

SSC 1029 Sociological Perspectives

Course Coordinator

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Objectives

- To become conversant in the foundations of sociological thought and theory.
- To gain an introductory understanding of the primary areas and methods of sociological analysis.
- To be able to apply sociological concepts and theories to the study of pertinent social problems.
- To reflect on the relevance and utility of sociology for 'everyday' life and public policy.

Description

This course offers an introduction to the social scientific discipline of sociology by focusing on foundational areas of sociological inquiry and theorizing. Emphasis is placed on learning how to apply a sociological perspective to contemporary social issues and problems. Some key questions explored include: What is society? How are individuals shaped by society? To what extent can and do individuals shape society? How have different societies developed historically? How do societies distribute wealth, income and other resources? How do societies establish particular kinds of political authority and power relations? How are cultural identities, values and beliefs reproduced over time? What are the sources of conflict, consensus and change in society? Working from a global comparative perspective, the course will introduce students to different strands of sociological theorizing, the distinctive levels of sociological analysis, and some of the most central areas of sociological investigation, such as class, race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, media, education, marriage, work and globalization. Periodic attention will be given to applying sociological concepts to the analysis of pressing social issues and problems in the contemporary world, such as inequality and violence. This course is a prerequisite for SSC2028 Classical Sociology and SSC2059 Social Movements.

Literature:

- The required textbook is Joan Ferrante's *Sociology: A Global Perspective*, 9th Edition.
- A selection of e-readers will also be made available on the student courselink.

Instructional format:

- Tutorial group meetings and lectures.

Primary Assessments:

- 1.) Concept Clarification Paper (30%)
- 2.) Group Presentation (20%)
- 3.) Final Exam (50%)

1.) Concept Clarification Paper (30%)

- During Week Two, each student will be assigned to a group (A, B, C, D or E) and then be asked to write a short paper which [i] defines, [ii] explains and [iii] illustrates the analytical value of a particular sociological concept or interrelated set of concepts. Your chosen concepts must come from the textbook and be linked to the specific post-discussion that is scheduled to take place on the day that your paper is due. For example, if your paper is due in tutorial #6 when we discuss gender and sexuality, then your paper must be focused on a concept or set concepts linked to the study of gender and sexuality, such as 'gender polarization'. The paper will be due at the start of class on the specific date that is slated for your designated group to hand in their work (see schedule below). You must write the assignment for your designated group.

-The primary purpose of this paper is to concisely contemplate the analytical value of one or several interlinked concepts that are presented and discussed in the textbook (typically highlighted in boldface type and defined as 'key terms' in the glossary). Your paper should [i] demonstrate clear comprehension of the selected concept(s) and [ii] provide a substantive discussion of the concept for purposes of explanation through illustration. Questions to consider while writing your paper include: In what domain of sociological research is this concept primarily located? What kinds of social issues or phenomena is this concept (or set of concepts) intended to help us understand? How can this concept (or set of concepts) be put to work or 'operationalized' in order to generate useful insights about the world? You should put serious time and effort into this paper, and avoid handing in a rough draft characterized by incoherence, inconsistency and superficiality.

-The paper should be presented in a manner that is personalized and original, and does not merely rephrase the content of the textbook or some other source. This means that students must work diligently to 'extend' their thinking beyond what the textbook says and apply their understanding of the concept to a particular social problem or situation in the 'real world'. It is thus recommended that students draw on a source in the (English-language) news media for inspiration, such as The Economist, New York Times, or The Guardian. For example, if you write about the concept 'trained incapacity' (Ch.6), think of a particular context or case in which this concept can be productively applied, such as rising unemployment among educated youths in the EU.

-The paper is worth up to 30pts and will be graded along three axes: [i] clarity of thought and writing (10pts), [ii] depth of the explanation and illustration (10pts), [iii] effective extension of thought and link to real world issues (10pts). The length of each essay should be at least 800 but no more than 1000 words in length. Direct quotation should be kept to an absolute minimum and all sources must be properly referenced in APA style. A hard copy is to be given to the instructor at the start of the tutorial on the day that the essay is due. No late assignments will be accepted. In general, students are discouraged from writing a paper for the same tutorial for which they are discussion leaders, but this caution can be waived by the tutor. A basic example of the paper will be made available on Courseweb.

Please note the specific date that your concept clarification paper is due:

Group A: *Week 3, Tutorial 5*

Group B: *Week 3.2, Tutorial 6*

Group C: *Week 4.,1 Tutorial 7*

Group D: *Week 4.2, Tutorial 8*

Group E: *Week 5.1, Tutorial 9*

2.) Group Presentation (20 %)

- During week six, each student will pair up with another student to carry out a brief but insightful review of at least 3 but no more than 4 sociological case studies linked to any given topic which has been covered in the textbook. Each case study must have a [i] theoretical framework, and [ii] make use of qualitative and/or quantitative data. The case studies must be chosen from peer-reviewed sociological journals, such as *Acta Sociologica*, *American Sociological Review*, *British Journal of Sociology*, *The Sociological Review*, *Social Forces*, *Qualitative Sociology*, *Sociological Focus*, *Sociological Inquiry*, *Sociological Forum*, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, *Gender and Society*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *Sociology of Education*, *Sociology of Religion*, *Sociology of Health and Illness*, or *Journal of Marriage and Family*. There are many more journals out there. If you doubt whether one of your chosen case studies is suitable, seek the advice of your tutor.

- The primary purpose of this presentation is to illustrate how sociological concepts and theories have been put to work so as to better comprehend social problems or phenomena. Your presentation should entail the following: [i] basic introduction and contextualization of a given social phenomenon or problem, [ii] brief summary of your case studies, [iii] concise discussion of the most important findings generated by sociological case studies, and [iii] a succinct concluding statement on how future sociological research might be carried out to shed further light on your chosen topic. Please note that a full summary of each case study is neither possible nor desirable due to the limited timeframe of your presentation. Considerable effort should thus be made to synthesize the most interesting and significant findings from all your case studies.

-The length of your presentation should be at least 10 but no more than 12 minutes in length. A PowerPoint or Prezi should be prepared with careful attention placed on utilizing a minimal number of 3-6 slides. Given the short length of these presentations, students should work hard to craft a presentation that is both concise and substantive. An equal division of time and labor should be created between the students.

-Presentations will be evaluated along four axes: [i] *clarity* of the ideas and information presented (5pts), [ii] *depth* of the ideas and information presented (5pts), [iii] *comprehension* of sociological concepts and research (5pts), and overall *organization* of the presentation (5pts).

Final Exam (50 %)

A comprehensive final exam will take place during week seven. Students will answer a series of questions in the form of short answers and extended essays. A primary focus of this examination will be on defining, understanding and operationalizing sociological concepts so as to assess [i] your understanding of foundational themes in sociology as well as [ii] your capacity to apply a sociological perspective to the study of concrete issues and problems, such as globalization, gender, inequality and conflict. Students will typically be asked to merge themes from different sets of readings and post-discussions. Guidelines will be provided in advance.

Participation/Attendance (pass/fail)

-Students are expected to participate to their fullest and best capacity during all of our meetings. Authentic engagement in a PBL tutorial entails being attentive, making relevant and substantive comments, asking thoughtful questions, taking notes and consistently referencing the readings. Students who demonstrate a systematic lack of preparedness and engagement during the early stages of the course will be approached by the tutor to bolster their participation. If a student does not visibly improve her/his participation after this intervention, then the tutor reserves the right to deduct up to a maximum of two full points (20%) from the final grade of the student. Attendance in 80% tutorial meetings is mandatory. Attendance at lectures is not mandatory, but strongly recommended. The extra meeting during Week Six for purposes of student presentations will be treated like a normal class and attendance will be taken.

Re-sits

-All re-sits must be requested by the student and shall be arranged on a case by case basis.

Leading a discussion (pass/fail)

- Working either individually or in pairs, each student will lead a post-discussion. In addition to their own notes, the discussion leaders should have an outline or 'roadmap' prepared for the tutor prior to the beginning of class. This outline should be no more than one page in length and clearly list the learning goals as well as provide a basic overview of how the discussion leader(s) would ideally like to orchestrate the flow of the post-discussion. When leading a discussion, students should pay close attention to [i] maintaining thematic cohesion to the discussion, [ii] probing for specific examples and detailed information, [iii] properly managing the allocated time, and [iv] ensuring opportunities for everyone to participate. Frequent use of the whiteboard is advised to summarize key points during post-discussions. If a student does not do well to lead a post-discussion, then s/he will either be asked to lead another discussion in the future or to complete an alternative assignment.

SCHEDULE (Pd.1 2017)

Week 1.1 T1 Welcome!

Introduction to class, tutor and students
Prediscussion of Task One, Chapters 1 and 2

< Lecture #1 >

Week 1.2 T2 Foundations of Sociology: Questions, Theories, and Methods

Postdiscussion of Chapters 1 and 2

Prediscussion of Task Two, Chapters 3, 4 and 5

Week 2.1 T3 Culture, Socialization and Interaction

Postdiscussion of Chapters 3, 4 and 5 (Ferrante)

Prediscussion of Task Three, Chapters 7 and 8 (Ferrante)

< Lecture #2 >

Week 2.2 T4 Deviance and Inequality

Postdiscussion of Chapters 7 and 8 (Ferrante)

Prediscussion of Task Four, Chapters 6 and 11 (Ferrante)

Week 3.1 T5 Organizations, Markets and States

Postdiscussion of Chapters 6 and 11 (Ferrante)

Prediscussion of Task Five, Chapter 10 (Ferrante) + Extra Reading (online)

GROUP A: Concept Clarification Paper Due on Ch. 6 & 11

< Lecture #3 >

Week 3.2 T6 Gender and Sexuality

Postdiscussion of Chapter 10 + Extra Reading (on-line)

Prediscussion of Task Six, Chapter 9 + Extra Reading (on-line)

GROUP B: Concept Clarification Paper Due on Ch. 10 + Xtra Reading

Week 4.1 T7 Race and Ethnicity

Postdiscussion of Chapter 9 + Extra Reading (online)

Prediscussion of Task Seven, Chapter 13 (Ferrante) + Extra Reading

GROUP C: Concept Clarification Paper Due on Ch. 9+ Xtra Reading

< Lecture #4 by Ulrich Mueller >

Week 4.2 T8 Education

Postdiscussion of Chapters 13 (Ferrante) + Extra Reading (online)

Prediscussion of Task Eight, Chapters 12 + 15 (Ferrante)

GROUP D: Concept Clarification Paper Due on Ch. 13 + Xtra Reading

Week 5.1 T9 Families, Population and Health Care

Postdiscussion of Chapters 12 + 15

Prepping for presentations and final exam

GROUP E: Concept Clarification Paper Due on Ch. 15 + 16

Week 5.2 T10

-- Workshop for Presentations

Week 6.1 T11

Group Presentations, pt.1

< Additional Timeslot for Group Presentations, pt. 2 (*Attendance will be taken*)>

Week 6.2 T12

Group Presentations, pt.3

Week 7 Final Exam

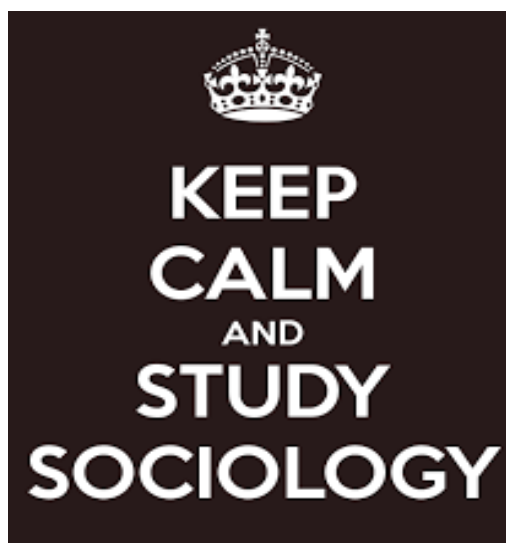
TIME/PLACE TO BE DETERMINED

*Please note that the date and time of the exam can be changed by the Office of Student Affairs due to scheduling conflicts. Although any and all changes will be clearly announced, please pay close attention.

<<<<< TASKS >>>>>>

#1) Getting Started

Sociology is one of the most foundational and influential disciplines within the social sciences. In the most basic and broadest terms it can be defined as the systematic study of human relations and societies across time and place. Although sociology has many similarities with psychology, anthropology, cultural studies, history and philosophy there are certain key traits which distinguish it from other fields and disciplines. Sociology emerged from a particular geographical and historical *context*, and traces its origins to several key sets of *thinkers*. In spite of many staple and long-standing concerns, sociology has *evolved* in a variety of ways through the years. Indeed, contemporary sociological research has many different areas of *specialization* and pursues a variety of agendas with a variety of *motives*. Accordingly, sociologists ask many different kinds of *questions* and work from a relatively broad range of *theoretical* perspectives and *methodological* approaches. While some theories and methods are highly compatible, others less so. There are also many different *dimensions* (culture, economy, politics) and *levels* (micro, meso, macro) of society that are studied by sociologists. Despite such diversity, however, sociology is characterized by some core distinguishing traits. In addition to generating insightful academic knowledge and stimulating intellectual inquiry, sociological research has many important implications for the ‘everyday’ world.



#2) Culture + Socialization + Interaction

Culture is a foundational theme of sociology. Whether we are conscious of it or not, culture influences so many aspects of our lives from birth through death. Culture has been studied from a wide array of angles and for many different purposes. Indeed, culture has been studied and talked about in so many different ways within sociology, that sometimes it may not be totally clear what exactly is under discussion. While some sociologists talk about “culture” as a large-scale context or structure within which we live, others talk about “culture” as a set of practices or actions that we do. Moreover, while the study of culture seems to have devoted a lot of attention to issues of social unity and togetherness, it has also dealt frequently with issues of social conflict and division. In working to understand how people *shape* and are *shaped by* culture, sociologists have operationalized an array of concepts, and shed light on a great number of pressing social problems. Given that so much time and energy has been put into the study of this thing we call “culture”, surely it must have some serious value for sociology. Your mission in this task is to uncover some of the major insights generated by sociological research on culture. Remember, to closely contemplate how and why ‘socialization’ and ‘interaction’ are strongly linked to sociological studies of culture.



3) Deviance and Inequality

Sociological research is often motivated by desires to overcome concrete social problems 'within the world'. In this light, sociological research on the themes of *deviance* and *inequality* has played a most fundamental role in the history and progress of sociological thinking. Your mission in this task is to understand the relationship between deviance and inequality, and to think of how these two areas of scholarship can interlink and influence one another in fruitful ways. As you do the readings identify some key concepts and work to understand how these concepts help to explain pressing social issues and problems. Use the text below as a way to start up the pre-discussion. Keep in mind that the focus should not be exclusively on the phenomenon of homelessness in Europe, but rather on the broader questions and issues raised in the text.

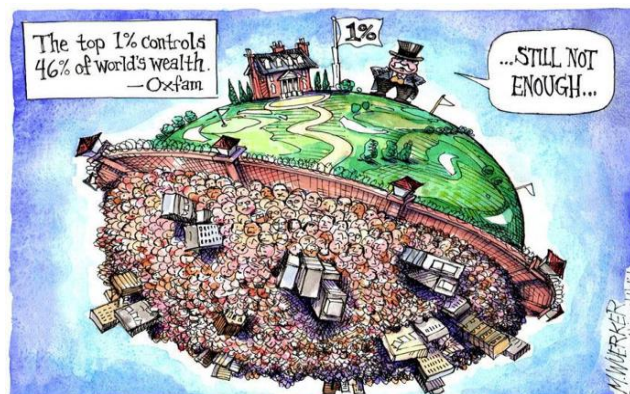
“A growing number, of people across Europe are experiencing a great need for housing. Many have nowhere to live and sleep, in doorways, squats, abandoned buildings, parks and other places unfit for human habitation. Among those facing major difficulties are Roma, victims of domestic violence, street children, people with disabilities, refugees, migrants, internally displaced persons, tenants without security, addicts, the unemployed and people excluded from the labour market... Being homeless is generally not an individual choice. Living and sleeping rough in public spaces constitutes a huge risk to one's health, social well-being and security. Everyone, including homeless people, would typically prefer adequate and safe housing if it were available and affordable... In recent years, a series of laws, regulations, policing tactics and surveillance measures have been put into motion across many European cities which effectively criminalize homeless persons and homelessness more generally. While some argue that such measures are intended to reduce increased levels of criminality and misbehavior supposedly associated with homeless persons, others argue that such policies are motivated by a political desire to reduce the visibility of homelessness and poverty on city streets, and thus hide the reality of homelessness as a major social issue.”

Taken from: Nils Muižnieks (Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights). 2013. "Preface to FEANTSA Report: Penalisation of Homelessness and Human Rights in Europe". From: <http://www.housingrightswatch.org>

4.) Organizations ↔ Markets ↔ States

“Over the course of the past several decades, large transnational corporations (TNCs) have become a tremendously influential political and economic force with dramatic impact on the social, cultural and environmental realities of diverse peoples around the world. According to the 2010 UN Conference on Trade and Development, there were about 75,000 TNCs operating worldwide. While these large business firms may be headquartered in one particular nation, TNCs are defined by wide-ranging chains of production and networks of distribution that span around the world which allow them to generate massive amounts of capital. For example, the giant American conglomerate General Electric (GE) holds more assets abroad than any other non-financial firm in the world. With over \$500 billion in total asset value, 70% of GE’s value is rooted in foreign assets based outside of the United States.... The activities of large corporations shape the lives of billions of persons every day, often in complex and imperceptible ways... Some people perceive the ascendancy of TNCs as a positive force, bringing economic growth, jobs, lower prices, and quality products to an expanding share of the world’s population. Others view large firms as exploiting workers, dominating the public policy process, damaging the natural environment, and degrading local cultural values. One thing is for certain, however, TNCs are an inescapable presence in the global nation-state system and will be so for the foreseeable future. So, perhaps the more relevant issue at hand is not whether TNCs are inherently ‘good’ or ‘bad’, but rather the extent to which the economic, political and cultural structures of sovereign nations around the world should be shaped by the profit-driven commercial interests of business corporations.”

From: Roach, B. 2007. *Corporate Power in a Global Economy*. Global Development And Environment Institute, Tufts University, Boston MA, USA.



#5) Gender and Sexuality

The study of gender and sexuality is a foundational arena of contemporary sociological research. The historical reasons for the centrality of gender in sociological inquiry are multiple and very important to understand. Today, the study of gender and sexuality have become closely intertwined and are strongly linked to understanding many other major social issues and problems. Sociological research has shown how notions of gender and sexuality play a very important but yet all too often dramatically under-examined role in shaping the social worlds we live in. For example, research has shown that the advertising and entertainment industries in Western Europe and North America have traditionally given a great deal of commercial attention to the sensual experiences, expectations and preferences of young heterosexual males (e.g. Craig 1992). In a social environment where commercial media can play an extremely big role in the socialization of youth, popular understandings of female sexual desire and pleasure have thus been largely determined by the gaze of straight males. As a consequence, many young heterosexual men (and women) grow up knowing very little about the dynamics of female sexuality and arousal. Despite the seemingly 'natural' or 'objective' criteria which may seem to define gender and sexuality, from a sociological perspective, it is important to understand that gender and sexuality are socially constructed categories. Indeed, the notion of social construction is very central to how sociologists typically approach the study of gender and sexuality, and also part of the reason why sociological research on gender/sexuality has been criticized and regarded as controversial. Saying that gender is a social construct, however, does not mean that it is a mere fiction which exists in our heads and which can be un-imagined with a bit of concerted thought. Gender and sexuality are very real and very powerful social categories which have a major influence on people's lives. Gender and sexuality are deeply rooted in the cultural, economic and political structures of society.

Comic by Agatha Pop. Source: http://aplus.com/a/un-women-cartoons-comics-gender-stereotypes?no_monetization=true



#6) Race and Ethnicity

To be announced

#7) Education

To be announced

#8) Health, Populations & Social Change

To be announced