

THINKING ABOUT SOCIAL PHENOMENA: CONSTRUCTING PUZZLES

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The course considers *how to explain* social phenomena. It is designed to motivate critical thinking and argument in order to understand the complexity of human choices and behaviour. Everyday sociological phenomena are framed in the form of puzzles as a means to introduce scepticism towards common lines of reasoning. Lectures will introduce different types of puzzles and explanations, followed by a discussion seminar one day of the week.

Arrangements

Where: 202, classroom block, Himalaya Building

When: Monday and Thursday, 3.30 to 5.00 pm

- Monday: Lecture for all
- Thursday: Lecture for all, followed by seminar

Requirements

1. Every Thursday you will participate in a discussion seminar, in groups of 10 each, based on readings and a puzzle assigned on Monday. Your contribution to your group will be assessed alongside the assignments (see pt. no. 2).
2. You will write two essays of no longer than 1,500 words each (excluding references), during the course. Essay questions will be circulated later. These essays will be based on your own analysis of readings and classroom discussions [Weightage: 30%].
3. A group-based project to construct a puzzle for an everyday sociological phenomenon, collect data, and present possible explanation [Weightage: 15%]

Exams

The course as a whole is examined by a mid-semester exam in February 2020 [Weightage 20%] and an end-semester exam [Weightage 35%] in April 2020

Readings

The course textbook is:

Elster, Jon. 2007. *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Copies of this book have been ordered for the IIIT-Hyderabad library. Please consider buying the book (look for second-hand copies on Amazon India).

Journals are available online on JSTOR.

ESSAY QUESTION

Write an essay on any of the following. Refer to the next page for FAQs.

You are part of a group protesting on campus. You demand a change in University policy which could positively impact all students. Your friend is part of another group that opposes the protest. This group believes that protesting would make no difference. This conflict persuades a professor to present two research papers to both groups: one showing the positive effects of protests on policy, the other showing negative effects. In your opinion, how would your group and your friend's group assess the findings? Make a theoretically informed argument. Use examples.

OR

I am deeply motivated to do something. I, therefore, act on my motivation and do it. Would you agree with these statements? Discuss, giving examples.

Essay: Frequently Asked Questions

1. What am I meant to do?

Answer any of the two questions. Evaluate the readings and construct your own argument.

2. How should I develop the essay?

Introduce your essay with the key questions you will address, then move on to explain how you will approach these questions. In the introduction itself, make sure to tell the reader the core argument you propose to make. In the remaining text, use the literature you have read to flesh out your argument. Do not show off your language skills or use unnecessary academic jargon. It is the process of your thinking that matters. Simple, precise sentences are easier to convince the reader.

3. What is the word count?

No longer than 1,500 words, excluding references.

4. What is the essay deadline?

Thursday, February 6, 2020. Hand it over to me in class. Late essays will not be marked. If you are sick and cannot submit the essay on time, please bring a doctor's certificate.

4. How should I cite the literature?

Use the style of any major sociology journal (e.g. *American Journal of Sociology*; *Rationality & Society*; *Economic & Political Weekly* etc.). Ensure that you remain consistent with the style.

5. Can I discuss the essay with my classmates?

Yes, of course—as long as your writing is your own.

6. Can I use chunks of text from the internet or from my classmate's essay?

NO. Plagiarism is strictly prohibited. Any case of suspected plagiarism will be reported to the Academic Dean.