

# INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

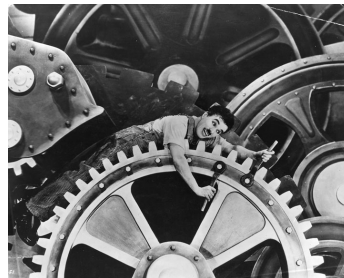
SOC 350-02

Fall 2023  
Online and Asynch

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



*Society as **change** (above: Banksy)...*



*...or **function** (above: Chaplin)*

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## 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* (6<sup>th</sup> 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.

*Note on Online/Asynchronous learning:* Due to the unique nature of this instructional modality, this course will have a semi-structured feel. New content will be posted each week, leaving the consumption of that material up to the student. It is vital that you do not get behind from week to week for obvious reasons. Assignments will continue to have hard deadlines, just like a 'normal' semester.

##### **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., asking questions via discussion posts) 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 CANVAS. 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 CANVAS 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 social problem.

*3/6 Theory Apps (50 points each) = 150 points*

### **Final Project**

In this assignment, social theory is approached using visual, and other interactive, media to apply theory to a real-world social problem and solution(s). Specific instructions will be covered in class.

*1 Final Project = 100 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 Canvas activities and discussions throughout the semester.* 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 =	150
Final Project =	100
<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
5-Sep	Introductions and review of syllabus		
	Discussion Post	DP and TA instructions	
	<b>1. Sociology, Theory, and Foundations</b>		
11-Sep	Knowledge, theory, and method (Mills)	Supp. (Comte, Spencer, Saint-Simon)	
	Saint-Simon, Comte, and Spencer		
18-Sep	Alexis de Tocqueville	Supp. (Tocqueville)	<b>DP1</b>
	<b>2. The 'Holy Men' of Sociology</b>		
	Karl Marx	54-60	<b>TA1</b>
25-Sep	Karl Marx cont.	Supp. (Marx Religion)	<b>DP2</b>
	Emile Durkheim	87-90	
2-Oct	Emile Durkheim cont.	105-111	<b>DP3</b>
	Max Weber	118-122	
9-Oct	Max Weber cont.	114-117	<b>DP4</b>
	Review		
	<b>3. Important Women Social Theorists</b>		
16-Oct	Harriet Martineau	Supp. (Martineau)	<b>DP5, TA2</b>
	Charlotte Perkins Gilman	185-188	
23-Oct	Jane Addams	164-166	<b>DP6</b>
	<b>4. Of Self and Identity</b>		
30-Oct	W.E.B. Du Bois	248-250, Supp. (Du Bois)	<b>DP7, TA3</b>
	Review Final Project instructions		
6-Nov	George Herbert Mead	221-225	<b>DP8</b>
	Georg Simmel	194-197	
13-Nov	Erving Goffman	335-336	<b>DP9</b>
	Project Workday		
	<b>5. Society as Structure or Phenomena</b>		
20-Nov	Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton	299-301	<b>DP10, TA4</b>
	Peter Berger	377-380	
27-Nov	Dorothy Smith	381-384	<b>DP11</b>
	Clifford Geertz	373-376	
	<b>6. (Post)Modernity and Beyond</b>		
4-Dec	Pierre Bourdieu	417-421	<b>DP12, TA5</b>
	Anthony Giddens	460-464, 561-563	
11-Dec	Zygmunt Bauman		
	Project Workday		<b>TA6</b>
22-Dec	<b>Final Exam Period</b>		<b>Final Project</b>
5:00pm	Submit Media Project Paper via Canvas		<b>Paper</b>