

## Course Syllabus

Seminar: Wednesdays 1:20pm-4:10pm  
Location: 001 Wallace Hall

Professor Sam Trejo  
Office: 187 Wallace Hall  
Office Hours: Mondays 1:00 - 2:00pm  
Email: [samtrejo@princeton.edu](mailto:samtrejo@princeton.edu)

### Course Description

In the United States and around the world, both formal and informal sports are central to social life. This course approaches sport as a social institution—one that is embedded in society and shaped by, while also reflecting, broader values, tensions, and contradictions within the social order. Although our primary focus is on sport and recreation in the United States, we may draw on comparative insights from other social and cultural contexts. Using a sociological lens, students will learn to think critically about sport—as participants, fans, and informed citizens—by reflecting on their own experiences with athletics and comparing them to firsthand accounts of sports across a range of American communities. Through popular and academic readings and in-class discussion, the course examines both the individual and social benefits of athletic participation, as well as the risks, inequalities, and value distortions that can accompany competitive sport. By the end of the course, students will be better equipped to analyze and engage with the ethical, social, and political dimensions of contemporary debates about sports.

*“The institution of sport provides a ‘natural’ laboratory for sociological inquiry of significance far beyond the realm of sport itself... for the price of a ticket, the sociologist who has done his homework and knows what to look for, can gain access to a mirror reflecting the past traditions, the present turmoil, and, to a great extent, the future destiny of society. Whether one’s concern is with specific areas such as interracial relations or male-female role relationships, or with more general areas of scientific inquiry such as social organization and social change, sport offers a virtually unexplored avenue for generating new knowledge and gaining better insights into old problems.”*

– HARRY EDWARDS  
SOCIOLOGY OF SPORT, 1973

## Assignments & Grading

Your final grade will weight the assessments as follows:

Attendance & Participation	30%
Weekly Reading Responses	25%
Final Paper	25%
Final Presentation	20%

**Attendance & Participation:** Students are expected to attend and actively participate in all class discussions. Make sure to bring your copy of the book that we are discussing to class each week. In the event that you need an excused absence, please email the instructor in advance explaining your situation. Note, per Princeton University policy, two weeks of cumulative absences, regardless of the reason a student misses class, may constitute grounds for a failing grade in a course. Once during the semester, each student will be expected to lead the in-class discussion (either by themselves or with a partner). Discussion leaders will facilitate conversation during that week's seminar and provide a document summarizing main themes from that week's readings and a range of discussion questions. Discussion questions can be about the underlying concepts in a reading, the real-world implications of the ideas discussed, or any other aspect of the reading that sparked intrigue; be as specific as possible. This will help ensure that our intellectual space is largely student-driven. This document should be emailed to me by 12:00pm on the Tuesday before seminar so that I can provide feedback.

**Weekly Reading Responses:** Each week, we will begin with an in-class writing assignment where students respond to a set of essay questions regarding that week's required reading.

**Final Paper/Project:** In lieu of a final exam, each student will prepare a final project that explores a social, ethical, or policy question related to sports and recreation, broadly defined. The final project is designed for students to show mastery and deep engagement with course content. To do this, students can choose one of several options. The most straightforward option is to complete a final paper, which may not strictly be a literature review and instead must synthesize sources to advance a novel argument. To select a topic, each student should consider which facets of the course were most compelling to them. Students who do not wish to write a final paper are free to develop any project they desire, as long as they check in with the instructor first. This can be recording a podcast episode, developing an artistic performance or display, building a website, etc. Students are required to submit a rough draft or detailed outline of their final paper (5-6 pages in length) via e-mail by 10pm on Sunday, March 15<sup>th</sup>. If a student elects to do a final project rather than a final paper, they should submit a plan for that instead (e.g., a draft podcast script/outline). Final papers (at least 10-12 pages in length) are due via e-mail on Monday, May 11<sup>th</sup> by 7:00pm. Each paper must be in .pdf format (double-spaced, 1" margins, Times New Roman font).

## **Wellness**

As your professor, I truly value your physical and mental well-being. Ideally, this will be a fun, engaging environment that contributes toward your growth and development as an individual. Please be kind to yourself throughout the semester. As such, I am willing to negotiate due dates on a case-by-case basis; please reach out to me if you find yourself struggling.

## **Email Policy**

I will respond to emails within 24 hours during normal business hours (9am-5pm, Monday-Friday). I check my email only twice a day, once at the very beginning of the day and once at the very end. Please do not expect immediate responses, especially during non-business hours and over the weekend.

## **Freedom of Expression**

In this class, students will be asked to discuss their analysis and interpretation of the content presented in the course readings. I expect students to do business in the proper currency of intellectual discourse—a currency consisting of reasons, evidence, and arguments—but no ideas or positions are out of bounds. However, as explained in the Princeton University’s Statement on Freedom of Expression, personal threats and harassment are incompatible with Princeton’s mission and therefore not tolerated.

## **Use of Artificial Intelligence**

Students are expected to follow Princeton University’s standards for academic integrity (see <https://scholarlyintegrity.princeton.edu>). Generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot) may be used to support learning and the writing process—for example, for brainstorming, clarifying concepts, checking understanding of readings, improving clarity and organization of prose, or assisting with citation formats—but they may not replace your own analysis, interpretation, or original argument.

If you use AI in connection with an assignment, you must submit a brief record of your interaction with the tool and acknowledge any direct contribution to your written work in a short footnote or author’s note. Using AI to generate complete drafts, substantial portions of text, or analytical interpretations of the readings that you then submit as your own work is not permitted. All written assignments must reflect your own reasoning, critical engagement with course materials, and independent development of ideas.

## Course Reading

*How Tracy Austin Broke My Heart* by David Foster Wallace (Philadelphia Inquirer, 1992).

*Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Women's Sport* by Susan Cahn (University of Illinois Press, 2015).

*Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, and a Dream* by H.G. Bissinger (Addison-Wesley, 1990).

*Reclaiming the Game: College Sports and Educational Values* by Sarah A. Levin & William Bowen (Princeton University Press, 2003).

*Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game* by Michael Lewis (W.W. Norton & Company, 2003).

*Protecting Home: Class, Race, and Masculinity in Boys' Baseball* by Sherri Grasmuck (Rutgers University Press, 2005).

*What We Inherit: How New Technologies and Old Myths Are Shaping Our Genomic Future* by Sam Trejo & Daphne Martschenko (Princeton University Press, 2026).

# Course Calendar

WEDNESDAY	
Jan 28th	1
Course Introduction	
Feb 4th	
<i>-Class Canceled-</i>	
11th	2
Friday Night Lights I & II	[Pan]
18th	3
Reclaiming the Game I	[Shaw & Organek]
25th	4
Reclaiming the Game II	[Wilhoit & Charles]
Mar 4th	5
Reclaiming the Game III	[Phillips]
11th	
<i>-Spring Break-</i>	
18th	6
Moneyball I	[Hayes]
25th	7
Moneyball II	[McCarroll & De Pree]
Apr 1st	8
Protecting Home I	[Doron-Repa & Ma]
8th	9
Protecting Home II	[Duncan & Kelley]
15th	10
What We Inherit	[Murphy]
22nd	11
~Final Presentations~	