SOC 590 – Norms, Institutions, and Social Action
http://faculty.washington.edu/kitts/soc590.html

Class Meetings: Savery Hall, Room 313
Thursdays 1:30-3:20 pm
Office Hours- By appointment

James A. Kitts
Savery Hall 206M
kitts@u.washington.edu

TENTATIVE SYLLABUS

This seminar will investigate the emergence, reinforcement, and change of social norms and institutions. We will examine self-organizing solutions to dilemmas of resource management, observe the maintenance of informal norms among California cattle ranchers, study the demography of rules in formal organizations, and model the dynamics of technology protocols and revolutionary political change. Our readings draw from important work in Political Science, Anthropology, Economics, and Law, as well as classic and contemporary sociological theory.

In addition to reading the scheduled material, students will submit informal responses (2-3 pages) to the weekly reading, by noon on the day before our class meeting. These responses may be submitted electronically through the course web page. Students will take an active role in leading discussion and in responding to each other’s work. Each student will also work on a seminar project that will contribute to her/his own research, such as a thesis chapter, grant application, or prospectus for a research article.

BOOKS

Response papers and discussion questions may focus on selected parts of the assigned reading. For some weeks, I may also suggest other articles or books as “further reading.” These will be optional, of course, but you may want to take a look at some of this material if it is relevant to your own project.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 – April 4 – Introduction

INTRODUCTION

Week 2 – April 11 – Cognitive/Cultural Foundations
Durkheim, Emile. 1984. *The Division of Labor In Society* Book One, Chapter 2, pp. 31-67

Week 3 – April 18 – Instrumental Foundations

Week 4 – April 25 – Institutional Change

Week 5 – May 2 – Law, Norms, and Social Welfare

Week 6 – May 9 – The Emergence of Norms in Close-Knit Groups
Week 7 – May 16 – Law and Social Norms

Week 8 – May 23 – Common Knowledge and Normative Change
Kuran, Timur. 1995. Private Truths, Public Lies. (pp. 3-59, 60-83, 84-117, 118-154, 247-309)

Week 9 – May 30 – The Dynamics of Rules in Organizations
March, James G., Schulz, Martin, and Xueguang Zhou. 2000. The Dynamics of Rules: Change in Written Organizational Codes (pp. 5-27, 28-55, 56-82, 106-202)

Week 10 – June 6 – Synthesis
Seminar project presentations (may include readings assigned by seminar participants).