

## SOCIOLOGY OF IMMIGRATION – SOCI 125

University of California – San Diego  
Winter 2025



*Figure 1: Woven Chronicles by Reena Saini Kallat*

Tues, Thurs, 8-9:20am  
Center Hall 222

Prof. Jake Watson  
[j8watson@ucsd.edu](mailto:j8watson@ucsd.edu)

Office Hours: Wed, 3pm-5pm, or by appointment  
Social Science Building, Room 493  
Feel free to attend as individuals or in groups

---

Teaching Fellow: Tannistha Sarkar  
[tasarkar@ucsd.edu](mailto:tasarkar@ucsd.edu)  
Office Hours: TBD

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

Migration is one of the most contentious issues of our time, often surrounded by competing claims that shape public opinion and policy: “immigration policies should let in real refugees and block the undeserving;” “immigrants take jobs and fail to assimilate;” or “deportation impacts only those here illegally.” In this course, we critically examine these and other prominent claims, analyzing their assumptions, historical context, and evidence. Organized around these debates, the course explores core themes in the sociology of migration: theories of migration and mobility; processes of incorporation, assimilation, and othering; the

construction of borders, citizenship, and legality; and the global and domestic politics of migration governance. Drawing primarily on case studies from the United States, we will also examine how policies shape migrant experiences, how migrants in turn resist and reshape these policies, and how race and racism remain central to the politics and outcomes of migration. The aim of this course is not to arrive at firm conclusions or definitively (dis)prove claims. Rather, I hope that you will leave the course with the tools to critically assess prominent narratives around migration, understand the complexities of global human mobility, and situate your own immigration experiences and histories in a broader context.

## READINGS

There are no required texts for this course. All readings will be made available as PDFs on Canvas or through the library. Please familiarize yourself with UCSD's physical holdings and online catalogue system. Please also sign up for free *New York Times* access. You are encouraged to acquire hard copies, but given contemporary custom, all materials assigned are available online. You may be interested in this [discussion between Ezra Klein and Maryanne Wolf](#) about reading as you make decisions throughout college about hard vs. digital texts.

## COURSE STRUCTURE

We have ten weeks of classes this quarter followed by a finals week. The course will be organized around a “migration claims” framework. Each week, we will assess a prominent claim around migration, with a focus on the politics of the United States. Claims will be organized thematically around core topics of migration theory, focused on the drivers, regulation, and outcomes of human migration. Throughout, we will incorporate the perspectives and experiences of migrants and their children navigating policies, politics, and local contexts. Each week is organized into two sessions. The first will generally introduce a core concept or area of social scientific research, while the second will extend on these foundations through engagement with a case study or alternative perspective. Lectures will include important material not in the readings that will be covered in assessments. Slides will be uploaded every Monday for the week prior. Materials are listed on the day they are to be completed *before* coming to class, and they should be done in the order that they appear on the syllabus.



Figure 2: Temporary Storage: The Belongings, by Camilo Ontiveros

## GRADING AND COURSE REQUIREMENTS

At the end of this course, you will receive a numerical grade out of one hundred that refers to the following letter grades. Your grade will be rounded to the closest whole number. For

example, if you finish the course with 93.1, you will be rounded to 93 (A-). If you finish with 93.5, you will be rounded to 94 (A).

A	94+
A-	90 - 93.9
B+	86 - 89.9
B	82 - 85.9
B-	78 - 81.9
C+	74 - 77.9
C	70 - 73.9
C-	66 - 69.9
D	60 - 65.9
F	59.9 <

Your final grade will be assessed on the following components:

2% Your Migration Story – Sunday Jan 12<sup>th</sup> by 11:59pm

Please submit a one-page essay describing your migration story by the end of Week 1. Your essay should cover the following questions: When and where did you/your family migrate from and to? What were the reasons for migration (economic, political, social)? What happened to you/them once they arrived? How have you/they settled in the United States? Feel free to reflect on difficulties you had answering these questions (e.g., multiple migration trajectories or lack of knowledge). This assignment will be the first entry in your migration journal (see below). It will be graded on a pass/fail basis.

25% Migration Claims Journal

You will complete five “journal entries” across the quarter that respond to the week’s main claim (listed below). For example, the claim for Week 2 is “Everybody from poorer countries wants to migrate to the U.S.” Your journal entry should respond to this claim: what do you make of it? What assumptions does it make about human mobility? What does it miss? Each entry should have three components completed on a “2-2-1” framework: two things you learned from readings and lecture, two remaining questions and/or critiques, and one application to a contemporary event, issue, or debate. Every entry should draw explicitly from and reference *at least* one reading and one topic covered in lecture. Be specific and make sure to include page numbers when citing particular arguments or pieces of evidence from readings. Entries should be between 350-500 words in length. For your reference, this paragraph is 149 words.

Journal entries should be submitted after the final session of the week and before midnight on Sunday. For example, the entry for Week 2 should be submitted between 9:20am on January 16<sup>th</sup> and 11:59pm on January 19<sup>th</sup>. Entries will be graded on a 0-5

scale reflecting the 2-2-1 framework. Full grades will go to those that effectively respond to the week's claim by providing two things you learned from course material, two remaining questions/critiques, and one contemporary application. Everybody can receive full marks for each entry. To upload for review, go to the assignments page on Canvas and look for the respective week. Entries can be submitted every week except for Week 1 & Week 6 (midterm). This means you have eight opportunities to write five entries. Your lowest three grades will be dropped at the end of the quarter to account for the three weeks you can miss.

25% Midterm – In-Class on Thursday, February 13

The midterm will cover course materials and lectures up to and including February 11. There will be three question formats: multichoice, true/false, and short answer. More information will be provided closer to the time.

20% Migration Claim Op-Ed – Friday, March 14 (end of Week 10)

An objective of this course is to equip you with the skills and knowledge to understand and engage in public debate around migration. In this final assignment, I prompt you to use what you've learned to join this debate by writing an Op-Ed. Choose a claim covered in the course (or select a new one in consultation with me or our TA) and write an evidence-based argument about it. Your Op-Ed should muster as much *credible* evidence as possible to make a convincing argument about a prominent aspect of contemporary migration to a public audience. This will require some additional desk research. You may draw on your journal entries for materials or ideas. I strongly encourage you to speak with your instructor and/or TA about your Op-Ed idea. For instructions on writing Op-Eds, see [this website](#). For examples, see the Opinion section of any major online newspaper, such as the [New York Times](#). A more detailed assignment prompt and rubric will be provided closer to the time.

28% Final – Thursday, March 20th 8:00-10:59am (Location TBD)

The final will cover all course materials and lectures. There will be three question formats: multichoice, true/false, and short answer. More information will be provided closer to the time.

## EXTRA CREDIT OPPORTUNITIES

You may complete a maximum of two bonus credit assignments over the course of the quarter, equaling an additional 2% on your overall grade – enough to move a grade boundary. To take advantage of this opportunity, you will attend a migration-related talk or event on or off campus and write a one-page reflection memo about it drawing on concepts and material from class. Memos must be submitted to Canvas no later than 3 days after the event. They will be

graded on a fail (0), check (0.5%), check-plus (1%) basis for a maximum of one percent of your total grade. This will be applied to your record at the end of the quarter. I will periodically post relevant events, but any event at the [Center for Comparative Immigration Studies](#) would work. If you see something interesting, feel free to reach out and check its eligibility. At all events, please be respectful of the speaker and audience.

## STATEMENT ON USAGE OF GENERATIVE AI

Generative AI tools such as Chat-GPT are transforming higher education. My view is that GenAI can short-circuit important stages of the learning process to detrimental effects. Across the sciences and humanities, the *process* of our learning (i.e., critical reading, thinking, and communication skills) is at least as important as the information we are learning and creating. We can use GenAI to get at the latter, but often at the expense of the former. It is through grappling with concepts and ideas, assessing their relative value, debating them with our peers, and formulating our own thoughts in relation to them through research, writing, and speaking that we develop the habits of mind critical for active participation in democratic societies.

At the same time, I recognize that GenAI can be a valuable tool and that many of you will enter careers after college where you will interface with it frequently. Given this, it is important to learn how to use these tools in intentional, reflective, and transparent ways. As such, I permit the use of GenAI in this course with important considerations and stipulations:

1. AI should not be relied on for reading. Read materials, take notes, and think critically about them *before* turning to AI to aid comprehension (if you do this at all).
2. You are not allowed to use GenAI to conduct primary writing. If you use GenAI for writing at all, it should be restricted only to the post-writing editing phase. Indeed, AI can be useful for this, but it should not be used to shortcut the process of learning that occurs through writing and research.
3. Using an AI-content generator to complete coursework without proper attribution of authorization is a form of academic dishonesty that may violate UCSD's honor code. Original ideas taken from AI output (even if modified) **must be cited** and are therefore not considered your own original work. Failure to appropriately cite AI will result in your submission to the honors council.
4. For the sorts of tasks required in this course, AI outputs are at times confidently wrong. They make mistakes that people familiar with the topics and readings (i.e., me!) can recognize quickly. They can also create "hallucinations," i.e., false arguments, quotations, or whole articles and books that simply don't exist. Given this, you should verify any outputs you get from AI before using them.

## WRITING SUPPORT

Professional and academic writing is a skill that requires practice and training. I encourage you to take advantage of the wonderful writing support resources offered on campus. UCSD's [Writing Hub](#), for example, offers free one-on-one consultation on papers and assignments.



## LATENESS POLICY

Please make sure to hand in assignments on time. Unexcused lateness will be penalized by one point for every hour late. I am happy to discuss extensions when appropriate, but please reach out to arrange these *before* deadlines pass. In the interests of fairness and accountability, retroactive extensions will not be granted except under exceptional circumstances.

## TIME BANK

Every student is given a 24-hour time bank for the quarter. You can choose how to use it – if at all. It is your responsibility to keep track of how much time you have used. Canvas tracks lateness, so you do not need to inform me independently if you use your time bank.

## ACCOMODATIONS

Life happens. If you find yourself in a difficult situation such as the loss of a family member, grave illness, or a mental health crisis, please let me know. I might be able to accommodate your specific circumstances and/or direct you to appropriate campus resources.

Note that in the case of sexual assault, I am obligated to report the incident to our Title IX Coordinator who is responsible for overseeing investigations of sexual misconduct. For confidential support, please contact The Office for the Prevention of Harassment & Discrimination directly: [ophd@ucsd.edu](mailto:ophd@ucsd.edu)



Figure 3: *La Talaverita, Sunday Morning NY Times*, by Aliza Misenbaum

## WEEK 1: Introduction

01/07 – Course Overview

01/09 – Migration Theory Basics

- Doug Massey. 1999. Why Does Immigration Occur? A Theoretical Synthesis. In; *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience*, pp. 34-52
- Amitav Chomsky, Myth 14 & Case Study: Philippines

## WEEK 2: “Everybody from poorer countries wants to migrate to the U.S.”

01/14 – Debating Push/Pull Models: what drives migration? How does development impact both the aspiration and capability to migrate?

- Hein de Haas. (2010). Migration Transitions: A Theoretical and Empirical Inquiry into the Developmental Drivers of International Migration. *International Migration Institute*, [Working Paper Series](#) No. 24

01/16 – Immobility: Why do so many people stay rather than migrate?

- Debray, A., Ruysen, I., & Schewel, K. (2023). The Aspiration to Stay: A Global Analysis. *International Migration Review*, 0(0).

## WEEK 3: “Countries have the right to exclude migrants.”

01/21 – Borders, Sovereignty, & Political Strangers: When and why did states begin to regulate human movement across national borders? Is this regulation ethical?

- Torpey, J. (1998). Coming and Going: On the State Monopolization of the Legitimate “Means of Movement”. *Sociological Theory*, 16(3), 239-259.
- E. Tendayi Achiume. (2019). “[The Postcolonial Case for Rethinking Borders](#).” *Dissent Magazine* (2 pgs.) (Op-Ed Example)

01/23 – Borders, Laws, Race: How do racial hierarchies shape immigration law and legal categories?

- Ngai, M. (1999). The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924. *The Journal of American History*, 86(1), 67-92.
- Listen: [How the Other Side Leaves](#). *This American Life*, March 2022 (18 mins)

## WEEK 4: “Migration is out of control.”

01/28 – Constructing Threat: Why do we perceive certain forms of migration as threatening? What does it mean to say that migration is “out of control”?

- Leo Chavez. (2008). “Chapter 1: The Latino Threat Narrative” In; *The Latino Threat Narrative: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation*. Stanford University Press

01/30 – Why Policies Fail: Why do enforcement policies often fail to stop migration? Why are so many would-be migrants “undeterred” by enforcement? Can more effective policies be enacted? Can/should these policies be ethical?

*Guest Speaker: Dr. Abby Córdova (zoom – fully remote)*

- Córdova, A., Hiskey, J., Malone, M., & Orcés, D. (2024). Undeterred: Understanding Repeat Migration in Northern Central America. *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, 12(3): 160-181

## **WEEK 5: “Our immigration system is fair & just.”**

02/04 – Legal Violence: What is “legal violence”? How does it impact immigrants?

- Menjivar, Cecilia & Leisy Abrego. (2012). Legal Violence: Immigration Law and the Lives of Central American Immigrants. *American Journal of Sociology* 117(5): 1295-1564
- Optional Read: Gonzales, Roberto. (2016). “Chapter 8: Adulthood: How Immigration Status becomes a Master Status.” In; *Lives in Limbo: Undocumented and Coming of Age in America*.

02/06 – The Reverberating Effects of the Law: In what ways do immigration policies – and especially deportation – impact whole families and communities? Is this fair?

*Guest Speaker: Dr. Abigail Andrews (in-person)*

- Abigail Andrews, Fátima Khayar-Cámara. (2022). Forced Out of Fatherhood: How Men Strive to Parent Post-Deportation. *Social Problems*, 69(3): 699–716
- Watch: “Through the Wall: A Family Divided by the US-Mexico Border.” *The Guardian* (6m)
- Optional Read: Canizales, S. L. (2023). Caught in the Dragnet: How Punitive Immigration Laws Harm Immigrant Community Helpers. *Contexts*, 22(1), 38-43

## **WEEK 6: Resisting Illegality & Midterm**

02/11 – Coming of Age: How does illegality shape the coming-of-age process? How and why do some young people decide to contest the law despite the risks?

- Nicholls, W. J., & Fiorito, T. (2015). Dreamers Unbound: Immigrant Youth Mobilizing. *New Labor Forum*, 24(1), 86-92.



- Watch: The Unafraid (available through the library)

02/13 – In-Class Midterm

## **WEEK 7: “Our immigration system lets in and supports real refugees.”**

02/18 – Seeking Refuge: Who are “refugees”? Do our laws allow them to find security and safety?

- David FitzGerald. (2019). “Chapter 1: The Catch-22 of Asylum Policy” & “Chapter 7: Buffering North America” In; *Refuge Beyond Reach. Refuge beyond Reach: How Rich Democracies Repel Asylum Seekers.*
- [\*Optional Watch\*](#): Ken Burns – The U.S. & the Holocaust – Episode 1: The Golden Door

02/20 – Resettlement: What is refugee resettlement? How are refugees treated once they are admitted to the United States?

- Heba Gowayed. (2020). “Chapter 3: American Self-Sufficiency” In; *Refuge: How the State Shapes Human Potential.*

## **WEEK 8: “Immigrants take jobs and drain the economy.”**

02/25 – Immigrants, the Economy, and the Global Restructuring of Social Reproduction: Why are immigrant workers often cheaper than citizen workers?

- Chomsky, Myth 1 – Immigrants Take American Jobs
- Miraftab, Faranak. (2011). Faraway Intimate Development: Global Restructuring of Social Reproduction. *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 31(4): 392-405

02/27 – Constructing Exploitable Immigrant Labor & the Case of the H1-B Vias: How does the law shape the economic value of immigrant labor to employers?

- Ron Hira & Daniel Costa. (2021). [New evidence of widespread wage theft in the H-1B visa program: Corporate document reveals how tech firms ignore the law and systematically rob migrant workers.](#) *Economic Policy Institute*, Washington D.C.
- Banerjee, P., & Rincón, L. (2019). Trouble in Tech Paradise. *Contexts*, 18(2), 24-29

## **WEEK 9: “Immigrants Don’t Assimilate.”**

03/04 – Structural Roots of Assimilation: What is “assimilation”?

- Min Zhou & Roberto Gonzales. (2019). Divergent Destinies: Children of Immigrants Growing Up in the United States. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 45: 383–99
- Catherine S. Ramirez. (2020). [What Does Assimilation Mean?](#) *Public Books Forum, Borderlands Collection* (2 pgs.)

03/06 – Identity & Belonging: How does racialization impact identity, integration, and belonging? Will some groups be “forever foreign” in the U.S.?

- Zaid Jilani. 2025. What Vivek Ramaswamy Leaves Out of His Story of South Asian Success. *New York Times*, Jan 3. 2025 (2 pgs.) (Op-Ed Example)
- Shams, T. 2020. Successful yet Precarious: South Asian Muslim Americans, Islamophobia, and the Model Minority Myth. *Sociological Perspectives*, 63(4): 653–669

## **WEEK 10: “People naturally don’t like others not like them”**

03/11 – Contact & Threat: What factors shape how citizens perceive and respond to immigrants?

- Marco Giesselmann, David Brady, and Tabea Naujoks. (2024). The Increase in Refugees to Germany and Exclusionary Beliefs and Behaviors. *American Journal of Sociology*. 130:3: 725-763

03/13 – Sanctuary Movements: What is “sanctuary”? What does its history in the United States suggest about possible relationships between immigrants and citizens?

- Paik, A. N. (2017). Abolitionist futures and the US sanctuary movement. *Race & Class*, 59(2), 3-25.

**===== END OF CLASSES, MARCH 14 =====**

## **ACADEMIC CODE**

Students are expected to exhibit the highest standards of academic integrity and never to submit work as their own which is the work of others – including AI models. Students should familiarize themselves with the UCSD’s Academic Integrity Policy: <https://senate.ucsd.edu/Operating-Procedures/Senate-Manual/Appendices/2>. Academic misconduct is the misrepresentation of one’s academic achievement and includes cheating on examinations, falsely indicating your own or another’s attendance in class, and plagiarizing written work. Failing to properly acknowledge and cite sources of information in a paper or presenting another person’s words or ideas as if they were your own constitutes plagiarism. All cases that violate UCSD’s rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including but not limited to failure in the course.

## **A NOTE ABOUT CONTENT**

This course may challenge each of our assumptions and raise questions that we have differing opinions on from one another. We will discuss sensitive topics with multiple personal and political dimensions, and diverse opinions and academic dispute are expected and welcome. You are expected to participate in all debates with respect for your classmates and instructor. Though personal opinions may differ, you will be graded only according to whether you learned the concepts taught in this course. I will never grade based on your political opinions or conclusions – only whether you support your arguments and conclusions with good, social scientific reasoning and evidence.

Challenges to our basic assumptions can feel uncomfortable, and the possibility of feeling distressed is magnified when the topics being studied are so deeply connected to the ways we understand ourselves and/or when they concern core aspects of our identities. If you are concerned, feel free to talk with me during office hours. Counselors are always available to students at the university's Counselling Center. You can make appointments through [MyStudentChart](#) or by calling (858) 534-3755.

I look forward to a challenging and stimulating quarter!