

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, CHAPEL HILL  
Fall, 2009

# Sociological Theory

(SOCI 250)

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Section 003 TR 11:00–12:15 Fred Brooks/Sitterson Hall F009

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Professor Andrew J. Perrin

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## COURSE OVERVIEW

This course is designed to give you an overview of major themes in sociological theory. In addition, it should give you an idea of the relationship between sociological theory and sociological research, and of the process of building sociological theory.

This course has four broad goals:

1. To present the history of sociological theory
2. To encourage a theoretical mode of thought
3. To consider the theoretical implications of social research and action
4. To promote excellent writing

## READINGS AND RESOURCES

### *Required Books*

**Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann.** *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Anchor, 1966).

**Pierre Bourdieu.** *Logic of Practice* (Stanford University Press, 1990).

**Émile Durkheim.** *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Free Press, 1995).

**Michel Foucault.** *The Foucault Effect* (University of Chicago Press, 1991).

**Erving Goffman.** *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Anchor, 1959).

**Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels.** *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (, 1849).

### Optional Books for the Second Paper

You will write on **one** of these books, of your choice, for your second paper; you do not need all of them unless you are interested in them for your own purposes.

**Barry Glassner.** *The Gospel of Food* (Ecco, 2007).

**Sam Harris.** *The End of Faith* (Norton, 2005).

**The 9/11 Commission.** *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (W. W. Norton, 2004).

**Malcolm Gladwell.** *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Back Bay Books, 2000).

**Andrew Keen.** *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet is Killing Our Culture* (Doubleday, 2007).

**Michael Pollan.** *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (Penguin, 2006).

**James Surowiecki.** *The Wisdom of Crowds* (Anchor, 2004).

**Dana Thomas.** *Deluxe: How Luxury Lost its Luster* (Penguin, 2007).

### Supplementary Readings

All other readings are available either on the web or on the course website. Readings available on the course website are marked with the WWW symbol. Those available on the web are linked from the course website. A few readings are on reserve in the library, and should also be available by electronic reserve; these are marked with the LIB symbol. The course website is available through <http://blackboard.unc.edu> and is also linked from <http://perrin.socsci.unc.edu>.

### Other Resources

Have a dictionary close at hand to look up words you don't know. You can find an adequate one at <http://www.dictionary.com> if you prefer using an online version.

The UNC Writing Center (<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb>) can help you with writing clearly and correctly. These are requirements of the class; you cannot do social theory adequately without writing well.

There is an astonishing amount of information available on the World Wide Web. A significant proportion of that information—though by no means all—is true and relevant. By all means, use the Web to supplement your reading and knowledge, but use it critically and make sure you know the source of the information.

## FORMAL REQUIREMENTS

The requirements of this course are as follows:

**Reading** You must complete all the course readings. *You are responsible for understanding the readings*—make use of your fellow students, your dictionary, the Internet, your TA, and me to make sure you understand the readings. Course time is to be used for substantive discussion and further exploration of the implications of course readings, *not* for grasping the basic contents.

Reading is due on the first *discussion* session about the reading. You may decide whether to do readings before or after a lecture pertaining to them.

**Participation** You must attend, *and participate in*, all class discussions. Participation in discussions means actively talking in them; attendance counts only for a very small portion of the credit. Come to discussions prepared to ask questions and discuss the readings. You are also responsible for the information contained in course lectures.

**Exams** There will be two examinations. The midterm examination will be a one-period, essay-style test held in class on October 20. You may consult the Internet and any notes or printed materials you wish during the midterm exam.

The final exam will be a time-limited, open-book and open-note exam. It will take place in Fred Brooks F009 on Saturday, December 12, at 12:00 noon. **You may be required to view a video before taking the exam. If so, this will be announced in class.**

**Class Papers** There are three written assignments:

1. Spend at least 30 minutes observing some social scene, such as a sporting event, a restaurant, a class, etc. Carefully note the social environment you observe, including the interactions and your observations about them. Write a short (2-4 page) description of your observations, highlighting anything you found puzzling, problematic, or particularly interesting. **Due September 29 in class.**
2. Choose one of the optional books listed at the top of the syllabus and write a short (3-5 page) *social theoretical* discussion of it. Your discussion should be neither a summary nor an opinion about the book; rather, it should engage with one or more theories of society in or related to the book and explore the implications. You may select a different book only with Professor Perrin's prior permission. It is strongly recommended, but not required, that you select a book with whose argument you expect to *disagree*. **Due November 3 in class.**
3. The final paper is your opportunity to synthesize what you have learned during the class with outside interests and experiences. Your final paper must develop a sociological argument using appropriate sources. It is an academic paper and, as such, must be written in an appropriate style. Use the observations you catalogued for assignment 1 above. Analyze these interactions, and the social system of your observed setting, using *at least* two theorists from class.

If you have another topic, relevant to the course and its readings, on which you would like to write, you must discuss it and get approval *before* you begin work on it. Papers on other topics that have not been pre-approved will receive no credit. **Due November 24 in class.**

Completing these requirements adequately will earn you a **B-** in the course. Completing them *exceptionally well* will earn you a B, B+, A-, or A, depending on the quality of work.

### *Grading*

Your course grade will be calculated as follows:

Discussion Participation	20%
Attendance	3%
Active Discussion	17%
Midterm Exam	15%
Final Exam	20%
Observation paper	10%
Book discussion	15%
Final Paper	20%

## COURSE ORGANIZATION

During most weeks, Tuesday's class will be a combined lecture, to be held in Fred Brooks F009. Thursday classes will usually be discussion classes; they will meet as follows:

- Last names beginning with A-M: Fred Brooks F009
- Last names beginning with N-Z: TBA

Check the syllabus schedule for exceptions to this rule.

Lectures and videos are integral to the content of the course. Slides and notes will *sometimes* be posted to the course website, but there is no substitute for attending the lecture.

## COURSE POLICIES

**YOU ARE AN ADULT.** As a student in this class, you are provided with a set of resources for learning the class's contents, and you are expected to fulfill a series of requirements designed to evaluate the depth and breadth of your knowledge of those contents. Your grade, therefore, is a reflection of your success in utilizing the resources you have at your disposal.

**YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE INFORMATION IN THE READINGS AND GIVEN DURING LECTURES.** If you do not understand something I say in a lecture, ask me during the lecture, during a later class, or privately via e-mail or office hours.

**ON DAYS WHEN DISCUSSIONS ARE SCHEDULED,** participation is mandatory. Your participation will be useless—and graded as such—if you have not done the reading.

**ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE ON THE DATES LISTED.** Make sure you give yourself sufficient time to finish assignments by their due dates. You will lose roughly one letter grade per day between the due date and the date the paper is received. You may make the calculation yourself as to whether your work will improve sufficiently in the extra time to make up for the grade reduction. In exceptional cases, I may grant an extension; you *must* discuss this with me in advance.

**YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS COURSE IS COVERED BY THE UNC HONOR CODE** (see <http://www.unc.edu/depts/honor/studinfo.html>). I take academic dishonesty—including, but not limited to, plagiarism—very seriously. There will be no excuses or second chances; if you have plagiarized the *ideas* or *words* of someone else without giving credit, you will be referred to the Student Attorney General. The usual sanction for academic dishonesty is failing the course *and* suspension from UNC for a semester. If you have questions as to what constitutes academic dishonesty, check <http://www.unc.edu/depts/honor/plagiarism.html> or consult your TA or me.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

**August 25** Lecture: Introduction to Sociological Theory

**August 27** Discussion: Preliminary challenges

- Plato, “Allegory of the Cave” (<http://www.historyguide.org/intellect/allegory.html>)
- Kant, “What is Enlightenment” (<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/kant.html>)
- Hegel, “Enlightenment” and “Absolute freedom and terror” (<http://www.class.uidaho.edu/mickelsen/ToC/Hegel%20Phen%20ToC.htm>)

**September 1** Lecture: Émile Durkheim: Social Facts and Solidarity

- Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Chapter I (<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/undergraduate/introsoc/socfact.html>) and V ([http://varenne.tc.columbia.edu/bib/texts/durkheim\\_rules\\_chap5.html](http://varenne.tc.columbia.edu/bib/texts/durkheim_rules_chap5.html))

**September 3** Discussion: Durkheim I

**September 8** Lecture: Émile Durkheim: Religion, Symbols, and Social Life

- Karen Fields, Translator's Introduction to *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*
- Durkheim, pp. 1–20, 33–44, 99–126, 418–448

**September 9** Karen Fields will be speaking about her work on Durkheim in Hyde Hall at 12:00 noon.

**September 10** Discussion: Durkheim II. All students meet in Fred Brooks F009 for a discussion of Durkheim with Karen Fields

**September 15** Lecture: Marx's early writings

- “On the Jewish Question”
- “The German Ideology”
- “Theses on Feuerbach”

**September 17** Discussion

**September 22** Lecture: Marx, later writings  
Marx & Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*

**September 24** Discussion

**September 29** Lecture: Weber

- **Observation paper due today in class**
- Weber, “Class, Status, Party,” pp. 926–939 in *Economy and Society* [WWW](#)
- Weber, Selections from *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (Free Press, 1947): <http://perrin.socsci.unc.edu/readings/weber-soci250-readings.pdf>

**October 1** Discussion

**October 6** Lecture: 20th Century American Theory  
Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Ch. I, VI, and VII

**October 8** Discussion

**October 13** Video: High Modernism

**October 15** Video: High Modernism

**October 20** Midterm Exam

**October 22** Fall Break – no class

**October 27** Lecture: Bourdieu and the Problem of Practice  
Bourdieu, pp. 52–65, 80–97, 112–134

**October 29** Discussion

**November 3** Lecture: Reading and Misreading Foucault

- **Book discussion paper due today in class**
- Foucault, “Questions of Method” and “Governmentality” from *The Foucault Effect*; “What is Enlightenment?” (<http://foucault.info/documents/whatIsEnlightenment/foucault.whatIsEnlightenment.en.html>)

**November 5** Discussion

**November 10** Lecture: Social Construction  
Berger & Luckmann, pp. 1–46

**November 12** Discussion

**November 17** Lecture: Current Problems in Social Theory

- Berger & Luckmann, pp. 129–162, 185–190
- Jo Freeman, “The Tyranny of Structurelessness.” (<http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.html>)
- Richard N. Pitt, Jr. “Downlow Mountain?: De/Stigmatizing Bisexuality through Pitying and Pejorative Discourses in Media.” *Journal of Men’s Studies* 14:2 (Spring, 2006): 254–258. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=20913805&site=ehost-live>

**November 19** Discussion

**November 24** Lecture: From Modernity to Postmodernity

**Final paper due in class**

**November 26 Thanksgiving** – no class

**December 1** Video: Postmodern Dystopia

**December 3** Video: Postmodern Dystopia

**December 8** (Tentative) conclusions: using and making theory as a sociologist

**December 12, 12:00 noon Final Examination**