

SOC 4050
SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY
Section 002/502
CRN 11614/13917
105 Main Hall
5:00 to 8:20

Professor: David Fasenfest
Email: david.fasenfest@wayne.edu
Office: 3229 FAB
Tel: 313-577-2930
Hours: Wednesdays 10:00-11:00, 3:00-4:00 by appointment

Description:

What is theory, why do we need it, what does it do? These are core questions everyone asks as they begin the journey of intellectual inquiry. Why do we need to know about theories that are so old, that do not seem to be current?

Second, we must ask, what does it mean to be a “sociologist” as a way of identifying ourselves and how we go about exploring and understanding society in all its micro- and macro-dimensions? What informs our “understanding” and the way we get to it?

To answer the first set of questions, we must consider that theory is a tool we use to construct a model of how society operates. Assessing patterns in society, theories are used a) to anticipate how society functions under different situations, and b) to provide a frame of reference from which to investigate social relationship (theories on a grand scale using large numbers in big places on one hand, or theories focusing on micro interactions of individuals in close interaction). In this course, we will focus on how to understand both the antecedents of contemporary theory, and focus on the more macro aspects of social organization. Theory is important as we make implicit and explicit choices about what we study, how we collect data, and formulate the relationships or mechanisms constraining or promoting social actions and outcomes. Theories are implicit in all we do. By making an *a priori*, but theoretically informed, choice (whether we know it or not), we go about deciding what is “evidence” and then collect data to assess our assumptions (analysis of data is not the focus of this course).

This course is designed to reflect upon a range of core sociological theories that have driven the development of contemporary theories. Identifying traditions underlying contemporary theory helps us to adjudicate when we are faced with contradiction or oppositional explanations. Consider the following pair of statements:

- 1) You are poor because you are powerless.
- 2) You are powerless because you are poor.

One might ask “so what?” and assume this is just semantics; what difference does the order of these words make? Be prepared to discuss these two statements in class at our first

meeting. I'll ask you to argue about the statements' differences, and why those differences are important. Ask yourself, does theory help direct how we think about things?

Objectives:

By the end of the course, students will understand the role of theory in sociology; each student should be able to engage in structured weekly assessments that:

- define theory and describe its role in building sociological knowledge;
- that compare and contrast basic theoretical orientations;
- show how theories reflect the historical context of the times and cultures in which they were developed; and
- describe and apply some basic theories or theoretical orientations in at least one area of social reality.

Required Texts:

Appelrouth, Scott A and Laura Desfor Edles (A&E in outline below). *Classical and Contemporary Sociological Theory*. Sage [3rd edition is the latest, but you can use an earlier edition if you find it for less—but you must make sure the subjects align,]

Furthermore, for the 3 “core” theorists I have uploaded in Blackboard and discuss in each first meeting some fundamental readings to understand the theorists' perspective. This will be the basis for our initial discussion through a close reading during the first week, and the textbook assigned readings will be the basis for our second week's discussion.

Course Organization

There is no way to avoid reading, lots of reading. Furthermore, there is no point in coming to the lectures unprepared. Each class will begin with a review of readings, posing and answering questions about the readings and discussing past lectures. Each class will be a discussion and an integration of the readings placed into the larger theoretical frame of the author being studied.

This is a theory course and you will be expected to read (I can't say this too often!). The weekly class discussions will be based on the required readings by the theorists (read in advance of the class meeting). Note: I have assigned only the excerpts by the core theorists. For a full understanding of the theoretical foundations of sociology you should read these theorists in their entirety. Required readings form the basis of our class discussion and your assignments throughout the semester.

I strongly recommend that you find a way of working in groups—how many in a group is a personal preference. Group discussions will help as you struggle with the weekly readings, and as you make your way through the final paper. Groups are useful throughout your career. However, make sure your work is your own.

Grading

Your final grade is based on several factors: participation (10%), reading journals (30%), short answer midterm exam (25%), and a group presentation and paper (35%).

Participation (10 points): I expect you to come to class prepared to participate in this seminar. There is no “attendance” policy (nor do I require that you give me an excuse when absent). You are expected to come prepared each week, ready to engage in class discussions and demonstrate your understanding of (or ask questions about) the reading and concepts presented. All will get full points for participation unless I notice a consistent pattern of missed classes, or if you routinely come to class unprepared.

Reading Journals (30 points): You will be asked to write down your reactions and thoughts about the readings in five discussion boards (due dates on the schedule). These should be a critical engagement with the theorists covered—that means you are to elaborate on some aspect of the readings. I will expect you to post twice each discussion. The first post on the reading will be due by *Sunday evening 5pm (9/10, 9/24, 10/8, 10/29, and 11/12)* where you give your reaction to the assigned readings. The second post with reflections is due by *Wednesday noon (9/13, 9/27, 10/11, 11/1, and 11/15)*, where you will react to what other students have written. Each post will receive 3 points, meaning 6 points per discussion board, simply for posting—I do not grade them on content, but you may not get points if your comments are not thoughtful (I will discuss this in class).

Short Answer Midterm (25 points): Distributed October 16 and due on October 18th, there will be a take-home short answer midterm exam, where you will be expected to provide a response to a range of questions, that will include defining basic concepts, and providing reflections or interpretations on the ideas found for the three classical theorists.

Group Presentation and Paper (35 points): The class will be divided into 7 groups no later than the 3rd week of the semester, if not sooner. Each group will prepare an in-class presentation when we meet on December 6th; the group will summarize the core ideas of one of 7 topics of the course (Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Du Bois, Critical Theory, Poststructuralism, and Postmodernism), The presentations should be a group project, and each member of the group present at the presentation will receive 10 points. Afterwards, each student will be required to submit their own 4-5-page paper (as an email attachment) summarizing the main theoretical themes of their topic and the class discussions that followed (25 points). Papers should be double spaced, no less than 1-inch margins, in 12-point font. Make sure your name is on the first page of the essay, the subject line of the email to me should read **SOC4050 FINAL ESSAY** and the filename of the attached paper should be “**SOC4050 YOURNAME FINAL**” All essays are due by 5pm on December 13.

➔ NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED ◀

Finally, let me explain my grading scheme for this final paper. It is necessarily subjective, and as such I am always willing to listen to an appeal. But it is, in the end, my decision.

21-25 POINT work consists of cogent, well-articulated, and well-developed written presentation, demonstrating insight, originality, and complexity in both form (e.g., language, expression, organization) and substance (e.g., logical argumentation, factual accuracy, and appropriate examples); critical thinking skills are amply demonstrated;

sociological imagination is highly active; tasks are completed on time and according to the guidelines, often going “above and beyond”. This work is considered excellent.

16-20 POINT work is thoughtful and developed, but may not be completely original, particularly insightful, or precise. While ideas might be clear, focused, and organized, they are less likely to be comprehensive. Critical thinking skills are satisfactory; sociological imagination is active. This work is considered good and shows originality.

10-15 POINT work is reasonably competent, yet may be unclear, inconsistent, and minimally inadequate in form and/or content. Critical thinking skills are minimal; sociological imagination is weak. This work is considered mediocre and barely adequate.

<10 POINT work is not competent, appropriate, relevant, complete, and/or adequate in form and/or content, thereby not fully meeting more than the minimum requirements. Critical thinking skills are largely absent; and one’s sociological imagination is lacking. You will earn these points for at least turning in your essay.

“**WN/P/F**” is only given when you withdraw from the course by the deadline. “WN” is given when no work was done during the semester—and I encourage you to withdraw by the early date to get a refund if you feel you can’t manage this class. “P” is given when you have completed all work to date in a satisfactory manner but must withdraw from the course (I do not require an explanation). “F” is given when you decide to withdraw but you have not kept up, did not take the mid-term exam and were generally absent.

Students initiate all requests to withdraw, pay attention to the withdrawal deadlines.

ODDS and ENDS

- 1) Writing matters for several reasons. First, it is the way you communicate with the discipline; poor writing will never make it into print. If you have problems with writing there are support systems available to you at WSU (see <http://clas.wayne.edu/writing>). Second, it is not the reader’s responsibility to interpret what you meant; if it is not said coherently it is likely you will not convey your argument well. I will not grade down for writing per se, but, from past experience, poorly written papers generally receive a lower grade at the end of the day..
- 2) FAQ on Plagiarism: The rules are clear: Nothing may be copied from books, articles, websites and other materials written by others UNLESS you give the author (creator) of the idea the credit.
 - * *What is plagiarism?* Plagiarism is copying words and ideas and passing them off as yours.
 - * *What constitutes copying?* Copying is writing down, word for word, something you read, written by someone else. Copying is stringing together bits and pieces from published sources to create a paragraph that reads as if you wrote it yourself.
 - * *When can a researcher copy?* Copying is allowed if you indicate you have copied the words and let us know where they came from.
 - * *What if I don’t copy the words, just the idea? Do I still need to reference the original work?* When you put someone else’s idea into your own words, you are paraphrasing the idea. You MUST reference the creator of the ideas.

- * *What is the best way to reference where I got the idea?* There are many books on the subject. For this class, simply indicate the source (likely the text) and page numbers, if you get ideas from any handouts or notes I may provide.
- * *If everything I write is taken from something I have read, won't I have a reference after every sentence?* Yes. This is good. It demonstrates you understand the rules. It also demonstrates that you have not done much original thinking. In that case, start doing some original thinking.

Departmental, College and University rules and requirements on plagiarism and falsification of work will apply. They outline your rights and responsibilities. **Failure to acknowledge the source of one's ideas, or to indicate paraphrases, ideas, or verbatim expressions not one's own through proper use of quotations and footnotes constitutes plagiarism (intentional or otherwise), is a form of academic dishonesty.** This may result in a failing grade for the assignment or course.

- 3) "Pages" mean double spaced, 1" to 1.25" margins, and Arial or New Times Roman 12-point font.
- 4) In my experience, you will learn more from each other than you will just from my lectures. As a result, I encourage and facilitate the formation of study and reading groups. Use the group to discuss readings, get reactions to what you are writing, and help formulate your questions for me.
- 5) **THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A BAD OR INAPPROPRIATE QUESTION!** If you have a question and do not ask, I cannot know you are confused. If you are uncertain about any question, ask it—if I think it should be addressed outside of class I will tell you. Perhaps not so obvious, it is hard to ask questions if you don't read the material beforehand.
- 6) All reading should be completed *prior* to the corresponding class meeting for maximum benefit and the best use of our time in class. It is much harder, after the fact, to read the material and, on your own, figure out what is going on. I do not repeat lectures. Come to class prepared. And consider that most things require two readings—the first time to get a general sense of what was being presented, the second time after discussion to more fully comprehend the material.
- 7) At the end of the day, this course is guided by the idea that theory is a tool, much like your methods and statistics courses. Therefore, it is up to you to learn how to use the tool wisely and when to apply it. This course is an introduction to theory and consequently somewhat of a survey course...it is now up to you to pursue your studies in other courses.

IMPORTANT DATES:

September 13:	Last Day to Drop with Full Tuition Refund
September 17:	Last Day to Drop without Permission, Tuition Charged
*** DECEMBER GRADUATING SENIORS PAY ATTENTION	
September 29:	Degree Applications Due if Graduating this Semester
October 18:	Take Home Mid-Term Exam
November 12:	Last Day to Withdraw from Course with Permission
December 6:	Group Presentations in Class
December 13:	Final Exam Period Begins, Final Papers Due

FALL 2017 SOC4050 COURSE OUTLINE

<i>Class</i>	<i>TOPIC</i>	<i>READING</i>
Aug 30	INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE Blackboard Introductions	
Sept 6	1. Marx, I	Chapter 1 from <i>Capital</i> Vol I found on Blackboard
Sept 13	2. Marx, II (Discussion 1)	A&E, Chapter 2 pp 23-82 Discussion post #1 9/10, #2 9/13
Sept 20	3. Durkheim, I	Chapter 1 from <i>Professional Ethics and Civic Morals</i> found on Blackboard
Sept 27	4. Durkheim, II (Discussion 2)	A&E, Chapter 3 pp 83-138 Discussion post #1 9/24, #2 9/27
Oct 4	5. Weber, I	Chapter 1 from <i>Economy and Society</i> found on Blackboard
Oct 11	6. Weber, II (Discussion 3)	A&E, Chapter 4 pp 139-199 Discussion post #1 10/8, #2 10/11
Oct 18	MIDTERM EXAM AVAILABLE MON 10/16, DUE 9PM 10/18	
Oct 25	7. Charlotte Perkins Gilman	A&E, Chapter 5 pp 201-237 Any other material on Blackboard
Nov 1	8. Du Bois (Discussion 4)	A&E, Chapter 7 pp 277-311 Any other material on Blackboard Discussion post #1 10/29, #2 11/1
Nov 8	9. Critical Theory	A&E, Chapter 10 pp 396-416 Any other material on Blackboard
Nov 15	10. Poststructuralism (Discussion 5)	A&E, Chapter 14 pp 640-718 Any other material on Blackboard Discussion post #1 12/12, #2 12/15
Nov 22	THANKSGIVING BREAK	
Nov 29	11. Postmodernism	A&E, Chapter 15 pp 719-759 Any other material on Blackboard
Dec 6	GROUP PRESENTATIONS FINAL PAPERS DUE 5PM DECEMBER 13	