

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, CHAPEL HILL  
Spring, 2013

# Sociological Theory

(SOCI 250)

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Section 001 TR 12:30–1:45 New West 219; Dey 301

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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 five 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 demonstrate the ongoing project of sociological theorizing
5. 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).

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

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

**W. E. B. Du Bois.** *The Souls of Black Folk* (Bantam Classics, 2005).

### *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://sakai.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 219 New West at Noon on May 6, 2013. **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:

**Big Question Reaction Paper:** For this short (approx. 1,000–1,500 words) paper, identify a big question raised by one (or more) theorist(s) in our class reading. Summarize the answer(s) provided by the theorist(s) and evaluate the relative success or failure of the answer(s) provided. Consider the implications of the answer(s) for related areas and questions. At the end of the paper, offer a list of a few related big questions that would be worth theoretical exploration. **Due February 14 in class.**

**Question Development Paper:** For this short (approx. 1,000–1,500 words) paper, develop a big question worth theoretical exploration. You will need to state the question and explain why it's important, presenting a set of facts from your own observations, news reports, or other sources that establish the importance and contours of the question. **Due March 21 in class.**

**Final Paper:** The final paper (approximately 2,000–3,000 words) 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. Provide a theoretically rich analysis of the big

question you developed in the previous paper. Develop *your own* argument 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 April 23 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%
Big Question Reaction paper	15%
Question Development paper	10%
Final Paper	20%

## COURSE ORGANIZATION

During most weeks, Tuesday's class will be a combined lecture, to be held in New West 219. Thursday classes will usually be discussion classes; they will meet as follows:

- Last names beginning with A–M: New West 219
- Last names beginning with N–Z: Dey 301

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://honor.unc.edu>). 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://instrument.unc.edu/instrument.text.html#academicdishonesty> or consult your TA or me.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

**January 10** Lecture: Introduction to Sociological Theory

**January 15** Lecture: Enlightenment, Reason, Religion, and Knowledge

**January 17** Discussion: Preliminary challenges

- Plato, “Allegory of the Cave” (<http://www.historyguide.org/intellect/allegory.html>)
- Kant, “What is Enlightenment” (<http://www.columbia.edu/acis/ets/CCREAD/etscc/kant.html>)
- Hegel, “Absolute freedom and terror” (<http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft7d5nb4r8&chunk.id=d0e3943&toc.id=d0e3531&brand=ucpress>)

**January 22** 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

**January 24** Discussion: Durkheim I

**January 29** W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

- Forethought, essays I, II, IV, XIV, Afterthought

**January 31–February 2** Attend as much as possible of the conference, “W.E.B. Du Bois and the Problem(s) of the 21st Century” at the Department of African and Afro-American Studies. See <http://duboisconference.web.unc.edu> for more information.

**February 5** Lecture: Social Facts, Patterns, and Marginality

- Fields, Karen E. “Individuality and the Intellectuals: An Imaginary Conversation Between W.E.B. du Bois and Emile Durkheim.” *Theory and Society* 31:4 (August, 2002): 435–462. <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/A%3A1020900208865>

**February 7** Discussion: Durkheim and du Bois.

**February 12** Lecture: Marx’s early writings

- “On the Jewish Question” (<http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/index.htm>)
- “The German Ideology”, Chapter 1 (<http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01.html>)

- “Theses on Feuerbach” (<http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/index.htm>)

**February 14** Discussion

**Big Question Reaction Paper Due in Class**

**February 19** Lecture: Marx, later writings

Marx & Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (<http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/index.htm>)

**February 21** Discussion

**February 26** Lecture: Weber

- 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>

**February 28** Discussion

**March 5** Lecture and Review Questions: High Modernism and the Contemporary World

- Perrin, Andrew J. “Why You Voted.” *Contexts* Fall, 2008. <http://ctx.sagepub.com/content/7/4/22.short>

**March 7** Midterm Examination

**March 12 and 14** Spring Break

**March 19** Lecture: Contemporary Social Theory

Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Ch. I, VI, and VII

**March 21** Discussion

**Question Development Paper Due in Class.**

**March 26** Lecture: Bourdieu and the Problem of Practice

Pierre Bourdieu, from *Logic of Practice*

**March 28** Discussion

**April 2** High Modernism - Video

**Begin reading for week of April 16!**

**April 4** High Modernism - Video (whole class in 219 New West)

**April 9** Lecture: Foucault and Social Construction

- Foucault, “Governmentality” from *The Foucault Effect*; “What is Enlightenment?” (<http://foucault.info/documents/whatIsEnlightenment/foucault.whatIsEnlightenment.en.html>)
- Berger & Luckmann, 1–46

**April 11** Focused discussion: Rail, Geneviève, Dave Holmes, and Stuart J. Murray. “The politics of evidence on ‘domestic terrorists’: Obesity discourses and their effects.” *Social Theory and Health* 8 (2010): 259–279.

**April 16** Focused discussion: Sallaz, Jeffrey. “Deep Plays: A Comparative Ethnography of Gambling Contests in Two Post-Colonies.” *Ethnography* 9:5 (2008): 5–33. <http://eth.sagepub.com/content/9/1/5.short> **Second Group Room TBA**

**April 18** Focused discussion: Focused Discussion: Law, John. “Seeing Like a Survey.” *Cultural Sociology* 3:2 (2009): 239–256. <http://cus.sagepub.com/cgi/doi/10.1177/1749975509105533>

**April 23** Lecture: From Modernity to Postmodernity

- **Final Paper Due In Class**

- Jo Freeman, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness." (<http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm>)
- 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>

**April 25** Discussion

**Monday, May 6, 12:00 noon Final Examination** - 219 New West