

# COURSE SYLLABUS

CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY  
SOCIOLOGY 4010

DR. GEERTSEN  
FALL 2016

**OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES:** Sociology courses collectively contribute to major goals of the sociology program, namely: to help students communicate effectively; to help students think critically, analytically, and reason logically about social issues and/or social problems; to help students understand and use sociological principles, concepts and theories to examine social behavior and issues; and to help students understand and evaluate the application of sociological methods to social behavior and issues. This particular course is called contemporary sociological theory. Contemporary means ideas that are currently being used by sociologists today. Theory refers to a collection of statements of relationship that are propositional in nature which suggest why events occur the way they do. In this sociology course, class activities, presentations, and reading materials are organized around the following specific objectives:

**1. GAINING FACTUAL KNOWLEDGE**

1a. To present a sociological way of thinking about the issues and problems of life in society.

**2. LEARNING FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES, GENERALIZATIONS, OR THEORIES**

2a. To show what scientific sociological theory is and how it relates to research and the "real" world.

**3. LEARNING TO ANALYZE AND CRITICALLY EVALUATE IDEAS, ARGUMENTS, AND POINTS OF VIEW**

3a. To document the wide diversity of theoretical ideas currently used by sociologists to interpret human relationships and social order in a multidimensional world.

**TEXTBOOK:** Electronic readings compiled by your instructor. To access, go to CANVAS for this class. Click on Files. Click on eReserves. The readings appear in alphabetical order.

**COURSE EXPECTATIONS:** You are expected to keep current on all readings, maintain regular attendance, and keep a complete set of class notes. Students who miss class tend to have difficulty with sociological theory. You are expected to be in your seat ready for class at the scheduled starting time. Although the readings will correspond with the topics covered in class, much of what will be presented in class provides greater detail than what is presented in the electronic readings. A complete set of notes and a careful reading of all assigned electronic readings is essential for doing well in this course!

**CLASS NOTES:** I DO NOT provide copies of my notes for students who miss class. You must make arrangements to obtain missed notes from other students.

**CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR:** Due to numerous complaints from students in previous classes, no *activated* cell phones, text messaging devices, ipods, or other such devices will be allowed in class

unless I grant special permission for unusual circumstances. Be sure to turn off all electronic devices prior to the beginning of class.

**DISABILITIES:** Any student with a disability who requires accommodation should let me know so that appropriate arrangements may be made; however, the disability must be documented by the Disability Resource Center.

**ASSESSMENTS OF LEARNING:** To assess progress in mastering course objectives, you will be required to participate in a group presentation, take four examinations, and be prepared to take periodic pop quizzes (5 points each) on assigned reading for a particular class period. You are allowed to miss or drop one quiz without a penalty. The exams will focus on the electronic readings and information presented in class. The precise question makeup of each exam will be indicated on the exam review day (the last class session prior to the exam).

**GRADING:** Grades will be based on the total points earned during the term from the following:

First Exam	=	100 Points
Second Exam	=	100 Points
Third Exam	=	100 Points
Group Presentation	=	15 Points
Quizzes on Readings	=	50-75 Points
Final Exam	=	100 Points

Grades will be determined by the percent of total points earned using the following breakdown: 90% = A, 80% = B, 65% = C, 60% = C-; 50% = D, Below 50% = F.

**GROUP PRESENTATIONS:** Each of you will be assigned to an unusual group in American history. All members assigned to a particular group will be responsible for presenting a live 10-minute dramatization to the class portraying some key feature or historical incident in the life of the group. You can role play key characters, re-enact some dramatic event or celebrated occasion, present a newscast, a mock trial, a talk show, etc. but the materials covered must be informative and factual. The method and style of the presentation will be entirely up to the members assigned to a particular group; however, points will be deducted for groups choosing to give individual reports or videotaped presentations. Groups will be assigned on Thursday, September 1. The first presentations will be given on Thursday, September 15.

**MAKEUP EXAMS:** A makeup exam will be given on Thursday, October 6 at 3:30 for the first exam, on Thursday, November 10 at 3:30 for the second exam, and on Tuesday, November 29 for the third exam. All makeup exams will be given in Main 224 (Suite 216G - my office), not in our classroom. Makeup exams are for students with unusual circumstances who notify me in advance.

**INCOMPLETE GRADES:** Incompletes will only be given under unusual circumstances such as prolonged illness or an emergency in the immediate family. They will not be given because you are failing the course or have fallen behind due to other commitments. Students granted incompletes must complete work within one year from when the incomplete grade is received.

**EXTRA CREDIT:** There is **NO EXTRA CREDIT**, so do the readings, do your part in your group, and study for the exams.

**CHEATING:** Falsification, cheating, and plagiarism are discussed in the USU Student Handbook and will be handled according to university guidelines. Normally this means an "F" grade in the course, but in severe cases, such as hiring a student to take an exam, additional action is possible.

**OFFICE HOURS:** Tuesday and Wednesday 3:00-4:15 in Main 216G (Located inside Main 224) or other times by appointment. You can email me at [reed.geertsen@usu.edu](mailto:reed.geertsen@usu.edu) or phone 797-1246.

<u>DATES</u>	<u>COURSE TOPICS</u>	<u>READINGS</u>
Aug 30	TYPES OF THEORY IN SOCIOLOGY	Why theorize
Sept 1	DISCOVERY AND EXPLANATION Group Assignments Scientific View of Theory	Propositions and Explanations
Sept 6	SYMBOLIC INTERACTION THEORY Freedom vs. Determinism and Approaches to Self Identity (Two readings)	Blumer's Symbolic Interaction Goffman's Mask and Beyond
Sept 8	THE FOCUS OF EVERYDAY LIFE Experiments with Assumptions	Illustration Ethnomethodology
Sept 13	SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY The Thomas Theorem and Relativity in Social Life (Two readings)	The Self-fulfilling Prophecy American Soldier
Sept 15	<u>ONEIDA GROUP PRESENTATIONS</u> Oneida's Approach to Commitment	Oneida
Sept 20	USING PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION TO STUDY GROUP LIFE  Study Guide for Exam	Hutterites
Sept 22	FIRST EXAM	Readings and Class Notes

Sept 27	<b>FUNCTIONS</b> Latent Functions and Merton's Law	Merton's Structural Functionalism
Sept 29	<b>SOCIAL SYSTEMS</b>	Illustration The Human Group
Oct 4	<b><u>SHAKER GROUP PRESENTATIONS</u></b> Shaker Organization and Functionalism	The Shakers
Oct 6	<b>FUNCTIONAL EXPLANATION</b> The Logic of Functionalism	Principles of Stratification
Oct 11	<b>DIALECTICAL CONFLICT THEORY</b> The Functions & Dysfunctions of Conflict	Coser's Structure Through Conflict
Oct 13	<b>GYPSY PRESENTATIONS</b>	The Gypsies
Oct 18	<b>POWER ELITES vs. PLURALISM</b> Self-Interest, Scarcity, and Power  Study Guide for Exam	A Summary of Conflict Theory
Oct 20	No Class - Attend Friday Classes	
Oct 25	<b>SECOND EXAM</b>	Information since first exam
Oct 27	<b>SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY</b>	Homans' Exchange & Reductionism
Nov 1	<b>EXCHANGE, POWER &amp; EQUITY</b>	Functional Exp. Reconsidered
Nov 3	<b>EXCHANGE PARADOXES</b> Limitations to Rational Choice	Social Exchanges are Different
Nov 8	<b>DIRECT AND INDIRECT NETWORKS</b>	Milgram's Experiments

<b>Nov 10</b>	<b>SOCIAL TIES AND CRITICAL THINKING</b>	<b>Groupthink</b>
<b>Nov 15</b>	<b>EXPERIMENTAL INSIGHTS INTO SOCIAL THEORY (Two readings)</b>  <b>Study Guide for Exam</b>	<b>Illustration:Some Classic Experiments Attachments and Converts</b>
<b>Nov 17</b>	<b>THIRD EXAM</b>	
<b>Nov 22</b>	<b>SOCIAL NETWORKS AND SOCIAL CAPITAL (Online: Nicholas Christakis: The Sociological Science Behind Social Networks and Social Influence</b>	<b>Illustration Weak Ties</b>
<b>Nov 24</b>	<b>Thanksgiving Recess</b>	
<b>Nov 29</b>	<b>MACROSTRUCTURAL THEORY Intersection and Macro-integration</b>	<b>Similarity and Propinquity</b>
<b>Dec 1</b>	<b>STRUCTURES OF OPPORTUNITY Determinism Sociology Through Rates</b>	<b>Structures of Social Association</b>
<b>Dec 6</b>	<b>CRITICAL THINKING IN SOCIOLOGY Multidimensional Sociology</b>	<b>Collin's Paradoxes of Power</b>
<b>Dec 8</b>	<b>SOCIOLOGY IN A POSTMODERN AGE An Assessment of Postmodern Power</b>  <b>Study Guide and Review for Final Exam</b>	<b>The Surveillance Society</b>
<b>Dec 13</b>	<b>FINAL EXAM Tuesday 4:30 Regular classroom Absolutely no finals will be given prior to this date and time!</b>	

