edu/>.

A REMINDER OF RELEVANT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
*** SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT POLICIES ***

GRADE INFORMATION: Grades are due in the Office the Registrar within 3 business days after the final examination. No information regarding grades will be released by the department office staff to anyone except designated personnel in Records and college offices. Students may access their own grades through the MyU Portal.

INCOMPLETES: It is the instructor's responsibility to specify conditions under which an Incomplete (I) grade is assigned. Students should refer to the course syllabus and talk with the instructor as early as possible if they anticipate not completing the course work. Coursework submitted after the final examination will generally be evaluated down unless prior arrangements are made in writing by the instructor. University policy states that if completion of the work requires the student to attend class in substantial part a second time, assigning an "I" grade is NOT appropriate. Incompletes are appropriate only if the student can make up the coursework independently with the same professor. Students need to have completed a substantial portion of the course in order to be even considered for an Incomplete.

MAKE-UP EXAMINATIONS: Arrangements for special examinations must be made directly with the instructor who taught the course and who is responsible for approving and supervising the examination or making individual arrangements. Circumstances for missing an exam include, but are not necessarily limited to: verified illness, participation in athletic events or other group activities sponsored by the University, serious family emergencies, subpoenas, jury duty, military service, and religious observances. It is the responsibility of the student to notify faculty members of such circumstances as far in advance as possible.

GRADE CHANGES: Grades properly arrived at are not subject to renegotiation unless all students in the class have similar opportunities. Students have the right to check for possible clerical errors in the assignment of grades by checking with the instructor and/or teaching assistant.

Students with justifiable complaints about grades or classroom procedures have recourse through well-established grievance procedures. You are expected to confer first with the course instructor. If no satisfactory solution is reached, the complaint should be presented in writing to the department Director of Undergraduate Studies or the Coordinator of Undergraduate Advising (909 Soc Sci). If these informal processes fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, other formal procedures for hearing and appeal can be invoked.

DISABILITY SERVICES: Students with disabilities that affect their ability to participate fully in class or to meet all course requirements are encouraged to bring this to the attention of the instructor so that appropriate accommodations can be arranged. For more info contact Disability Resource Center in 180 McNamara. <https://disability.umn.edu>. This publication/material is available in alternative formats upon request. Please contact the Coordinator of Undergraduate Advising at socadvis@umn.edu or visit the Department of Sociology in 909 Social Sciences Building, 271 19th Ave SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455

SEXUAL HARASSMENT: "Sexual harassment" means unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and/or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Faculty, Graduate Students, and full time Staff are Mandated Reporters for prohibited conduct. Such behavior is not acceptable in the University setting. If you have experienced sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment, or related retaliation; or if you have questions about any EOAA-related issue, please contact Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (EOAA) at (612) 624-9547 or eoaa@umn.edu For the complete policy, visit policy.umn.edu/hr/sexharassassault

SOCIOLOGY PROGRAMS INFORMATION: The Sociology Department offers two options for the Bachelor of Arts degree and a Bachelor of Science degree. Students interested in majoring in Sociology should view the online-information session about the major. Due to COVID-19, further information can be obtained from the following persons via email or online at <http://cla.umn.edu/sociology>

General information, Sociology Department – soc@umn.edu
Coordinator of Undergraduate Advising, Bobby Bryant – socadvis@umn.edu
Director of Undergraduate Studies, Prof. Teresa Swartz – tswartz@umn.edu
Soc Honors Faculty Representative, Prof. Teresa Swartz – tswartz@umn.edu
Director of Graduate Studies, Professor Michelle Phelps – phelps@umn.edu
Graduate Program Associate, Becky Drasin – drasi001@umn.edu

Undergraduate jobs, internships, volunteer and research opportunities, scholarships, and much more can be found in the Undergraduate Resources site - <https://sociologyundergrad.wordpress.com/>