DESCRIPTION

Social networks is the description of a diverse body of research and theory based upon the premise that relationships, in contrast to individual attributes, are useful for understanding social structure and social behavior. Network analysts study the structure of these relations, how the patterns of social interactions allocate resources, constrain behavior, and channel information and social change. Their methods are both quantitative and qualitative.

This course is a non-mathematical introduction to social network analysis. It is an introduction to the fundamental concepts related to the theory and measurement of social structure, including: network size, diversity, centrality, multiplexity, frequency of contact, tie duration, and tie strength. We will consider how using a network perspective can help to conceptualize and clarify many different types of important sociological questions and offer new ways of answering those questions. The course will show how attending to the organization of social relationships can increase our understanding of various aspects of individual, community, and organizational life, such as health, social support, job attainment, and the spread of information. Particular attention is given to the role of communications media and the role of new technologies in the maintenance and formation of social networks. The topic of “social capital” – resources people may access through their social contacts – will also be a central focus of the course. What are the costs and benefits of different kinds of network structure for people and for groups? We will constantly ask how and why various forms of personal social capital are unequally distributed, and how this contributes to social mobility and the reproduction of inequality.

PROCEDURES AND EVALUATION

Seminar sessions will involve intensive discussions of assigned readings. Final grades will be based on an evaluation of 10 blog postings on the subject of the weekly course readings (20%), 20 comments on other students’ blog postings (10%), a presentation outlining the final project (10%), a final project (50%), and class participation (10%). Students are urged to pay close attention to due dates, late assignments will not be accepted.

A major component of the course will involve the development and use of a personal blog. Students will receive access to the necessary blogging software and will be provided with basic instruction on how to maintain a blog. Students are not expected to have prior experience with blogs.

Course readings and participation: Students are expected to have read the week’s readings in advance of the course meeting. Class meetings will be in a seminar format and students should be prepared to participate in a discussion based on the topic and readings of the week.

Blog Postings: Students are responsible for submitting short commentaries on 10 of the weeks’ readings (500-700 words). Commentaries should focus on a minimum of 3-4 of the readings from each week and should consist of limited summary; focusing on an evaluation of the readings and identifying 2-3
questions for discussion during the class meeting (focus on the papers’ key issues, strengths and limitations, and a comparison to previous weeks’ readings). Each commentary should be submitted as a post to the student’s blog by 8:00am on the Tuesday before the class meeting. To be clear, students should post commentaries to their blog on the Tuesday before the topic is discussed in class.

Blog Comments: Each student is responsible for contributing comments to fellow students’ blogs. Comments should be a minimum of 200 words and offer a critique of that week’s posting, seek clarification, compare or contrast postings, or provide additional evidence or new information (such as a link to a related article, website, etc.). Each student must contribute a minimum of 20 comments, credit will be given for a maximum of two comments each week, students cannot comment on the same blog more than three times over the duration of the course. Comments must be posted by 8:00am on the day of class for posts related to that week’s readings.

Participation: To encourage active participation all seminar members will take turns introducing the day's readings and facilitating the discussion at different times during the semester. At the beginning of each week’s session discussion leaders will briefly evaluate the readings and suggest possible questions for discussion.

Presentation (March 20): The in-class presentation is as an opportunity for students to explore individual interests and to make a preliminary presentation of their final project. Student's presentations should be 10 minutes long, use PowerPoint, and follow the format of a formal conference presentation.

The presentation should include at least the following elements:

- Identification of the key problem.
- Research question(s).
- A minimum of three citations of key research in the area.
- Research methods and procedure.
- Main strengths and weaknesses of your methods.

Final project (due May 29): The final project can take on one of a number of different forms to be negotiated individually with the instructor. Projects should deal with course themes focusing on a topic of interest to the student. Possibilities include a full research proposal (25-30 double spaced pages), or a paper of near publishable quality based on the analysis of existing data or data collected as part of an original research project (25-30 double spaced pages).

COURSE MATERIALS
Readings, audio files, and grades will be available from the course Blackboard website: https://courseweb.library.upenn.edu/

Handouts, information on assignments, and other announcements will be available from the course blog: http://www.mysocialnetwork.net/blog08/555/

UCINET: Social Network Analysis Software.
Contact Lizz Cooper (support@asc.upenn.edu) to have installed on your ASC office PC.

It is recommended that students subscribe to Soicnet, the e-mail list of the International Network for Social Network Analysis (INSNA). On occasion current topics from this list will be discussed in class.

To subscribe to Soicnet send email to listserv@lists.ufl.edu with the following information in the body of the message (leave the Subject line blank):

subscribe SOCNET <yourfirstname> <yourlastname>

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1 (January 17) - Introduction and Organization

Week 2 (January 24) – What is Social Network Analysis? (NOTE: NO CLASS!)

Week 3 (January 31) – Small World and Scale Free Networks

Week 4 (February 7) – Tie Strength / Social Capital

Week 5 (February 14) – Community and Context


**Week 6 (February 21) – Network Size and Homophily.**


**Week 7 (February 28) – Popularity, Centrality and Prestige**


**Week 8 (March 6) – Measurement**


### Week 9 (March 13) – Spring Break (NO CLASS!)

### Week 10 (March 20) – Presentations.

### Week 11 (March 27) – Computer Networks as Social Networks I.


### Week 12 (April 3) – Computer Networks as Social Networks II.


**Week 13 (April 10) – Search, Diffusion, Contagion, Influence, Opinion and Adoption**


**Week 14 (April 17) – Health**


**Week 15 (April 24) – Social Inequality**
