Instructor: Dr. Zachary Neal

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Office Hours: Thursdays, 1 – 3pm

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Course Description

Communities are often defined in terms of geography (e.g. the East Lansing community), social characteristics (e.g. the MSU community), or demographic characteristics (e.g. the youth community). But, do any of these really capture what a community is? This course will explore a different approach to defining and thinking about communities by focusing on social networks, or the pattern of social interactions among a group of people. Using this approach, a community might be defined as a group of people who interact regularly with one another and are linked together by their relationships with one another. Thinking about communities as social networks can make abstract theoretical concepts more concrete and can help us consider new (and potentially better) answers to some old questions. In addition, it allows us to think about communities not only among people, but also among other types of actors: there are communities of people, but also communities of organizations, and communities of cities.

A Note on Course Structure

This course meets only once a week, which means that we'll be covering a lot of material in each session. It also means that missing a single session is like missing an entire week of a normal MW or TTH class. We'll take a 15 minute break in the middle, and you're welcome to bring your breakfast with you, but be sure to arrive on time and ready to talk.

This course is also a writing-intensive course. There are <u>no exams</u>. Instead, your final grade depends almost entirely on two paper/presentation assignments. This gives you a lot of room for creativity, but also requires some advance planning. Start thinking about your papers and presentations early; starting on them a day (or even a week) before they're due will almost certainly guarantee a poor grade. I will be available throughout the semester to meet with you about your progress and provide feedback, but it's up to you to get started and to get in touch with me.

Required Materials

Christakis, N. A. & Fowler, J. H. (2009). *Connected: The Surprising Power of our Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives*. New York: Little, Brown, and Rowman.

Neal, Z. (2013). *The Connected City: How Networks are Shaping the Modern Metropolis*. New York: Routledge.

Course Policies

Academic Integrity: The General Student Regulations state that: "[1.00] The principles of truth and honesty are fundamental to the educational process and the academic integrity of the University; therefore, no student shall: [1.01] claim or submit the academic work of another as one's own, [1.02] procure, provide, accept or use any materials containing questions or answers to any examination or assignment without proper authorization, [1.03] complete or attempt to complete any assignment or examination for another individual without proper authorization, [1.04] allow any examination or assignment to be completed for oneself, in part or in total, by another without proper authorization, [1.05] alter, tamper with, appropriate, destroy or otherwise interfere with the research, resources, or other academic work of another person, [1.06] fabricate or falsify data or results." In accordance

with the All-University Policy on the Integrity of Scholarship and Grades, <u>any student found in violation of this regulation will receive a failing grade for the course. By turning in an assignment, you confirm that you know what plagiarism is; if you do not know what plagiarism is, please talk with me before turning in an assignment.</u>

Attendance: Your participation in the course is an important part of your final grade. You can only participate if you attend class. Thus, <u>I expect that you will attend each class, that you will arrive on time, and that you will stay for the entire class period.</u>

Late Assignments: Except in cases of a documented emergency, late assignments will not be accepted. <u>All requests to submit late assignments must be accompanied by documentation of an emergency.</u>

Disruptive Behavior: Arriving to class late, ringing cell phones, and sending/receiving text messages are distracting to other students and the instructor. So, plan to arrive on time with your cell phone turned off and put away. Although this course is about social networks, <u>the use of social networking media like Facebook or Twitter during class time is not acceptable</u>.

Students with disabilities: Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services, and activities. Accommodations for persons with disabilities, with documentation from the MSU Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities, may be requested by contacting me at the start of the term and/or two weeks prior to the accommodation date (test, project, etc). Requests received after this date will be honored whenever possible.

Dropping the Course: The last day to drop this course with a refund is February 2nd. The last day to drop without a grade is March 3rd.

Desire to Learn (D2L): A copy of this syllabus, any supplementary course materials, and all grades will be posted on D2L. Lecture notes/slides <u>will not</u> be posted on D2L.

Extra Credit: There are opportunities for extra credit in both of the paper assignments. You can also receive 2 points extra credit for each Global Urban Studies Program (GUSP) brownbag talk you attend. I will be at these talks and will have a sign-in sheet with me, so please be sure to sign in either before or after the talk to confirm your attendance. If you do not see me there, you must take a photo of the opening slide of the presentation and email it to me.
- January 20th @ 11am in Berkey 457 – Toby TenEyck, Sociology
- February 10th @ 11am in Berkey 457 – Eric Scorsone, Agricultural Economics
- March 24th @ 11am in Berkey 457 – Jeanette Eckert and Jia Feng, Geography
- April 15th @ 11am in Berkey 457 – Xuefei Ren, Sociology

Office Hours: I am available to discuss any questions or concerns about the course (e.g. grades, assignments, etc.) on Thursdays 1 – 3pm. I am also happy to meet with you at other times/days by appointment. However, <u>if you make an appointment to meet with me and do not show up, I will deduct 5 points from your grade</u>.

Email: Email is the best way to contact me and I will try to reply to emails within one working day, but please <u>do not email the night before an assignment is due and expect an immediate response</u>.

Questions or concerns: If you have any questions about the material or the class in general, please ask…it's the only way to learn. You can ask questions during class, by email, or by coming to office hours.

Assignments
Reading: You will be expected to <u>complete the assigned readings before each class and be prepared to participate in the lecture and class discussion</u>. Most of the readings come from the two

required books, but one additional reading will be posted on D2L. The lectures are an opportunity to make the readings clearer, to expand upon ideas presented in them, and to ask questions, but they are not a substitute for doing the reading.

Participation (30 points): You are expected to participate in class discussions throughout the semester. Your participation grade will be based on your participation in these discussions, as well as your completion of in-class assignments/activities.

Small World Experiment: You will conduct a series of small world experiments like the one conducted by Stanley Milgram in the 1960s. This experiment is described in the film "How Kevin Bacon Cured Cancer" and the article "The Small World Problem." You will attempt to deliver a message via email to five different target individuals through a chain of personal acquaintances. This assignment has two graded components, a paper and a presentation:

Small World Paper (25 points, due March 5th): In 7 pages (not including a separate title page and bibliography; 1" margins, 12 pt. Arial/Helvetica, double-spaced), you will summarize your experiences with the small world experiment. Your paper should (a) describe the path that each message followed, (b) explain the strategy you used for deciding who to send the message to first, (c) discuss why some paths were successful and others were not, and why some successful paths were shorter than others, (d) refer back to the Milgram reading and correctly cite it, (e) present the mean and standard deviation of the length of the complete chains in the class, and (f) consider what these findings tell us about the social world. You should email your completed paper to zpneal@msu.edu no later than 9:10am on March 5th in MS Word .doc or .docx format.

Small World Presentation (10 points, on March 5th): On February 19th, you will be paired with another classmate to prepare a 15 minute presentation of the results of your small world experiments, which you will deliver as a group on March 5th. Your presentation should (a) describe the path that each message followed, (b) explain the strategy you used for deciding who to send the message to first, (c) discuss why some paths were successful and others were not, and why some successful paths were shorter than others, (d) compare the findings of each group member to each other and to the class as a whole, and (e) consider what these findings tell us about the social world. You are encouraged to use visual aids (or audio, or dancing, or whatever) to communicate your results in an engaging and interesting way.

Definition of Community: You will reflect on, and possibly revise, your definition of "community" based on the topics we discuss over the course of the semester. This assignment has two graded components, a paper and a presentation:

Definition of Community Paper (25 points, due April 30th): In 7 pages (not including a separate title page and bibliography; 1" margins, 12 pt. Arial/Helvetica, double-spaced), you will answer the question: What is community? Your paper should (a) summarize your definition of community and reflect on how it has changed since the start of the semester, (b) draw on material from the course, and (c) describe in your own words and correctly cite at least two published studies of communities that adopt a similar definition of community. During the week of April 16th, I will schedule one-on-one meetings to discuss your paper and provide feedback on your progress; be prepared with any questions or concerns you have when you come to that meeting. You should email your completed paper to zpneal@msu.edu no later than 9:10am on April 30th in MS Word .doc or .docx format.

Presentation (10 points, on April 30th): On April 16th, you will be paired with another classmate to prepare a 15 minute presentation of your definitions of community, which you will deliver as a group on April 30th. Your presentation should (a) summarize each of your definitions of community, (b) reflect on how your definitions changed since the start of the semester, and (c) compare and contrast your two definitions. You are encouraged to use visual aids (or audio, or

dancing, or whatever) to communicate your definitions of community in an engaging and interesting way.

Grading

Your grade in this course will be based on five course elements:

Participation	30 points
Small World Experiment Presentation	10 points
Small World Experiment Paper	25 points
Definition of Community Presentation	10 points
Definition of Community Paper	25 points
TOTAL	100 points

Final grades will be assigned as follows:

Grade	Points	Percentage
4.0	90 – 100	90 – 100%
3.5	85 – 89.9	85 – 89%
3.0	80 – 84.9	80 – 84%
2.5	75 – 79.9	75 – 79%
2.0	70 – 74.9	70 – 74%
1.5	65 – 69.9	65 – 69%
1.0	60 – 64.9	60 – 64%
0	0 – 59.9	0 – 59%

Each assignment will be graded using a rubric, which explains what each assignment must include and how points will be awarded for each component. You can find the rubric for each assignment at the end of the syllabus. Please look at these before you begin an assignment, and use them as a guide while you are working on an assignment.

Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Readings / Assignments
January 15th	Introduction	In-class Quiz: What is plagiarism? In-class Assignment: What is community?
January 22nd	Six degrees of separation	Film: How Kevin Bacon Cured Cancer Read: Milgram (1967) [POSTED ON D2L] **Oracle of Bacon Challenge Due**
January 29th	Introduction to Social Networks	Read: Christakis/Fowler, chapter 1
February 5th	Communities and Health Business Communities	Read: Christakis/Fowler, Chapter 4 Read: Christakis/Fowler, Chapter 5
February 12th	Political Communities Digital Communities	Read: Christakis/Fowler, Chapter 6 Read: Christakis/Fowler, Chapter 8 **Facebook Social Network Due**
February 19th	Micro-Urban Networks: Community	Read: Neal, Chapter 2 and Box #1 on Page 4
February 26th	Micro-Urban Networks: Groups	Read: Neal, Chapter 3
March 5th	**Small World Experiment Presentations, Papers Due**	
March 12th	**No Class – Spring Break**	
March 19th	Micro-Urban Networks: Politics Literature Searches	Read: Neal, Chapter 4 In-class Assignment: Literature Searches
March 26th	Meso-Urban Networks: Form	Read: Neal, Chapter 5
April 2nd	**Field Trip: Meet at Broad Art Museum @ 10AM**	
April 9th	Meso-Urban Networks: Function	Read: Neal, Chapter 6
April 16th	**No Class – One-on-One meetings about papers**	
April 23rd	Guest panel: What community means in my research	
April 30th	**Definition of Community Presentations, Paper Due**	

COMMUNITIES AND SOCIAL NETWORKS (PSY 493)
SMALL WORLD EXPERIMENT PAPER
GRADING RUBRIC

Name: _____

	Points
The paper includes a brief introduction that explains the small world problem and small world experiment.	___ / 3
The paper refers back to Milgram (1967) and correctly cites and references it.	___ / 2
The paper describes the path that each message followed, and explains the strategy used for deciding where to send each message first.	___ / 5
The paper discusses why some paths were successful and others were not, and why some successful paths were shorter than others.	___ / 5
The paper reports the mean and standard deviation of the lengths of all completed paths in the class. The values are interpreted, and compared to your own path lengths.	___ / 5
Extra Credit: The paper shows a histogram summarizing the lengths of all the completed paths in the class, and tests whether the average path length found by Milgram in 1967 is statistically significantly different from the class mean.	___ / 2
The paper considers what the findings tell us about the social world.	___ / 5
Spelling & Grammar Errors (-0.25 points each, max -12 points)	___
TOTAL	___ / 25

NOTE ON PLAGIARISM –
Any instance of plagiarism, whether intentional or unintentional, will result in <u>a failing grade in the course</u>. You may use outside sources, but they must be appropriately cited. If you do not know what plagiarism is, or how to cite your sources, please see me before turning your paper in.

COMMUNITIES AND SOCIAL NETWORKS (PSY 493)
SMALL WORLD EXPERIMENT PRESENTATION
GRADING RUBRIC

Name: _____

	Points
The presentation described the paths that each message followed, and explained the strategies used for deciding where to send each message first.	___ / 2
The presentation discussed why some paths were successful and others were not, and why some successful paths were shorter than others.	___ / 2
The presentation compared the two group members' findings to each other, and to the class as a whole.	___ / 2
The presentation considered what the findings tell us about the social world.	___ / 2
The presentation was clear and engaging, and used visual (or other aids) to communicate the results.	___ / 2
TOTAL	___ / 10

COMMUNITIES AND SOCIAL NETWORKS (PSY 493)
DEFINITION OF COMMUNITY PAPER
GRADING RUBRIC

Name: _____

	Points
The paper describes the author's definition of "community."	___ / 2.5

The paper includes the author's reflection on how his/her definition of community has (or has not) changed over the course of the semester.   ___ / 2.5

The paper draws on material from the course, and explains how two network concepts are relevant to the definition of community.
     Concept 1: _____   ___ / 5
     Concept 2: _____   ___ / 5

The paper correctly describes and cites two published studies of communities that adopt a similar definition of community. (HINT: IF YOU HAVE TROUBLE FINDING STUDIES, LOOK AT THE ENDNOTES IN THE CONNECTED CITY)
     Study 1: _____   ___ / 5
     Study 2: _____   ___ / 5
     Extra Credit: One of the studies was published before 1950, and one of the studies was published after 2010.   ___ / 2

Spelling & Grammar Errors (-0.25 points each, max -12 points)   ___

TOTAL (max 25 points)   ___ / 25

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Any instance of plagiarism, whether intentional or unintentional, will result in <u>a failing grade in the course</u>. You may use outside sources, but they must be appropriately cited. If you do not know what plagiarism is, or how to cite your sources, please see me before turning your paper in.

COMMUNITIES AND SOCIAL NETWORKS (PSY 493)
DEFINITION OF COMMUNITY PRESENTATION
GRADING RUBRIC

Name: _____

	Points
The presentation summarized each group member's definition of community.	___ / 2.5
The presentation included reflections on how the group members' definitions of community changed over the course of the semester.	___ / 2.5
The presentation compared and contrasted the group members' definitions of community.	___ / 2.5
The presentation was clear and engaging, and used visual (or other aids) to communicate the results.	___ / 2.5
TOTAL	___ / 10