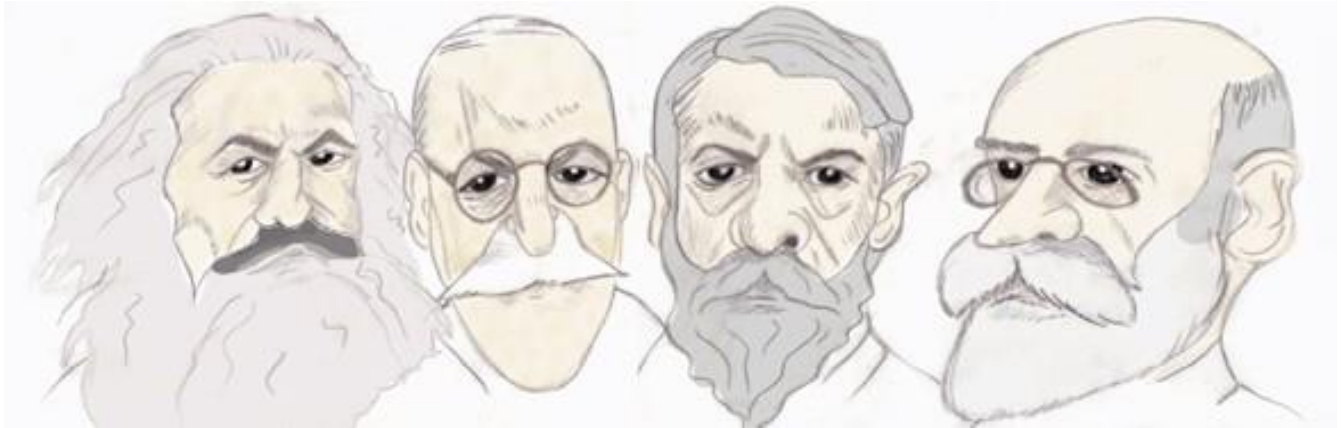


## SOC 4010: CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY



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Office: Old Main 224E

Meeting times:

3:00 pm - 4:15 pm Tuesday/Thursday Family Life 307

Office hours: Tuesday/Thursday: 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm

### **About the Course:**

What explains the differences between rich and poor? Why do people in different societies behave differently? What can be explained by individual choice and what cannot? What does religion do? These are some of the questions that the field of sociology began with. This course is an introduction to sociological theory, encompassing both the “classical” sociological works of Durkheim, Marx, and Weber, who merged empirical and normative interests in their arguments about social change during the 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as contemporary theoretical developments, including Structural-Functionalism, Symbolic-Interactionism, Critical Theory, and Post-Structuralism. Our goals are twofold: a) to understand the arguments the authors make, and b) to see how these arguments relate to current issues and events in our own society.

### **Learning Objectives:**

The goal of this class is that you learn to think like a sociologist. That means, that you understand the major assumptions of theories we will cover in this course and for every theory you encounter, you are able to think of hypotheses and empirical data to confirm or disprove it. Thinking like a sociologist also means that you see how events are rarely isolated phenomena, but have causes and effects on social life. When you read or hear of any news, my goal is that you be able to think about some of the possible explanations for the event, how it might affect other things, and how it might be part of a cycle or ongoing back-and-forth social process.

Upon successful completion of this course, you will:

1. Have knowledge and understanding of major classical and contemporary sociological theories (IDEA objective: *learning fundamental principles, generalizations, or theories*).
2. Be able to analyze, synthesize, apply, and critique those theories (IDEA objective: *learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view*).
3. Be able to express your understanding of sociological theories in academic prose, orally, and creatively (IDEA objective: *learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view*).

**Course Format:** This course will revolve around numerous readings and active discussion in class of these selections, as well as lecture to supplement and provide background information on each theorist or theoretical paradigm. We will spend the bulk of time wading through and struggling to understand the writings through primary readings composed by the actual theorists, themselves. But, we will supplement this with discussions as to the relevance of these ideas, and investigate the socio-cultural circumstances surrounding these writers and their ideas.

**Required course materials:**

**Book:** Sociological Theory, Ninth Edition by Ritzer and Stepnisky. Publisher: McGraw-Hill.

**Articles:** There will be several required research articles. Each will be available online on Canvas.

**GRADING/EVALUATION:**

Course grades will be based on the following weighting of course requirements:

2 in-class exams	50%
10 pop-quizzes	20%
Participation	20%
10 homework	10%

Two in-class exams (50 points each)

There will be two exams during the semester – one on classical sociological theories, and a final on contemporary sociological theories. (See Course Schedule for dates.) They will be closed book and held in class (so, there is no exam during Finals Week for this course). The exams will assess whether you have done the readings, paid attention in class, and thought about the material seriously. They will consist of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. More information will be provided as we go along.

Pop quizzes (4 points each=40 points total)

Nobody likes pop quizzes, but the goal here is motivate everyone to really do the readings. The quizzes will not be difficult; they are not intended to test how deeply you have thought through the text and absorbed the ideas. They are simply meant to assess *whether* you've done the readings assigned for that day. So, as long as you've done the relevant readings, and underlined, highlighted, or made notes on what seem to be relevant sections, you should be able to answer very basic questions about the text. Unless I specify otherwise, they will be open

book. And they will take about 10 minutes at the beginning of any given class. But if you arrive late and miss the quiz you will receive a zero. There will be 10 quizzes scattered across the semester. As you can see, by not telling you when the quizzes will be there is a real incentive on your part to do all the readings. Everything in this class is geared to get everyone to sit and read. Also, I will drop your 2 lowest grades.

Homework (2 points each=20 points total)

Each week, you will read articles and excerpts from books written by social theorists. Though the reading assignments are fairly short, they are dense. Therefore, in order to help you with the class discussions, you will be asked to do very short homework assignments, which you will turn in at the end of the class. You may be asked about what you liked or disliked about a particular theory and find a newspaper article and relate it to the theory we are discussing that week.

Attendance/Participation (40 points)

Attendance is required, and your grade for this part of the class depends on coming to class regularly, on time, and prepared to discuss the readings. Everyone is granted three free absences during the semester; any additional absence will be penalized. The only exceptions beyond this will be for serious family or medical emergencies.

Participation is always murky to assess, but you will be given a rough grade on the basis of your contributions to class discussions and level of engagement with the materials. It will be a rough scale: a plus (+) gets you full points and means you participated actively, consistently asking and answering questions and stating opinions and concerns; (half a plus) gets partial points and means you opened your mouth but didn't really convince me that you've done any serious reading; and a minus (-), no points, means you showed up to snooze. I realize talking in class is not easy for everyone and if that is the case I actively encourage you to set up an appointment to talk to me in my office to talk about the material.

I will be using something like the Socratic method during class discussions, meaning that I will be directing a series of questions to one student at a time, chosen at random by me before class begins. Expect to be called on with a series of questions around 5 times during the term (about every other week). Everyone will have an equal number of opportunities to answer questions, but it will be random (in other words, not everyone will go once before going again), so if you were called on in the last class, you still could be called on again in the next one. Your grade will depend on your attendance in class and for the quality of your preparedness.

Based on the distribution of pluses, half pluses and minuses, you will be assigned a grade for participation at the end of semester.

**Exceptional Participation (A range):** Participates frequently with thoughtful comments and questions that reflect an exceptional effort to understand the course material.

**Average Participation (B range):** Participates periodically with thoughtful comments and questions.

**Moderate Participation (C range):** Participates infrequently; rarely contributes thoughtful comments or questions to the class discussion.

The grading distribution is as follows:

94 and up	=	A
90 to 93	=	A-
87 to 89	=	B+
84 to 86	=	B
80 to 83	=	B-
77 to 79	=	C+
74 to 76	=	C
70 to 73	=	C-
67 to 69	=	D+
60 to 66	=	D
59 <	=	F

#### **GRADE APPEAL POLICY:**

We all make mistakes and it is consistent with my teaching philosophy that students be allowed the right to have those mistakes corrected. In order to facilitate that process: **always keep all graded work in case there is a discrepancy with your grade.** If you do not agree with a grade you have received, you may submit a *written* grade appeal to me within *one week* of receiving the grade. Appeals received after one week will not be considered unless there are serious extenuating circumstances. Write a rationale addressing all comments given to you on the assignment and explain your reasons for wanting a change in grade. We will then set a time to meet and discuss your appeal. Finally, if there are circumstances prohibiting you from completing course requirements, please see me *before* the end of the course.

#### **Communication:**

Key points regarding communication:

- ❖ Note that I do *not* monitor my e-mail 24/7. You should reasonably expect a reply to your electronic communications within 24 hours, *except for weekends and holidays*. Please include the course number in the subject line of all email messages (SOC 4010) and your name.
- ❖ Please keep a copy of all of your work. We cannot be responsible for missing work due to technical issues.
- ❖ It is expected that students in this course will access their e-mail **at least once a day.**

#### **Electronics:**

I do not allow the use of any electronic devices in class, which includes cell phones, laptops, I pads, and other devices. The World Wide Web is just too tempting. Any slides I use will be posted to the course website on Canvas, which should minimize the notes you'll need to take.

Exceptions will be made for students who require a laptop for accessibility reasons or who see the laptop as essential to their work.

**Academic Honesty:**

Plagiarism (Latin for “to kidnap”) which is using others’ work and presenting it as your own, **is not allowed**. You must abide by the rules on honesty in academic work, outlined here:

<http://www.usu.edu/student-services/student-code/article6.cfm>. Please be familiar with the rules and if you are confused, do not hesitate to ask me to clarify them.

**Accommodation with Students with Disabilities:**

If you have a documented disability and need reasonable accommodation to participate in this course, please make an appointment to meet with me as soon as possible so that together we can arrange the necessary reasonable accommodations. Please note that prior to our meeting you must obtain documentation of your disability through the Disability Resource Center (DRC) on campus.

### TENTATIVE COURSE OUTLINE

Week		Topics	Readings
Week 1	January 9-13	Welcome	Chapter 1
Week 2	January 16-20	Karl Marx	Chapter 2 Excerpt from "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844"
Week 3	January 23-27	Emile Durkheim	Chapter 3 Excerpts from "The Division of Labor in Society"
Week 4	January 30-February 3	Max Weber	Chapter 4 Excerpt from "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism"
Week 5	February 6-10	Review and exam	February 6 exam review <b>February 10 FIRST IN-CLASS EXAM</b>
Week 6	February 13-17	Structural functionalism	Chapter 7 Excerpt from "Sex Roles in the American Kinship System" (1943)
Week 7	February 20-24	Neo-Marxist theory: Habermas, Marcuse	Chapter 8 Excerpt from Marcuse's "One-dimensional man"
Week 8	February 27-March 3	Neo-Marxist theory: Gramsci	Chapter 8 Excerpt from "The Prison Notebooks"
Week 9	March 6-10	SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS	
Week 10	March 13-17	Symbolic Interactionism: Blumer, Goffman	Chapter 9 Excerpt from "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life"
Week 11	March 20-24	Post-structuralism: Foucault	Chapter 16 focus on "Ideas of Foucault" Excerpts from "Discipline and Punish"
Week 12	March 27-31	Post-structuralism: Bourdieu	On Pierre Bourdieu (Canvas) Excerpt from "An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology"
Week 13	April 3-7	Contemporary feminist thought: Patricia Hill-Collins	Chapter 12 focus on "intersectionality" Excerpt from "Black Feminist Thought"
Week 14	April 10-14	Micro-macro integration: Giddens	Chapter 14 Excerpt from "The Consequences of Modernity"
Week 15	April 17-21	Review and final exam	April 17 final exam review <b>April 21 FINAL IN-CLASS EXAM</b>