Introduction

Why do we love sports so much? Sports are nearly as old as human society. But in our SportsCenter culture of 24/7 sports, where North American sports alone are a $67.7 billion industry, where tens of thousands of fans have tattoos of their favorite teams, where Presidents make March Madness brackets for public consumption, sports have become a very powerful social institution. Some critics see sports as the “toy department” of academia and journalism – not worthy of serious study. In one sense, organized sports are simply an entertaining microcosm of our wider society. At the same time, sports are a space where society is constructed, reproduced, and changed. For this reason, organized sports are as worthy of scholarly attention as religion, family, or the media.

Throughout the course, we will apply a sociological lens to the world of sports. In particular, this course examines organized sports as a form of recreation and leisure, as popular culture, and as an industry with significant labor issues. We will pay special attention to stratification within sport along lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, and disability. Students will also consider the potential of sport for liberation and personal expression as well as a potential contributor to social problems.

Learning Outcomes

Students completing SO251R should be able to:
1. Describe the various ways that sport operates as a social institution including its role as an agent of socialization, as an industry, and as a major contributor to recreation and leisure.
2. Discuss inequalities of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability within sport.
3. Critically analyze the role of the market in shaping sport in capitalist societies.
4. Discuss how sport contributes to the formulation of social identities.
5. Develop a sociological argument regarding sport in both oral and written forms for a public audience.

Required Texts

Other readings for the course are available on the course’s Blackboard site (http://learn.skidmore.edu).

Requirements

1. Scholarly Attitude (10%) – Most faculty members evaluate “participation” as a part of students’ course grades. But mere “participation” – how much you do or don’t talk, sit up or fall asleep – isn’t really what most of us want from our students. Instead, most of us hope to see
students accept our invitation to “the life of mind” by adopting a “scholarly attitude.” Having a “scholarly attitude” involves developing intellectual curiosity and a genuine engagement with the ideas presented in the course. Students with a scholarly attitude take the student role seriously and demonstrate their commitment to academic pursuits by actively engaging in the material, reflecting deeply on the readings, raising thoughtful questions and comments in class, bringing unsolicited materials to share that are directly relevant to the topics being covered, come early and/or stay late to raise their own questions about the material, and generally go above and beyond the requirements of the course. Students who lack a scholarly attitude passively complete the readings and responses, occasionally engage in other activities during lecture (playing with phones, texting, daydreaming, and so on), and are primarily concerned with obtaining a particular grade in the course. I will send you a course grade report after each of the exams that includes a current scholarly attitude score.

2. **Exams** (35%) – There will be two non-cumulative examinations testing material covered both in the readings and in class. The first will be held on Oct. 9 and the second during the official exam period. Exams will incorporate definitions, short answer, and essay questions.

3. **Digital Exhibit** (25%) – This semester, we will be doing an exciting collaboration with the Tang Museum. Assistant Director for Curatorial Affairs, Rachel Seligman, Assistant Registrar for Collections, Jessica Lubniewski, and I have selected a number of objects from the Tang’s permanent collection that have to do with sport and society. We will visit the Tang twice to learn about visual analysis and writing for museum audiences. Each student will select an object and, in a few stages, write an extended museum label (400-500 words) for their object. The objects and the labels will be posted online as a digital exhibit available to the public and there will be an exhibition of the physical objects in the Tang Museum during the final week of class. Read the assignment sheet closely for complete instructions and all associated due dates.

4. **Research Paper and Panel Discussion** (30%) – Students will be given a topic related to an issue in sports and asked to write an 8-10 page research paper. Three or four students will be assigned the same topic and will participate in a panel discussion in front of the class at the end of the semester. You will be assigned to take either a pro- or con-position on the issue, but will have freedom to shape the nature of your argument. For the research paper, students will need to cite at least 10 sources, 5 of which need to be from academic journals or publishers (**due: Dec. 4**). All students will write their papers independently. However, groups should meet in advance of their panel discussion to think about how to frame the issue. Grades in the panel discussion will be based on participation, insight, and clarity. It will not be about persuasiveness or the ability to “win” the debate. Read the assignment sheet closely for complete instructions and all associated due dates.

**Summary:**

10% Scholarly Attitude
35% Two Exams
25% Digital Exhibit
30% Research Paper/Panel Discussion

100% Final Grade
Grades:

- 94%-100% A
- 90-93% A-
- 87-89% B+
- 84-86% B
- 80-83% B-
- 77-79% C+
- 74-76% C
- 70-73% C-
- 67-69% D+
- 64-66% D
- 60-63 D-
- <60 F

Course Policies

Disabilities: If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need academic accommodation, you must formally request accommodation from Meg Hegener, Coordinator for Student Access Services. You will also need to provide documentation which verifies the existence of a disability and supports your request. For further information, please call 580-8150 or stop by the office of Student Academic Services in Starbuck Center. I would also encourage you to communicate with me about any accommodations well in advance of exams and due dates.

Electronic Devices: Unless directed to do so, I expect that students will not use laptops or other electronic devices in class. Many studies have shown that people are extremely poor multi-taskers. Looking at Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia, etc. or even doing Google searches that may seem relevant all distract from lecture and discussion. Moreover, most people retain information better when taking handwritten notes. If you feel that your learning will be hampered by not having access to your laptop for note-taking or other legitimate purposes, please speak to me privately. Otherwise, keep your laptop as well as your cell phone and any other devices will be turned off and stowed away during class.

Late Policy: On all assignments, your grade will be reduced by one unit for each day late (e.g., 1 day, from A to A-; 2 days, B+; 3 days, B, and so on). After two weeks from the due date, you will receive a zero for the assignment.

Missed Exam: Students who will miss an exam date due to an official school absence must schedule an alternative exam date and time in advance. As a general rule, I do not allow students with unscheduled exam absences to reschedule. In extreme circumstances, a make-up exam will be given at my discretion and I reserve the right to change the format.

Cheating and Plagiarism: By enrolling at the college, all students have agreed to abide by the Skidmore Honor Code, which says, “I hereby accept membership in the Skidmore College community and, with full realization of the responsibilities inherent in membership, do agree to adhere to honesty and integrity in all relationships, to be considerate of the rights of others, and to abide by the College regulations.” Part of that code means not to misrepresenting others’ work as your own. Please review the detailed description of the rules and regulations surrounding cheating and plagiarism as described in the Skidmore College Student Handbook (http://www.skidmore.edu/student_handbook/honor-code.php). If you are unclear on what constitutes plagiarism and/or cheating, please discuss it with me in advance of due dates or exams. In the case of a violation, the offending student will receive a zero (“F”) for the assignment and I am required to report all offenses to the Dean of Academic Studies, which may result in disciplinary action. Please don’t let this happen!

Civility and Respect: The Skidmore Honor Code also has important implications for how students ought to treat each other. This course will include discussions of class, nationality, religion, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. I expect students to show respect toward all the
subjects of our study. More importantly, I expect you to treat your classmates and your instructor with respect and dignity at all times – especially when you disagree with them.

**Course Outline**

All listed readings are required. Please let me know immediately, if you have difficulty accessing the electronic files.

**Week 1: Introductions**

Sept. 9  Introduction

Sept. 11  No Class – but do this reading as background  

**Week 2: Theoretical Background**

Sept. 14  Sport as a Social Institution  
(E) Serazio, “Just How Much Is Sports Fandom Like Religion?”

Sept. 16  Why Rich People Play Tennis  
(E) Bourdieu, “How Can One Be a Sports Fan?”

Sept. 18  Why Americans Don’t Play Cricket  
(E) Kaufman and Patterson, “Cross-National Cultural Diffusion: The Global Spread of Cricket”

**Week 3: Sport and Socialization**

Sept. 21  Pick-up Games and Travel Teams  
(E) Williams and Feldman, “Anyone Up for Stickball? In a PlayStation World, Maybe Not”  
(E) Coakley, “Play Group versus Organized Competitive Team”

Sept. 23  The Problem with Friday Night Lights  
(E) Ripley, “The Case Against High-School Sports”

Sept. 25  Hockey Moms and Football Dads  
(E) Heffernan, “Parents Ruin Sports for Their Kids by Obsessing About Winning”

**Week 4: Violence and Abuse**

Sept. 28  Tang Museum Visit – **Meet in the Tang Lobby**

Sept. 30  Abuse in the Name of Sport  
(E) Ryan, “Female Gymnasts and Ice Skaters: The Dark Side”
Oct. 2  Masculinity and Violence  
(E) Phillips, “Man Up”  
(E) Morris, “The Rate of Domestic Violence Arrests Among NFL Players”

Week 5: Exam Week

Oct. 5  The Trouble with Doping  
(E) Allenby, “Is Human Enhancement Cheating?”  
(E) Gladwell, “Man and Superman”

Oct. 7  Review Day  
Due: Visual description of exhibit object

Oct. 9  Exam #1

Week 6: Fan Identities

Oct. 12  Among the Thugs  
(B) pgs. 1-34 + Glossary (pgs. 315-317)

Oct. 14  Among the Thugs  
(B) pgs. 36-126

Oct. 16  Among the Thugs  
(B) pgs. 130-174

Week 7: Nationalism, Politics, and Sport

Oct. 19  Among the Thugs  
(B) pgs. 175-262

Oct. 21  Among the Thugs  
(B) pgs. 263-314

Oct. 23  ATT Wrap-up  
Due: Three annotated sources for exhibit label

Week 8: Sports in a Capitalist Society

Oct. 26  Big-time College Sports  
(E) Branch, “The Shame of College Sports”  
(E) Weissmann, “The Outrageous 5-year Rise of College Sports Spending”

Oct. 28  Data and Sports, Guest Speaker: Prof. Michael Lopez  
(E) Silver, “Rich Data, Poor Data”  
(E) McCann, “Hey, Nate: There Is No ‘Rich Data’ In Women’s Sports”
Oct. 30  Writing for Museums  – **Meet in the Tang Lobby**
Guest Speaker: Rachel Seligman, Assistant Director for Curatorial Affairs

**Week 9: Sports, Business, and Media**

Nov. 2  *Breaks of the Game*
(H) pgs. ix-56

Nov. 4  *Breaks of the Game*
(H) pgs. 56-124

Nov. 6  *Breaks of the Game*
(H) pgs. 124-184

**Week 10: Pro Sports, Race, and Celebrity**

Nov. 9  *Breaks of the Game*
(H) pgs. 184-241

**Due: First draft of exhibit label**

Nov. 11  *Breaks of the Game*
(H) pgs. 242-301

Nov. 13  BOTG Wrap-up
(H) pgs. 301-398

**Week 11: Race, Ethnicity, and Globalization**

Nov. 16  Race and Pro Sports

Nov. 18  Ethnicity and Global Inequalities
(E) Zirin, “Say It Ain’t So, Big Leagues”

Nov. 20  Race and Fandom
(E) Hackman, “Detroit’s soccer scene flourishes but tensions of a changing city remain”

**Week 12: Sport and Gender**

Nov. 23  Sex, Gender, and Identity
(E) Cahn, “Testing Sex, Attributing Gender: What Caster Semenya Means to Women’s Sports”

**Due: Final draft of exhibit label**

Nov. 25-29  Thanksgiving
Week 13: Gender & Sexuality

Nov. 30  Title IX
        (E) Kane, “Title IX at 40”

Dec. 2  Gender, Professionalism, and Sexuality
       (E) Allison, “What sells women’s soccer?”

Dec. 4  Athletes, Sexuality, and Identities
       (E) Gieseler, “Derby drag: Parodying sexualities in the sport of roller derby”

Due: Research Papers

Week 14: Panel Discussions

Dec. 7  Panel Discussions I & II

Dec. 9  Panel Discussions III & IV

Dec. 11 Wrap-up

Exam Week

Dec. 12-14 Study Days/Sociology of Sport Exhibition

Dec. 15-18 Final Examinations