HUM 403 /SOC 376
NUMBERS, IDENTITY AND MODERNITY:
HOW CALCULATION SHAPES WHO WE ARE

Wendy Espeland
wne741@northwestern.edu
847 467 1252

Our world is awash in numbers and calculation is central to many theoretical understandings of what it means to “be modern.” This view will be our point of departure as we consider how we make and use numbers, how we know ourselves through numbers, and the particular kinds of authority we grant to numbers. Using a range of examples of calculation including testing, college rankings, and statistics about mortality and morbidity, citizens, race, and sexuality, this class will examine what prompts people to produce numbers, what causes them to spread, how they intervene in the worlds they measure, and how we think about ourselves and others differently as a result. Students will learn to become more critical and appreciative interpreters of numbers, and will appreciate the key role calculation and classification has played in our understanding of what it means to be an individual, a citizen, or a member of some particular group.

Each student will be responsible for leading at one seminar discussion, which may include introducing guest speakers. Students’ oral presentation will be evaluated by me and classmates; it is worth 15% of your grade. Students are expected to come to class having done the required reading, viewing or listening. If you do not prepare for class, you will make it harder for student presenters. Consequently, class participation will be evaluated by me and class presenters each week, for quality as well as quantify; it is worth 10% of your grade. Additionally, two papers will be assigned: one short paper in response to a prompt (worth 25%) and one a final paper, the topic of which will address some aspect or example of calculation selected by you in consultation with me. The final paper is worth 50% of your final grade.

The following books and articles (found via JSTOR or posted on BB) are required. Books should be available at Norris but as the order was lost for 2 months, they may take a week or so to arrive. The library also has multiple copies of all books. See me if you cannot afford to purchase books as I have a few copies I am happy to lend. This syllabus may be revised as the quarter unfolds.

Books:


Articles and excerpts are designated weekly.

**WEEK ONE: Introduction: Why Quantification is a Radical Social Process**

**Tuesday Jan 3**  No Tuesday class this week.

**Thursday Jan 5**  Introduction:  **PLEASE READ IN ADVANCE OF 1ST CLASS**


**WEEK TWO: Calculation, Capitalism and Rationalism: Labor, Money and Bookkeeping**

**Tuesday Jan 10**


Simmel, Georg. Excerpts from *The Philosophy of Money*, Ch. 6, “The Style of Live” pp. 399-411; 413-418; 429-441; 498-512. BB

**Thursday Jan 12**

Weber, Max.  Excerpts from *General Economic History; Economy and Society; The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. BB

**WEEK THREE: Trust, Distrust, and Calculation as Objectivity**

**Tuesday Jan 17**


WEEK FOUR: Making up Kinds of People: Citizens, Race, and Republics

Tuesday 24


Thursday 26

Anderson, Ch 5-9: pp 116-240:

Two page synopsis of final paper due in class.

WEEK FIVE: Making People Visible/Invisible

Tuesday Jan 31

Igo, Sarah. The Averaged American, Ch. 1-2

Guest Speaker: Jean Beaman, “Racial Statistics in Republican France”.


Thursday Feb 2

Igo, Sarah. Ch. 3-4

WEEK SIX: Sorting by Numbers: Intelligence, Ability and Access

Tuesday Feb 7

John Carson; “Army Alpha, Army Brass, and the Search for Army Intelligence”
Author(s): John Carson
Isis, Vol. 84, No. 2 (Jun., 1993), pp. 278-309
Published by: The University of Chicago Press on behalf of The History of Science Society
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/236235

Lehman, Nicholas. The Big Test

Thursday Feb 9

Lehman The Big Test

Claude Steele, Stereotype Threat

WEEK SEVEN: Making People Visible/Invisible

Tuesday Feb 14

Igo, Chapter 5, 6, Epilogue: Watch Kinsey;

Numbers and Gay Politics: Espeland and Michaels:

Thursday Feb 16 Numbers, War and Representation


WEEK EIGHT: Numbers Visibility/Invisibility (cont.) and Calculation as Bureaucratic Logic

Tuesday Feb 21

"Numbers on Top of Numbers": Counting the Civil War Dead”, Drew Gilpin Faust
Article Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/4138192

Thursday Feb 23

WEEK NINE: Holding People and Organizations Accountable and/or Gaming, Lying, and Cheating: The Unintended Consequences of Counting

Tuesday Feb 27:

Watch Moneyball


University of Illinois Law School Admissions Sandal:

Thursday Mar 1


WEEK TEN Summing Up (pun intended) What Shouldn’t We Count?

Tuesday Mar 6  Last Day of Classes Spring Term

http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/88/numbers

Wednesday Mar 7 Reading Period Begins

Monday March 12: FINAL PAPERS DUE:

TWO VERSIONS REQUIRED: HARD COPY IN MY MAIL BOX, c/o Sociology Department, 1810 Chicago Ave. ATTACHMENT IN MY EMAIL: wne741@northwestern.edu.

Monday Mar 19 Spring Break Begins!