Course Statement

Sociology is the study of how our social world, our *everyday, taken for granted reality*, is constructed and mediated through social action and social structures. In short, sociology is the study of how individuals, groups and institutions co-exist and interact in a world of complex social and historical forces. Can humans successfully study themselves and others scientifically, and if so, to what end? Do the features inherent in the *social construction of reality* promote or retard wisdom? What does it mean to be part of a complex process through which structures are created which in turn create us? These are some of the questions we will address in this course en route to understanding the historical emergence and practice of sociology.

Class Preparation

This is a four credit course and you are expected to dedicate approximately 8 hours each week preparing for class meetings. Prior to each class meeting you must complete the assigned reading and prepare a one page (single spaced) written response to an assigned question. To make class discussion more interesting this semester I have organized these daily, preparatory written assignments according to student “teams.” Each student will be assigned to either Team A or Team B for the semester, and will complete the question assigned to his or her group on any particular day. Students will then bring their written work to class and draw from it during class discussions.

Grading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class preparation:</th>
<th>25%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midterm essay exam:</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Term paper phase 1:</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>Term paper phase 2:</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>Final exam:</td>
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Policy on Unexcused Absences

An absence will be excused if the reason for the absence is valid and documented in writing by the appropriate authority. Given the importance of attendance and classroom discussion, three unexcused absences are grounds for receiving a failing grade in this course.

Required Texts

New York: Prentice Hall.
Thursday  8/24  
Course overview

Tuesday 8/29  
Understanding and internalization  
Discuss chapter 1 in Bell, et al.  
TEAM A: Research the meaning of deconstructionism and summarize its key features.  
TEAM B: Prepare a one page essay deconstructing your early college experiences. What are some of the stronger assumptions you had about college that, upon critical reflection, were revealed to be untrue?

Thursday  8/31  
Socrates, Plato’s cave and Hegel’s dialectic  
Discuss excerpt from Book VII of Plato’s Republic and chapter 2 in Bell, et al.  
TEAM A: Prepare a one page essay that interprets Plato’s metaphor of the cave and explores the sense in which Rhodes may be understood as a cave.  
TEAM B: Research the meaning of “dialectic” in both the Socratic and Hegelian sense.

Tuesday  9/5  
Culture and ethnocentrism  
Discuss 2.2 (Miner) and 32 (Becker)  
TEAM A: Would you like to live in the culture described by Miner; why or why not?  
TEAM B: Research the meaning of “ethnocentrism”; what is it and can it be avoided?

Thursday  9/7  
The Sociological Imagination  
Discuss #1.2 (Mills)  
TEAM A: Who was C. Wright Mills and how did he envision sociology as an academic discipline?  
TEAM B: What is the sociological imagination and in what sense does it go beyond the taken for granted way of seeing and thinking about social reality?
Tuesday 9/12 Paradigms and Positioning
TEAM A: Who is Thomas Kuhn and what is his thesis in his book “The Structure of Scientific Revolutions?”
TEAM B: Considering Kuhn’s definition of “paradigm,” do paradigms exist in the social sciences, and why or why not?

Thursday 9/14 Is sociology a science?
TEAM A: What is the scientific method and in what sense are social sciences scientific?
TEAM B: What was August Comte’s view of intellectual history, how did he envision “positivism,” and is positivism a science?

Tuesday 9/19 The origins of sociology
Discuss handout (Durkheim)
TEAM A: Who was Emile Durkheim, how did he envision sociology, and what are some of his main contributions to the field?
TEAM B: Using the handout as a resource, 1) why do you think Durkheim positions sociology among the “other” natural sciences, 2) what is a social fact and 3) do you think Durkheim successfully makes his case for creating a new science of society?

Thursday 9/21 What are the origins of religion?
Discuss 47 (Durkheim) and handout (Durkheim)
First phase of paper assignment is assigned
TEAM A: Research questions: research the meaning of the “sacred and profane” and explain why Durkheim finds the distinction to be the conceptual and behavioral basis of religion.
TEAM B: Based on the assigned readings, why does Durkheim consider the emergence of society to be a sufficient cause for the creation of religion?

Tuesday 9/26 Is suicide a sociological phenomenon?
TEAM A: What are the suicide rates for the U.S., Tennessee and Memphis/Shelby County; what are the demographic predictors of suicide (age, race, gender, occupation). Why do you think these factors influence suicide rates?
TEAM B: According to Durkheim, what are the four types of suicide conceptualized by Durkheim and how does religious affiliation affect suicide rates?

Thursday 9/28 The division of labor
Discuss handout (Durkheim)
Deadline for submitting research topic
TEAM A: What is the ‘division of labor’ and how does it lead to a transformation from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity?
TEAM B: What are “integration” and “regulation” and how do they relate to Durkheim’s notion of anomie?

Tuesday 10/3

**Marx’s dialectical materialism**
Discuss 51 (Marx) and handout (Marx)
TEAM A: What are Marx’s assumptions about history and human nature and how do they foreground his Communist Manifesto?
TEAM B: What is dialectical materialism and how does it understand the role played by technology in the transformation from capitalism to socialism?

Thursday 10/5

**Alienation and reification**
Discuss handout (Marx)
TEAM A: What is alienation and why does Marx believe that wage earners are, by definition, alienated?
TEAM B: What is reification and why does Marx consider it to be problematic and dehumanizing?

Tuesday 10/10

**Class stratification**
Discuss 7.2 (Davis and Moore) and 21 (Gans)
**Phase one of paper assignment (literature review) due**
TEAM A: Research the meaning of functionalism and apply the concept in a critique of Gans’s article written from the perspective of Davis and Moore.
TEAM B: Research the meaning of stratification and apply the concept in a critique of Davis and Moore’s article written from the perspective of Gans.

Thursday 10/12

**Culture and class**
Chapter 13 in Bell, et al and 19 (Purrucci and Wysong)
TEAM A: Drawing from the article by Purrucci and Wysong, what is the nature of the new class structure in America and how does it differ from past structures. What advice might you give to those in the lower portion of the class structure?
TEAM B: Interview someone you know who experienced upward mobility in his or her life. Ask about relationships with parents and family members and whether they changed as a result of their upward mobility.

Tuesday 10/17

**Fall Break**

Thursday 10/19
In class review for midterm exam.

Tuesday 10/24
In-class midterm essay exam

Thursday 10/26
Class meets to discuss film assignment
Tuesday 10/31  
**Language and behaviorism’s black box**  
Discuss 7 (Cooley) and 3.1 (Mead)  
**Second phase of paper assignment distributed**  
TEAM A: What is behaviorism and what do behaviorists mean by the “black box?”  
TEAM B: Explain George Herbert Mead’s notion that ‘taking the role of the other’ is the key to developing a self identity. How does language also contribute to the development of the self?

Thursday 11/2  
**Socialization through internalization**  
Discuss 8 (Berger and Luckmann) and 11 (Dunphy)  
TEAM A: What do Berger and Luckmann mean by “internalization” and how does the concept compare to Mead’s symbolic interactionism?  
TEAM B: What is the take away point in the Dunphy article regarding the relative importance of social relations, interaction and the self concept?

Tuesday 11/7  
**The Social Construction of Reality**  
Discuss handout (Berger and Luckmann) and 7 in Bell, et al.  
TEAM A: What is phenomenology and in what sense is Berger and Luckmann’s work phenomenological?  
TEAM B: Based on Bell’s chapter, what is the difference between knowledge and understanding?

Thursday 11/9  
**Social control and gender**  
Discuss 14 (Berger and Luckmann) & 28 (Howard and Hollander)  
TEAM A: Based on the reading by Berger and Luckmann, what is social control and how is it that it seems to operate automatically?  
TEAM B: Drawing from the reading by Howard and Hollander, in what sense is gender a social control? Provide several examples of how the mechanism of gender controls gender identities.

Tuesday 11/14  
**Social control and gender (continued)**  
Discuss 12.3 (Berger and Kellner) and 9.4 (Nelson)  
TEAM A: Drawing from the reading by Berger and Kellner, describe the sense in which marriage may be understood to be a form of social control.  
TEAM B: Research and report the latest national statistics on violence against women. What do these statistics evidence regarding the status and cultural condition of women in our society?
Thursday 11/16  
**The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism**
6.4 (Weber) and handout (Weber)  
**TEAM A:** What is an “ideal type” and what are the ideal typical features of bureaucracy? What is the prevailing logic of bureaucracies and how is it evident in the performance of roles and duties by bureaucrats?
**TEAM B:** According to Weber, what is the prevailing logic of the Protestant Ethic and how is it evident in the behavior of Protestants?

Tuesday 11/21  
**Weber’s four types of social action**
Phase two of paper assignment is due  
**TEAM A:** How does Weber define social action and what does he identify to be the main types of social action?
**TEAM B:** Define and contrast value rational and instrumental rational social action? To what extent does instrumental rational action involve displacement?

Thursday 11/23  Thanksgiving

Tuesday 11/28  
**Reification and dehumanization**
41 (Boggs) and 11.2 (Dowie)  
**TEAM A:** Drawing from Boggs’s article, write a short essay that describes how instrumental rational logic and action are key features of corporate culture.
**TEAM B:** Write a short essay that describes how the features of corporations described by Boggs are readily apparent in the behavior of Ford as described by Dowie.

Thursday 11/30  
**Self displacement, authority and violence**
Discuss 15 (Zimbardo) and 16 (Meyer)  
**TEAM A:** Write a response to and commentary on Zimbardo’s account of the prisoners experiment. What does the case tell us about instrumental rationality, social controls, reification and displacement?
**TEAM B:** Write a commentary on Meyer’s account of Milgrim’s famous experiment. What does the case tell us about instrumental rationality, social controls, reification and displacement?

Tuesday 12/5  Review for final exam.