

# PSC 233 Syllabus

In this syllabus, I'm going to try to tell you what you need to know in order to decide whether to take this course. If there's anything you need to know that I don't cover here, just send me an email or ask me when you see me in our class meeting. I'm at [stuart.jordan@rochester.edu](mailto:stuart.jordan@rochester.edu). My office hours are 3:30 to 5:00 on Tuesdays. If you're reading this before the first day of class, please jot down any questions this raises for you, so I can answer them when we meet!

-Stu

## Quick Summary

- **Your work in this course affects others.** So if you want the freedom this semester to blow things off, or you think your life might get in the way of doing all of the required work in this course, don't take this course.
- **This course requires showing up.** Specifically, showing up for...
  - ...from August 28 through September 22, both weekly class meetings;
  - ...from September 23 through November 16, three to four hours of off-campus activities per week and one class meeting per week;
  - ...from November 17 through December 11 (last day of classes), both weekly class meetings;
  - ...an off-campus event during our scheduled final exam period on the morning of December 19th.
- **Your work in this course consists entirely of two big projects:**
  - In September, October and the beginning of November, we will work as a team to administer surveys and interviews to persons in Rochester who are facing or have experienced eviction from their housing. You will have responsibility for administering the surveys and interviews, entering the survey data in our

database, and transcribing and coding the interviews.

- Throughout the semester, you will develop an independent research project. The project must address questions about or challenges of the local housing market described by local policymakers, service providers and advocates, who you will talk to throughout the semester. Your research must draw on the survey and interview data we collect, on data collected by the students who took this course last year, and on published academic research that you select in consultation with the instructor. Instead of writing a paper to describe your findings, you will develop a webpage meant to share what you've learned with the public, informing on-going policymaking and program design in Rochester.
- **Your grade depends on consistently showing up and getting your work done:** In many (most?) courses, your grade depends on whether you can demonstrate mastery of knowledge or skills on exams, papers and homework. It's not like that in this course. Instead, what matters is whether you show up and complete assigned work on time, each and every week of the semester. The grade, in other words, is based purely the quality and consistency of your engagement.
- **By taking this course, you will gain...**
  - ...hands-on experience in conducting applied social science research for informing public policy and social service and community development programs.
  - ...expertise in U.S. housing policy and the challenges low-income households face in obtaining adequate and stable housing in the U.S.
  - ...familiarity with and connections to several Rochester-based government, social service and community development agencies.

## Your work in this course affects others

Whether you show up and do your work in this course has consequences for persons other than you. The course is taught in partnership with local government agencies and non-profit organizations. All of the work you do in this course contributes to a project that

I've planned in collaboration with these partners over the last 12 months. As part of this project, you will survey and interview persons at risk of or who have experienced eviction from their housing, asking them to share sensitive details about their lives to help our partners develop programs and policies that can address an on-going housing crisis in Rochester. Moreover, you'll work as part of a team of students in this course and each of you will depend in part on work done by other members of the team.

So, if you take this course and then blow off your work or become unable to do your work, you'll leave our partners' needs unmet, undermine the contributions of the persons who participate in our surveys and interviews, and harm my ability to recruit partners to invest in future projects for other UofR. You'll also make it harder for everyone else on the team to deliver a quality product for our partners and to meet our obligations to the persons who share information with us.

There are plenty of courses at the UofR in which you are the only person who stands to lose anything if you decide to blow off coursework or your life gets in the way. If you think this is a semester when you want the freedom to blow things off (By the way, I'd like everyone to have at least one semester like that in college.), or you think other demands in your life might get in the way of you doing the work in this course, don't take this course.

## This course requires you to show up

In many courses, showing up for class and other scheduled activities is just one among many entirely optional things you can do or not do in the course. That's not the case in this course. If you take the course, showing up for scheduled activities counts towards your grade (details on exactly how later in this document). More importantly, whether you are physically present affects the ability of the rest of the team to do quality work. And if the quality of the work suffers... [see the section above](#).

So when and where, exactly do you need to show up? Our work is broken up into three phases, and where you have to be when is different in each phase.

## Preparation Phase: August 28 through September 22

In this phase, you must be at both scheduled class meetings every week. We meet Monday and Wednesday from 9:00am to 10:15am in room 104 of LeChase Hall. Labor day (Monday, August 2) is the only day in this phase when class does not meet.

## Survey and Interview Phase: September 23 through November 16

**This is the phase when things look very different from the typical course at UofR!!!**

In this phase, we will be conducting a survey of persons who appear as litigants in Rochester Landlord-Tenant Court. You will be assigned to be at Landlord-Tenant Court to administer surveys one weekday per week from 9:00am until 11:30am, from September 23 through November 15. (If the words “you will be assigned” freak you out a little, keep reading... you will have a say over your assignment through a system described further down!) Landlord-Tenant court is held in the [Monroe County Hall of Justice](#), about 2.3 miles from campus.

We will also be conducting one-hour interviews with persons who have experienced eviction from their housing in the past. These interviews will take place at churches and non-profit organizations in Rochester’s [Beechwood Neighborhood](#). You will be assigned (again, if that freaks you out, keep reading!) a slot each week during which you can conduct an interview in Beechwood if an interviewee is available. These slots will generally be weekday evenings or Saturday late mornings. You are only required to conduct *two* interviews during the semester, and they must take place between October 21 and November 16. So you will only have to show up for your assigned interview slot twice (at most!) during the semester.

Because the off-campus time commitment is so extensive during this phase, you will only be required to show up for *one* of our two class meetings each week. I will assign you to one of the two class meetings, based on the schedule of survey and interview assignments and in an effort to have about the same number of students at each meeting.

So how exactly will you be “assigned” to a schedule for the surveys and interviews?

During the first week of the semester, **you will fill out a survey** in which you tell me which slots you can be available for. Based on what you and the other students say in the survey, I will make assignments to slots by the second class meeting of the semester on September 4. So you will know on September 4 whether or not you've been assigned to slots that can work for you for this semester!

Finally, you should know about transportation costs during this phase. Thanks to a grant from the **Rochester Center for Community Leadership**, I can reimburse each student in this course up to \$40 for transportation expenses during this semester. If you walk or bike to the Hall of Justice for the survey, this is probably just enough to get you to and from Beechwood twice for the interviews via a ride-hailing service. Getting from campus to the courthouse is also quick and easy via RTS, and costs \$1 each way. I am happy to ride RTS with you to show you how it works! Getting to Beechwood via RTS is also \$1 each way, and easy... but not quick. It takes about 1 hour. But an RTS bus is a great place to get homework done! And of course you are free to use any personal vehicle you have access to. Either way, keep in mind that the \$40 reimbursement is a maximum – you are responsible for covering transportation expenses beyond \$40. Also, to get reimbursed for any transportation *you must save your receipts (which for RTS rides is your fare card!)*.

Analysis and Writing Phase: November 17 through December 19

In this phase, you're back to being required to show up for both weekly class meetings on Mondays and Wednesdays from 9:00am-10:15am, through the last day of classes on December 11. In addition, you must participate in an event with our community-partner organizations in which we'll share and discuss what's been learned from our work. This will take place in the Beechwood Neighborhood during the course's designated final exam slot, which is December 19, 8:30am to 11:30am. So if you take this course, *don't buy tickets to leave town before December 19!*

Your work in this course consists entirely of two big projects

Surveys and interviews on evictions in Rochester

You probably have a sense from the previous section that the first of our two projects is a survey and interview study about eviction in Rochester. This study is in service of three Rochester-based organizations: [Monroe County Department of Human Services \(DHS\)](#), [Connected Communities, inc.](#) and [Common Ground Health, inc.](#). You'll do a great deal of work through the month of September to get your head around the goals and methods of this study. So I'll try to keep the description here brief.

Rochester's housing market (like that of many other U.S. cities) is in a crisis in which the income many households bring in is too low relative to rents. As a consequence of this, evictions due to non- or late-payment of rent are common, with about 8,000 eviction cases per year heard in our local court system, and likely many more evictions happening each year without any legal proceedings. Evictions have a severe impact on the ability of households to meet their needs, because they disrupt employment and cause households to lose valuable personal property. They also disrupt children's ability to attend and thrive in school and likely have have severe consequences for adults' and childrens' mental health.

As a result, finding ways to support low-income households in securing and maintaining stable housing is a top priority for local social service and community development agencies. Our work will support these efforts in two ways. First, our survey will help to determine the proportion of persons facing eviction through our court system who are financially eligible for emergency financial assistance through Monroe County's Department of Human Services (DHS). If this proportion is especially high, Monroe County may be able to place DHS personnel in the building where eviction proceedings occur so that tenants could immediately access financial assistance that could help them keep their housing. Second, our interviews will gather first-hand accounts of the causes and consequences of eviction from persons who have been evicted. These stories are the first step in a multi-year effort to inform the design of housing programs that support more stable housing for low-income households, and explore that links between housing (in)stability

and health.

## Raising awareness of housing challenges through research

By preparing for and then conducting our survey and interview project, you are going to gain a great deal of insight into how Rochester's housing market works for low-income households, and the role public policies and private-sector institutions play in those outcomes. In your second project in this course, you will deepen the insights you gain from conducting the survey and interview study by reading published research on issues in housing and housing policy. Using what you learn from the research, and using the data we collect through the surveys and interviews, you will then develop a web-based exhibit that shares what you've learned with the wider public. You will work on this project steadily throughout the semester – working with your peers and the instructor to select a topic by mid-October, selected and reading published research in October and November, analyzing our survey and interview data in November, and finally developing your website during November and December.

## Your grade depends on showing up and consistently getting your work done

To keep track of our work, we will keep a spreadsheet called a **task tracker**. The task tracker will list what you have to do and where you have to show up as part of the course each week. If you participate in the required work and complete your tasks at an acceptable level of quality each week, you will get an A in the course. You can expect that failing to complete anything less than 90% of required tasks on time, or missing a deadline for a task on which your peers or our partners directly depend will result in a grade of B or lower. Failing to complete less than 80% of required tasks on time, or missing multiple deadlines for work on which your peers or our partners directly depend will result in a grade of C or lower.

As the instructor, I will aim to keep total amount of weekly work in the course (including time spent in class meetings and off-campus survey and interview work) under 9 hours

per week. So if can you put in 9 hours per week, showing up according to the schedule we develop, and getting each task done by the deadline, you can expect an A in the course.

Also, since we're working with sensitive data in this course, and generating products that will be relied on outside the university, academic honesty is an especially important value in this course.

- You will frequently be assigned reflective writing assignments that ask you to describe your thoughts, questions, beliefs and reactions to your readings and experiences. Never allow anyone else to write these for you. You should almost never have a need to use any source for these, because they ask you to describe your own thoughts and reactions. However, if you do draw on an outside source, you must quote it and cite it.
- You will be collecting and entering data. I will treat any falsification or faking of data as a severe violation of academic integrity, because it stands to do severe harm to the populations our partners serve, to our partners, and to the ability of the University to positively impact the community beyond campus.
- You will be working with sensitive data that you may not share beyond the students in the course and our partner organizations. Sharing this data with others could do immense harm to the persons who our partners serve. It will also violate the trust of our partners and thus harm the ability of the University to positively impact the community. Thus I will treat any such sharing of sensitive data as a severe breach of academic integrity.
- In the final phase of the course, you will author and produce written and audio-visual material for our partners and the wider public. Those materials will be presented as your work and thus should be solely your work, albeit informed by feedback from me and your peers and academic research. The work you do in this phase will be informed by outside sources. You should never include material in this work that is drawn from outside sources without proper quotation and citation. This applies to both draft and final versions of this work.

# What you'll gain by taking this course

## Three things.

- **You'll get hands-on experience conducting applied social science for informing public policy and for informing the design of social service and community development programs. This experience will include the design and execution of survey research and qualitative interview research. You'll also gain direct experience in the analysis of the data this research generates, and (this one is especially rare in college courses) experience in trying to turn social science data and research into something that helps policymakers and practitioners improve their work. This experience will help you to get a sense of whether applied social science research is something you would like to do for a living, and whether graduate school in an applied social science field (e.g. public policy, public health, social work, education, applied economics) would be a good fit for you. It will also make you attractive as a candidate for a job as a research assistant on any team that uses social science methods to inform decisions. These jobs are all over the place – including the public, non-profit and for-profit sectors.**
- **You'll get a handle on the structural failures of the U.S. housing market, how those structural failures sometime affect (often much for the worse) the lives of a large portion of U.S. residents, and the role played in the housing market by local landlord-tenant laws and private-sector institutions such as housing developers, housing investors and property management firms. You'll also learn about the options social service and community development agencies have in trying to intervene in the housing market to address its structural weaknesses, and how those interventions might be helped or hindered by municipal, state and federal public policy.**
- **You'll make connections to people who work in a variety of social service and community development organizations in Rochester. You'll get a sense from talking to them about what their work is like on a day-to-day basis, and how it connects to the larger structural challenges their organizations try to address. You'll have the opportunity to seek more contact with anyone you meet, seeking them out for advice,**

**mentorships, and maybe even a job.**