## SOC 5400/8400: THE FAMILY

* **Term**: 2016 Fall (08/31/16 - 12/20/16)
* **Day and Time**: Wednesdays, 3:00-5:45pm
* **Location**: 0237 State Hall
* **Instructor**: John Girdwood, PhD
* **Office Location**: 2250 Faculty Admin Building (FAB) but prefer meeting before or after class
* **Office Hours**: By appointment
* **Phone**: 774-473-9663 (you can leave a message for me)
* **Email**: 77girdwood@gmail.com (best way to reach me)

## About the Course

* **Credits**: 3
* **Course Description**: “An introduction to the sociology of the family: forms of organization, interaction patterns throughout the life cycle, ethnic and cultural differences, conflict and change. Especially useful for students in social work, counseling, family and consumer resources, nursing and education, as well as the other social sciences.”

## Message from the Instructor

Sociology is situated uniquely within academia because it is often required but few students pursue it as a major of study. Many students who take sociology courses do so to become well-rounded learned individuals and use the skills learned to apply to future professional work. This means that sociology can be a useful applied science for many students. In other words, students may take their newly acquired sociological knowledge to other disciplines and use sociological theories, methods, and research to support scientific arguments in other academic and professional endeavors. This is “doing sociology.”

Sociology tends to involve the study of everyday phenomena so it is sometimes difficult for students to see how sociology is a science. For example, many students bring a point of view and a plethora of opinions to class. This is fine, but students need to learn and grow throughout the semester and leave with more than the opinions they entered with. Students need to become critical thinkers.

Critical thinking is a process of analysis, a way of looking at the world objectively, and allows individuals to draw conclusions based on facts. Sociologists use many types of data to form arguments about everyday phenomena. Sociologist sometimes use numerical data and statistics, called “quantitative” analysis, and other times sociologists use words to form arguments, called “qualitative” data. In either case, sociologists do not simply espouse opinions; sociologists are scientists who form hypotheses and support findings with data.

You will learn to think sociologically in this course. You will develop a sociological imagination (Mills, 1959) that will help you think critically. You will learn about social facts and sociological methods (Durkheim, 1895). You will learn how social structures may influence how people function (Parsons, 1951). You might question the products of your labor and how it contributes to your identity as a human being (Marx, 1906). However, I encourage you to think about sociology not only as a cerebral journey of philosophical debate but also as a practical and ethical discourse. Sociology is rich with empathetic discovery (Weber, 1922). It may increase your proficiency by expanding your perspective.

## Themes of Discourse

Sociology is an active discipline and your participation during this semester should be rich in discourse. This means that you do not have to memorize much; instead, you will process what you learn into a healthy and vibrant conversation called “discourse.” We will not debate whether or not something it true. Rather, we will form strong arguments that support the lens through which we see the world. We will have different points of view and that is fine. Here are topics that we will examine this semester:

* Forms of organization
	+ Example: Families may have consisted of many children in early America when the economy was heavily agricultural but families may now consist of two cohabitating unmarried professionals who live in different cities with no intent to have children.
* Interaction patterns throughout the life cycle
	+ Example: Parents may feed their young children during infancy but then the children grow up and move out of the house, with little reliance on the parents other than minor financial support, and the children eventually become caregivers for their aging parents.
* Ethnic and cultural differences
	+ Example: It might be normal in some cultures or eras that the husband was the primary breadwinner but women may be heads-of-household in other countries or centuries.
* Conflict and change
	+ Example: Same-sex couples may become less stigmatized in American culture but it might take several decades before they realize legislative and political equality.

Notice my use of the words “may” and “might” in the themes above. Please note that you should enter the classroom with an open mind as I do. In this class, we look at phenomena – things that happen – and then try to figure out how and why those things occur. We do not make value judgments.

## Learning Objectives

Students are not expected to memorize or recite much in this course. However, students are expected to read and understand the principles of sociology and apply those principles to certain phenomena:

* Acknowledge and discuss the diversity of families in the United States
* Understand the relationship between family structure and the economy
* Describe how families are socially constructed
* Put families into perspective in terms of centuries (time), countries (space), and other spectrums
* Intersect family with other social institutions (e.g. religion, government, education)

Students must convey an understanding of at least two sociological theories (e.g. cultural relativism, social constructionism, structural functionalism) and appropriately attach sociological methods (e.g. ethnography, surveys, statistical analysis) to subject matter and phenomena (e.g. cohabitation). The ability to adequately apply sociology to family matters is the quintessential learning objective in this course. Students will gain the ability to hold substantive discourse on topics using a sociological framework.

“Communal relationships may rest on various types of affectual, emotional, or traditional bases. Examples are a religious brotherhood, an erotic relationship, a relation of personal loyalty, a national community… The type case is most conveniently illustrated by the family” (Weber, 1922, p. 41).

## Required Text

The following books are available at most booksellers, the library, or your local college bookstore:

Hill, S. A. (2012). Families: A Social Class Perspective. Pine Forge Press.

McAdoo, H. P. (2007). Black Families. SAGE.

## Optional Text

The following books may be used for lecture but you do not have to buy them as they are hard to find:

Barrett, M., & McIntosh, M. (2015). The Anti-Social Family. Verso Books.

Friedan, B., & O’Farrell, B. (1997). Beyond Gender: The New Politics of Work and Family. Woodrow Wilson Center Press.

Zaretsky, E. (1986). Capitalism, the Family, and Personal Life. New York: Harper Collins.

## Course Requirements

* 10% Attendance
* 10% Discussion and Participation
* 10% Journals
* 40% Reflection Papers
* 30% Final Project

## Grading Scale

* 100 – 92.51 A
* 92.50 – 89.51 A-
* 89.50 – 86.51 B+
* 86.50 – 82.51 B
* 82.50 – 78.51 B-
* 78.50 – 75.51 C+
* 75.50 – 71.51 C
* 71.50 – 67.51 C-
* 67.50 – 64.51 D+
* 64.50 – 59.51 D
* 59.50 – 54.51 D-
* 54.50 or below F

## Expectations

### 10% Attendance

Students are expected to attend class. Points will be deducted for any absence. If you must miss class, please contact me in advance and present some type of written note to verify your absence after the incident. Please make up the work if you miss class. Even if you are excused from class, you will be responsible for learning all material including lectures which are recorded and posted to Blackboard.

### 10% Participation

Students are expected to participate during class discussion. If I am lecturing, there is no reason for you to be searching the internet unless it is relevant to the topic. There is no reason you should be on your phones, tablets, or devices. Eye contact is a good indicator of attention. You are encouraged to ask me to repeat anything you do not understand. Questions are beneficial to the discussion. Your peers may have the same question(s) so please raise your hand to contribute your perspective, question, or contribute to the discussion. Your behavior in class can either increase or decrease your grade for this expectation.

### 10% Journals

Students are expected to submit journals as part of the ongoing discourse of the class period. Journals are an extension of class discussion and can be done either before or after a class period. Often, students are discouraged when receiving less-than-full credit for a journal and the usual reason for this outcome is that the students just stated an opinion. While the journals are not held to the same standard as other written work, I expect journals to be much more than recitation or statements of opinion. Please use course material and newly acquired knowledge and apply what you learned to all writing and assignments in this class including journals.

### 40% Reflection Papers

Students are expected to write two papers during the semester about any specific class topic (i.e. weekly topic). Students can also choose from any theory, method, or phenomena they see fit. If you want to write about something other than the topics listed in the syllabus, I encourage you to do that but please discuss it with me before you start writing. Your reflection must be critical. Many students lose points because their writing is only descriptive. Please remember to use your sociological imagination and support some type of argument (not value judgment) in your paper. I will teach you what this means throughout the semester. Again, your papers must exhibit critical thinking.

### 30% Final Project

Students are expected to submit a capstone project. Most students choose to write a research paper (roughly 15 pages with 10 sources) because it is somewhat uniform and comes with a rubric. However, students should pursue a wide variety of possible capstone project formats. If you choose something other than the final paper option, please discuss it with me prior to the middle of the term.

## Template for Success

Here is an example of how a student might obtain an “A” grade during the semester:

* 9% Attendance: Comes to every class but misses one week due to a family emergency. Provides a written note but does not do any reading for that week. Also, shows up late a few times.
* 10% Participation: Raises hand at least twice per week, once to ask a question and once to comment about an alternative point of view than that of the instructor or another student.
* 9% Journals: Turns in every assignment but sometimes only reviews the text without critique.
* 35% Reflection Papers: Covers all the material discussed in class and meets the page length requirements (conveyed during lecture) but cites Wikipedia and news articles rather than scholarly academic journal sources.
* 30% Final Project: Submits a 5-page executive summary of a research proposal and presents the proposal to the class, fielding questions and responding well. Displays thorough understanding.

## About the Syllabus

This syllabus provides a framework for the course and can be considered a course plan. However, it is not a detailed explanation for every assignment. Most of the details will be conveyed during class. For example, I will provide a clear description for each Journal, Reflection Paper, and the Final Project. You will be graded on the criteria listed in the assignment instructions. Many students have trouble with this. Sometimes, students focus in on one tiny detail in the syllabus and believe that it represents the assignment in its entirety. This is simply not valid. The syllabus is just one piece of the entire puzzle.

To convey this point, I use the analogy of surgery. Think of the Final Project like surgery. Your assignment, for example, is to “perform surgery.” The syllabus describes your Final Project as “the performance of a surgical procedure.” During the semester, I teach you about general anesthesia. You are excited to perform surgery during the final week of class. You complete the surgery and receive a “C” grade then come to me wondering why, citing that the syllabus says only to “perform surgery” for your Final Project. I explain to you that you forgot about an entire week of lecture and material, you did not anesthetize the patient, and the patient is now suing the university for malpractice. “But,” you exclaim, “the syllabus says…” It is important to see the big picture, learn all the objectives, and display a comprehensive set of applied knowledge on each assignment you submit. Don’t forget the anesthesia.

## Other Policies

* Late assignments are docked 10% per day and are not accepted > 1 week from due date.
* Any and everything presented in lecture, text, and discussion is appropriate to test.
* Cell phone use is prohibited. Laptops are not to be used unless looking up course material.
* Withdrawals and Incomplete grades are governed by university policy.
* Please use courtesy and common decency. If you are aggressive, you will be asked to leave.
* It is your responsibility to voice your concerns. I cannot read your mind. Please bring any and all concerns to me without fear. I will listen. We can usually resolve course-related issues swiftly through conversation. Bring all course-related concerns to me first. However, if you have a concern about me (myself, not the course) then you should take that concern to the department chair. Again, do so without fear. You need to feel comfortable and safe here.
* The university has policies about students with disabilities. I am overly accommodating to students with disabilities but you should be familiar with the university policies, too.
* The university provides resources like writing and library assistance. Please use it; you pay for these services. I can provide a link to these services but they are supplementary to the course.
* If you plagiarize, I will notice. Not only does it hurt you and your future, it is something that puts a dark cloud over the entire semester so just do not do it. There is no point. I would much rather read something written in your voice (full of grammatical errors and misspelled words) than a polished piece written by someone else. Just do not do it. It is silly. You might even get expelled from the university.
* Class may be canceled for various reasons including my (rare) illness or (frequent) bad weather. You should pay close attention to your email on days we have class. I will email cancelations.
* One final word of advice – Think optimistically. We are partners in this journey, not adversaries.

In the words of folk singer Phil Ochs, this syllabus is “all the news that’s fit to print.” It does not contain every detail necessary for a successful experience but it provides a solid foundation to plan your course.

## Course Plan

Based on our text, the class is categorized into four sections: Race, Class, Gender, Economy. You might want to think of these as our institutional lenses but please do not get stuck on the division. Sociology often elucidates the intersection of institutions and social forces so you may find quite a bit of overlap.

Please understand that we only have a discrete amount of time to cover a large swath of topics. We will apply sociological thought to our concepts, e.g. “race,” through certain lenses, e.g. African American families. This does not mean that “race” can only be viewed through this lens (this should go without saying). It is simply a function of time divided by topics. We just do not have time to review every race. In fact, we hardly have time to define what “race” means. But, we’ll try in the limited time we have!

Week 1 / Aug 31 – Introduction to the Course and Teaching Philosophy

### Section 1: Race

Week 2 / Sept 07 – McAdoo (p. 51 – 69 Dodson) Conceptualizations and Research of African American Family Life in the United States: Some Thoughts

Week 3 / Sept 14 – McAdoo (p. 69 – 79 Nobles) African American Family Life: An Instrument of Culture

Week 4 / Sept 21 – McAdoo (p. 172 – 184 Sudarkasa) African American Female-Headed Households: Some Neglected Dimensions; (p. 219 – 238 Livingston) The Roles of African American Fathers in the Socialization of Their Children; Intersection of Race and Gender

Week 5 / Sept 28 – McAdoo (p. 319 – 328 Edelman) A Portrait of Inequality; (p. 328 – 339 Hill) The Impact of Welfare Reform on Black Families; Intersection of Race and Class

Reflection Paper 1 Topic: Apply any of your newly acquired knowledge to another social group of families. You can choose to distinguish by any socio-economic status category like race (e.g. white families), religion (e.g. Muslim families), education (e.g. highly educated parents), etc.

### Section 2: Class

Week 6 / Oct 05 – Hill (Chapter 1, p. 1 – 29) The Evolution of Families and Marriages

Week 7 / Oct 12 – Hill (Chapter 2, p. 29 – 49) Theorizing Social Inequalities

Week 8 / Oct 19 – Hill (Chapter 3, p. 53 – 68) Elite and Upper-Class Families

Week 9 / Oct 26 – Hill (Chapter 5, p. 91 – 115) Economically Marginalized Families: Living on the Edge

Reflection Paper 2 Topic: You read in Week 5 about Welfare Reform which some might consider a “safety net” for families “living on the edge.” How do social welfare policies affect American families?

### Section 3: Culture, Structure, Function, and Action

Week 10 / Nov 02 – Barrett (Chapter I, p. 11 – 43) A Question of Values

Week 11 / Nov 09 – Barrett (Chapter II, p. 43 – 81) The Anti-social Family

Week 12 / Nov 16 – Barrett (Chapter III, p. 81 – 131) Contemporary Social Analysis

Week 13 / Nov 30 – Barrett (Chapter IV, p. 131 – 161) Strategies for Change

### Section 4: Economy

Week 14 / Dec 07 – Zaretsky; Capitalism, the Family, and Personal Life

### Section 5: Intersections

Week 15 / Dec 14 – Students will be assessed on comprehensive knowledge of course material including the application of acquired knowledge to social phenomena involving family issues.

## Teaching Philosophy

I include a brief explanation of my teaching philosophy in every syllabus. This is important because it conveys my point of view to students early during the semester. I have accumulated a variety of experiences as an instructor at many different colleges and universities in Michigan. The fundamental theme that is omnipresent in all of my experiences is that communication is key and a dialogue is important to achieving successful outcomes. Even when two individuals do not agree on something, if each party clearly conveys their perspective then both leave with a better understanding of each other.

My teaching philosophy is based on a two-way dialogue. The term “two-way” means open dialogue between student(s) and teacher(s). We learn from each other and each participant in the experience will benefit from the contributions of the other. Even though I bring slightly more sociological knowledge to our discourse, I do not know your background or expertise. Therefore, it is essential that you contribute to the conversation.

Learning is a shared partnership. There are responsibilities on both sides of the relationship. I promise to do my best as a teacher, instructor, lecturer, editor, advisor, professor, and human being. These are several different roles that combine to construct my identity in the classroom. Let us not forget the other aspects of my identity: white, male, middle-class, privileged, progressively leaning somewhat radical thinker. I believe every person in my position should acknowledge these and other aspects early in the relationship formed with students. And, I expect that students inform me of your expectations of us both. I need to know what you want out of the relationship. The best results come from relationships built on clear expectations and mutual respect. Let me emphasize “mutual” respect. This means that I respect you, the student!

I put forth my best effort when teaching but my pursuit of excellence does not stop at the end of class or the end of the semester. I am aware that I have areas for improvement. I take feedback and constructive criticism very seriously. It is most impactful when repeated more than once. Many students have indicated that I am too vague when explaining criteria for assignments. I now offer point-based rubrics. Some students feel that I am too laid back. To improve, I now require students to read a precise length of pages or specific articles. My ultimate objective is to enhance the learning experience so that students receive the most benefit from having enrolled in courses that I teach. I do not assume that I know the best pathway to success so I am always seeking to make adjustments toward excellence.

Education is my top priority which is why I became a teacher. The sociological knowledge that I have accumulated in my life is “social capital” that I want to share, transfer, or convert to something useful for my students. I want to train students how to think critically, giving them the tools that will help throughout the rest of their lives. This is a mantra probably best exemplified by the cliché that “teaching a woman to fish means she will eat for a lifetime.” Education is an experience through which students acquire new knowledge that teaches them how to make good decisions; education does not tell students what decision to make. I teach students how to see the world from different points of view.

Although I use some clichés to make my point, it should not hide the message I am delivering. I teach classes heavily reliant on dialogue and “two-way” communication. This is the pragmatic manifestation of the sociological imagination, a theoretical framework for viewing the world through many different lenses. It is only logical that we approach our discourse as such. We will analyze the social world through your perspective, mine, and from as many other points of view as we can fit into a semester.

Remember, we are partners – not adversaries. Your enemy would not divulge his game plan, would he?

## Practicum

One of my favorite in-class exercises is not “in-class” at all unless you consider “the world” to be our classroom. Depending on the course that I am teaching, I might conduct a walking field trip to teach the sociological method of participant observation or ethnography. Here is how it works:

I tell 25% of the students in the class that we are going to a coffee shop. I explain that their job is to take notes regarding the behavior of the employees at the coffee shop. They might record field notes about language, facial expressions, or other symbolic interaction data. Then, I have them leave the room.

I tell 33% of the remaining students that their job is to take notes regarding the behavior of the students that just left and are now waiting in the hallway. I instruct those students to pair up with one of their peers in the hallway and begin their interaction by informing their peer under study that I am buying them a coffee or whatever they want at the coffee shop. I explain that the first field note they will take is probably related to excitement, confusion, or a similar reaction but students should not write “they were excited” but should instead take notes on the physical expressions so that we may later infer what the expression meant. For example, stone face does not necessarily mean “excited” but it may mean “confused” and that is an activity that comes later in the data analysis phase. Then, they go to the hall.

I tell 50% of the remaining students to observe and record notes on the “researchers” who just left. This is not a long explanation of their job, as I just explained the intricacies of taking field notes to the class. However, I encourage them to record the interactions and not focus on individuals.

After those students leave and there are only 25% left, I tell the remaining students that they have the most exciting job of the bunch. These students will act as deviants. They are encouraged to be loud and obnoxious, within limits, and are even told to cut in line when we arrive at the coffee shop. I give them certain things they might say, like “this is stupid” and “boring.” They even have the option of blatantly separating from the rest of our group.

The exercise begins when all students are in the hall outside the classroom. I stand back and do not prompt the students to start toward the coffee shop. Later, I ask them why nobody went (because they lacked a charismatic leader to start movement). The exercise ends back in the classroom where we discuss the ethnographic method, field notes as data, analysis versus description, and we all enjoy coffee together.

### Sample Final Project

Many students choose to write a 15-page research paper following APA format using 10 scholarly academic journal sources, preferably peer-reviewed. This is how I grade that 30-point assignment:

1. Point for a properly formatted title page
	1. Point for clarity in title: Do I understand what this paper is going to be about?
2. Point for a properly formatted, concise, summary in the form of an abstract
	1. Point for clarity in abstract: Do I understand what this paper is about?
3. Point for a properly formatted 1.5-page introduction to the problem
	1. Point for clarity in title: Do I understand what the social problem is?
4. Point for a fluid connection between the introduction and literature review
	1. Point for readability: Does the paper flow between sections or is the transition abrupt?
5. Point for a properly formatted 2.5-page literature review citing and comparing multiple sources
	1. Point for relevance: Does the chosen literature support or negate an argument?
6. Point for an explanation of an appropriate sample of analysis for a study of this topic
	1. Point for understanding: Does the student convey an adequate sample?
7. Point for an explanation of an appropriate sociological method to analyze the sample
	1. Point of understanding: Does the student convey an adequate method?
8. Point for the type of data that would be accumulated using the chosen method
	1. Point of understanding: Does the student convey appropriate data sources?
9. Point for an explanation of the limitations of the study described above
	1. Point of understanding: Does the student exhibit knowledge of study limitations?
10. Point for cohesiveness between the literature review, study proposal, and conclusion
	1. Point of process: Has the student exhibited cohesive writing and argument structure?
11. Point for a unique, fresh conclusion that adds value to the field of sociology
	1. Point of style: Is the voice of the student clearly conveyed?
12. Point for explaining how the proposal would fill in the gaps of prior literature
	1. Point of value: Does the paper add new knowledge?
13. Point for a properly formatted bibliography
	1. Point of editing: Does the student follow APA format precisely?
14. Point for an adequately supportive list of appropriate scholarly academic journal sources
	1. Point of scholarliness: Does the student know where to look for vetted information?
15. Point for cohesion of the entire document
	1. Point of subjectivity: Has the student impressed the reader by leaving an impact?

Please note that this is a qualitative assessment disguised as a quantitative analysis. This is why rubrics can be confusing. Please talk to me if you have any questions about the expectations of what I want from a 15-page final paper. It is essentially a research proposal. You can write it to look like any of the scholarly journal articles you have read during the semester. Most scholarly journal articles, especially in sociology journals, have standard section headings like: Introduction, Literature Review, Sample, Methods, Results, Discussion, Conclusion. Most students who succeed begin writing early in the semester. If you choose to write a term paper, I recommend you identify your topic by the third week, develop a problem statement by the sixth week, assemble your sources by midterm, and create a rough draft about four weeks prior to the final class. This allows plenty of time for revision!

## Your Course Plan

Take a moment to review the syllabus. Please ask yourself why you are here. I want you to understand how this course fits into your life, your college experience, and all of your endeavors. Writing answers to the following questions will help you calibrate yourself into the curriculum and coursework.

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What do you expect from me? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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What do you expect from yourself? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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What do I expect from you? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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What do you know about sociology? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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What do you know about families? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Define the word “family” \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Define the word “sociology” \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Define success in this course \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Your course plan should take you from where you are (here) to where you want to be…

## Further Reading

Durkheim, E. (1895). The Rules of Sociological Method. Simon and Schuster.

Marx, K. (1906). Capital: A Critique of Political Economy.

Mills, C. W. (1959). The Sociological Imagination. Oxford University Press.

Parsons, T. (1951). The Social System. New York, NY, US: Free Press.

Weber, M. (1922). Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology.