

SOCI 498WIC (Senior Seminar) Descriptions

Sociology Department, Sonoma State University

Spring 2026

Each SOCI 498WIC (WIC-Writing Intensive Course) section has its own topic and research method. Students will design and conduct an individual research project using their section's topic and method. All student research topics must be approved by the professor.

Modality: *All sections of SOCI 498 will be offered in person.*

Prerequisites: To be enrolled in SOCI 498WIC during spring 2026, you must have completed SOC 201, MATH 165/SOCI 301 (or equivalent statistics requirement), SOCI 300, and SOCI 375, each with a minimum grade of C-, and 12 additional units in Sociology. You must also have filed a seminar application and applied to graduate spring or summer 2026.

Registration: Allowed only for students with an approved Senior Seminar application (please complete a senior seminar application with your assigned SOCI advisor before registering for SOCI 498WIC). There is a hard cap on the number of seats available. If you submit a late application, you are not guaranteed a seat in Senior Seminar.

SOCI 498WIC.1: Senior Seminar: Public Space and Public Life

- Instructor: Professor Melinda Milligan
- Method: **Participant Observation**
- Time: Monday and Wednesday, 3:00-4:50 pm
- Salazar 1035

Sociology 498WIC is the “capstone” to the sociology degree at Sonoma State University. It focuses on student completion of independent research projects with an emphasis on a specific course theme and using a specific research method (both selected by the instructor). Emphasis in **SOCI 498WIC.1** will be the investigation of public life and public space using the method of participant observation. Additionally, as a capstone, the course will review basic sociological concepts and perspectives and will ask you to apply them to your own research.

The “publicness” of a space is linked to the degree of freedom of various types of people to access and use the space. The more accessible a space is and the wider the range of activities that may be done there, the more public is it. Public life is understood to be the activities that take place within public space. Examples of the types of public spaces you might choose to study for your project include parks, plazas, bars, cafes, festivals, farmers’ markets, art walks, etc. You’ll develop a sociologically informed guiding question to structure your observations.

The sociological themes we'll examine include public spaces as third places, the privatization of public space, features that make for successful public spaces (and what "successful" means), stranger interaction in public spaces, public space and the "decline of community" debate, the role of public space in the creation of public life, and many others.

SOCI 498WIC.2: Senior Seminar: Medicine, Health, and the Body

- Instructor: Professor Debora A. Paterniti
- Method: ***Intensive Interviews***
- Time: Tuesday, 8:00-11:40am
- Stevenson 1207

SOCI 498WIC.2 will focus on the topic of medicine, health, and bodies. We will use sociological theories and concepts from medical sociology to examine bodies, health, and medical practice as *symbolic social processes*. Our topics will include definitions and meanings given to individual and public bodies, representations of bodies in understandings of health and illness, and negotiated definitions and contexts of illness, health, and risk. We will discuss how medical definitions and consumer movements frame health and illness and consider their roles in characterizing and shaping understandings of disease, bodies, and public constituencies. Examples of topics students might investigate include management of health and wellness, living with chronic illness, alternative practices to western medicine, decision-making about medicine and medical procedures, contexts and meanings that define health-seeking behaviors, access to care and interactions with care providers, caregiving and caregiver stress, bodily stigma and self-presentation, body art and body work, the accessibility of public space for differently-abled bodies, diet and food in illness and illness prevention, and the role of exercise in health maintenance, among others.

Engagement in **Sociology 498WIC.2** will introduce you to the method of intensive interviewing and use of grounded theory in data analysis, and will offer you an opportunity to do original research. You will learn about how sociologists use intensive interviewing and grounded theory to understand *Medicine, Health & the Body* by:

- framing a specific research question about medicine, health and/or the body through a coherent review of relevant sociological literature(s) and examination of key concepts related to your research question;
- creating an in-depth interview guide, conducting, and transcribing interviews;
- learning to analyze qualitative data through iterative review and grounded theory;
- using data from interviews to critically and systematically answer your research question; and
- applying the ethical principles important to research practice, including those related to engaging the narratives of human participants, protecting and using research data, and writing up research results.