

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

SOC 350, SECTION 2

Spring 2017
TR 9:35-10:50am
Room: CCC 330

Department of Sociology and Social Work
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point



Society as change (above: Banksy)...

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...or function (above: Chaplin)

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

“To have mastered ‘method’ and ‘theory’ is to have become a self-conscious thinker, a man [or woman] at work and aware of the assumptions and the implications of whatever he [or she] is about. To be mastered by ‘method’ or ‘theory’ is simply to be kept from working, from trying, that is, to find out about something that is going on in the world.”

C. Wright. Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*

The main purpose of this course is to *experience* the fundamental ideas, concepts, and theories, and the men and women behind them, that shaped and continues to shape the discipline of sociology (as well as other social sciences). I use the word *experience* because all the material covered, although decades if not centuries old, is still applicable and relevant for understanding our social world today. In this way, it is my hope that you will find some aspect of this material that is relatable to in your own lives.

This course has three main objectives. First, we will cover the major elements of key social theories that have become an important bedrock of sociological thinking. But, these ideas and theories were created by men and women living in particular socio-historical contexts and conditions. Therefore, and secondly, we will also examine the lives and environmental characteristics (political, religious, economic, cultural, etc.) of the theorists themselves in order to gain a deeper understanding of their ideas and where they came from. Only after obtaining a thorough understanding of the material can adequate application of the theories to contemporary issues and problems be made – the third objective. By examining how others have applied these theories, and by applying

them yourself, it should be clear that these ideas are still very relevant for understanding social phenomena today.

As illustrated by the above quote by Mills, it is important that we not be slaves to particular ways of thinking or acting. Instead, we must constantly critique, evaluate, and question in order to develop and grow. By successfully completing the three objectives above, as structured in the course expectations described below, you will gain useful skills in critical thinking, analysis, reading and writing – important proficiencies for any academic or professional aspiration. Specifically, you will critically analyze the contributions and limitations of each theoretical concept. As this semester unfolds, you will notice that there is no such thing as a universal social theory that explains all social phenomena. Instead, each theory and idea has advantages and disadvantages, contexts where they work and don't work, groups of people and behaviors that they explain and come up short. It will be one of our tasks to see just how useful (or not) these theories were and still are.

REQUIRED TEXT

- (1) Lemert, Charles. (2013). *Social Theory: The Multicultural, Global, and Classic Readings* (5th edition). Westview Press.
- (2) Supplementary material will be provided throughout the semester

COURSE FORMAT AND EXPECTATIONS

Format

The format of each class will vary throughout the semester. Since we all learn differently, I will utilize a variety of teaching methods to present the material. These methods will include lectures, in-class activities, video presentations, and class discussions. It is vital that you come to class prepared (i.e., read what you are asked to have read!) and ask questions and make comments when you have them. Not only will the material make more sense, but you will get a lot more out of the class as well.

Academic Integrity

To ensure that the highest level of academic and personal integrity is upheld, it is important that you understand your rights and responsibilities as a student at UWSP (see [Academic Integrity: A Guide for Students](#)). For a complete overview of UWSP academic standards and disciplinary procedures, please visit: the following website: <http://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Pages/Academic-Misconduct.aspx>

Disability Services

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal law requiring educational institutions to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information about UWSP's policies. Any student who feels that an accommodation may be needed based on the impact of a disability should contact [Disability Services and Assistive Technology](#) at 715-346-3365 in Room 609 Learning Resource Center at 900

Reserve Street. Staff will work to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

Technology Policy

My expectations regarding technology are simple and, hopefully, not unrealistic. I do not expect students to be without their phones, tablets, and/or computers. I completely understand that the schedule for most students may even necessitate this. In fact, our class will even utilize this as a resource at times during the semester; for instance, in-class activities that prompt students to do a quick search online. I also understand that some students prefer to take notes electronically, on a tablet or laptop. (Be warned: [research shows that students retain more information when notes are hand-written.](#)) But, *unless specified otherwise or a circumstantial agreement with me is made, phones should be silent (e.g., airplane mode), and out of sight.* As soon as a device becomes a distraction to the class, I will revoke technology privileges all together.

Attendance Policy

Your attendance and participation will be recorded and calculated as part of your final evaluation. However, I understand ‘participation’ inclusively. This can include the conventional (i.e., talking in class) as well as other forms of interaction in and outside of class (e.g., office hour visits, email discussions, in-class activities). In short, I am looking for students to be engaged in the material, however or wherever that might be.

Assignment Submission and Late Policy

All assignments (unless specified otherwise) should be submitted by the respective deadline electronically via Dropbox on D2L. Turnitin (originality checking software) is activated with results viewable to you and me. Please use this as a tool for writing. Late work is accepted up to one week after the specified deadline (5-point reduction), also via the appropriate D2L dropbox. I will not accept assignments after this.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATIONS

Weekly Discussion Board

Weekly Discussion Posts are *critical* dialogues covering some aspect from the previous week and organized in a popular online format. This will allow your fellow students to comment/discuss in a productive and respectful manner. This interactive approach is vital for working through new material. The specific requirements and directions will be discussed in class.

10/12 Weekly Discussion Posts (10 points each) = 100 points

TheoryApps

Theory Apps are more organized assignments that approach a specific topic or problem. The requirements and expectations for these papers will be discussed in class. In general, these are assignments that allow you to apply the theories we have discussed in class to a setting/problem of your choosing. These papers will require some research in order to best apply the given social theory to a relevant problem.

4/6 Theory Apps (50 points each) = 200 points

Multi-Media Application

In this assignment, social theory is approached using visual, and other interactive, media. Specific instructions will be covered in class. In general, this is a semester long group project that will require you to choose a medium in which to apply and present a social theory (or an important aspect of). This may include a poster, film, slideshow, music, etc.

1 Multi-Media Application = 50 points

Attendance/Participation

Attendance is crucial to succeed in this class. Keeping up on your reading in order to actively participate in class will ensure that you are adequately prepared for the assignments. My teaching philosophy is based on a cultivation of *active learning*. This means that I aim to provide an environment whereby students are able to ‘experience’ the material. However, this is a dual relationship. Students must also be willing to learn in order to make this happen. By *being* in class regularly (not just present), an active and invigorating culture of learning can be developed. *Attendance and Participation will be recorded via in-class activities and quizzes*. This being said, life is always full of unexpected events and emergencies. If you think you will miss a class, please let me know as soon as possible so we can make other arrangements.

Attendance/Participation = 50 points

Evaluation

Evaluation of this course is based on the standard UWSP grading scale.

Course Evaluation:

Discussion Posts =	100
Theory Apps =	200
Multi-Media =	50
<u>Attendance =</u>	<u>50</u>
Total =	400

Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Percent	Points
A	92-100	366<
A-	90-91	358-365
B+	87-89	346-357
B	83-86	330-345
B-	80-82	318-329
C+	77-79	306-317
C	73-76	290-305
C-	70-72	278-289
D+	67-69	266-277
D	60-66	238-265
F	<60	<238

COURSE SCHEDULE

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignment
24-Jan	Introductions and review of syllabus		
26-Jan	Discussion Board	DB and TA instructions	
	1. Sociology, Theory, and Foundations		
31-Jan	Knowledge, theory, and method (Mills)	266-269	
2-Feb	Saint-Simon, Comte, and Spencer	Supp.	
7-Feb	Alexis de Tocqueville	Supp.	DP1
	2. The 'Holy Men' of Sociology		
9-Feb	Karl Marx	28-33, 41-49	TA1
14-Feb	Karl Marx cont.	33-34, Supp.	DP2
16-Feb	Emile Durkheim	56-61	
21-Feb	Emile Durkheim cont.	72-79	DP3
23-Feb	Max Weber	83-87	
28-Feb	Max Weber cont.	79-82	DP4
2-Mar	Review	Supp.	
	3. Important Women Social Theorists		
7-Mar	Harriet Martineau	Supp.	DP5, TA2
9-Mar	Charlotte Perkins Gilman	130-134	
14-Mar	Jane Addams	54-56	DP6
16-Mar	Anna Julia Cooper	134-139	
21-Apr	<i>Spring Break</i>		
23-Apr	<i>Spring Break</i>		
	4. Of Self and Identity		
28-Apr	W.E.B. Du Bois	126-130	DP7, TA3
30-Apr	George Herbert Mead	161-165	
4-Apr	Georg Simmel	139-142	DP8
6-Apr	Erving Goffman	255-257	
	5. Society as Structure or Phenomena		
11-Apr	Talcott Parsons	288-291	DP9, TA4
13-Apr	Cliffor Geertz	Supp.	
18-Apr	Peter Berger	292-294	DP10
20-Apr	Dorothy Smith	294-297	
25-Apr	Group-Project Workshop		DP11
	6. (Post)Modernity and Beyond		
27-Apr	Anthony Giddens	367-372	TA5
2-May	Zygmunt Bauman	450-452	DP12
4-May	Choose your own adventure	Supp.	
9-Apr	Presentations		TA6
11-Apr	TBA		
	Final Exam Period		
16-May 10:15am- 2:15pm	Submit Media Project Paper via DropBox		Media Project Paper