

SOCI 326 ¹

Social Networks

Instructor: Dr. Min Zhou

Course Description:

From the perspective of social networks, the world around us is not made up of isolated individuals but is full of connections and networks. These connections generate friendship, support, trust, sense of community, and social cohesion. They are also the foundation of social capital and status, and give rise to inequality, hierarchy and power.

Thanks to its great utility, the perspective of social networks has been developing very rapidly and has been applied to a variety of substantive fields such as social interaction and friendship, community and neighborhood, social stratification, organizational studies, diffusion of ideas and technologies, social epidemiology, online social networking sites, global trade, international relations, among others. It is a powerful approach to understand how society works at many different levels and domains.

This course introduces the social network approach from three aspects—theoretical foundations (theory), methodological tools (methodology), and substantive studies (application). (1) The theoretical component of this course will cover major concepts and general principles in social networks. You will learn interesting concepts such as ties, balance, transitivity, diffusion, cohesion, centrality, clusters, small worlds, homophily, hierarchy, structural equivalence, roles, structural holes, brokerage, and the world system, among others. (2) A set of methods for social networks (“social network analysis”) has been developed over the recent years. The methodological component of this course will introduce elementary techniques without getting into abstruse technicalities. (3) The perspective of social networks has generated numerous substantive studies in many fields. We will sample social network studies with diverse substantive concerns and interesting findings. These empirical studies lend support to the ubiquity of social networks in our daily life and give you a sense of the potential offered by the social network approach.

Course Outcomes/Objectives:

By the end of this course, you should (1) have a good understanding of the existing literature on social networks, (2) understand major theoretical ideas and concepts underlying network studies, and (3) be able to view many social phenomena from a social network perspective.

Required Textbook:

Kadushin, Charles. 2011. *Understanding Social Networks: Theories, Concepts, and Findings*. Oxford University Press.

¹ This online outline is only intended to give an overall sense of the course. Detailed course outlines will be made available for all registered students on the first day of class. Only those outlines are to be considered official.