

SOC 1101: Introduction to Sociology  
Instructor: Mr. Antonio Sirianni  
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12:30pm-3:00pm M-F  
Uris Hall 254

**Office Hours:** Uris 368 By appointment from 3:30-5:00pm M-F

**Course Description:** This course is designed to give you an overview of how sociologists make sense of and analyze the social world, and to introduce an important selection of the type of problems that they seek to understand.

**Objectives:**

*“Our ability to think clearly about society is directly related to our willingness to give up our most cherished beliefs...” – Miller McPherson*

The main objective of this class is to develop a “sociological lens” that you can use to make sense of the social world – both formally and in everyday situations. This is created by understanding:

1. How our personal decisions, beliefs, desires, and actions are influenced by the institutions, cultures, and networks that we are embedded in.
2. How our individual behaviors in turn create and re-create the social world.

The secondary objective of this class is to learn what comprises sociology as a field of academic study. This involves understanding:

1. The intellectual traditions from which sociology emerged and how they continue to guide our sociological understanding.
2. The range of substantive areas that sociologists study in contemporary research.

Finally, I want to provide the tools necessary to participate in sociological conversations with people in academia and in the “real world”. This requires:

1. Developing a sociological vocabulary and knowledge of basic sociological concepts.
2. Learning how to rigorously discuss sociological ideas and concepts, even (and especially) if they seem too “obvious” to be worthy of scientific discussion.
3. Being able to discern and articulate key points from scholarly research articles.

I have tried to spread the readings and topics of discussion across several different intellectual traditions and substantive areas. Most items we discuss could merit an entire course of their own, and there are certain areas of sociology we will not address at all. If there is any portion of the course that you would like to “dig deeper” on, or if there is a portion of the field that we do not address that you would like to learn more about, I invite you to discuss this with me in office

hours. I will do my best to direct you to material that addresses your interests. You also have the option of doing an extra credit assignment on a topic of interest to you...see below.

## Course Policies

**Accommodations:** If you have a disability (learning or otherwise) and you need a reasonable accommodation, please communicate this with me as soon as possible so we can work together to develop a solution that will give you the opportunity to successfully complete this course.

**Conduct** - Sociology by its very nature touches on some controversial topics. Please be respectful of one another's backgrounds, opinions and viewpoints. Recognize the potential limitations of your own knowledge and understanding. I will do my best to adhere to these guidelines as well. Respectful debate and disagreement is encouraged, and at times you may be asked to defend ideas and opinions that are contrary to your own.

**Integrity** - Academic dishonesty and plagiarism will be heavily policed. *TurnItIn* will be used to check assignments for plagiarism. Placing ethics aside, this is not a class where academic dishonesty will be of great service to your final grade. There is no single assignment or examination in this class that will "make or break" you, yet a single incidence of academic dishonesty could be extremely jeopardizing to your academic career.

**Technology** – Laptops are permitted for notetaking during lecture - I may ask you to put them away during class discussions. Phones are not to be used during class. (We will typically have a short break in the middle of class and you may use any technology during that time.)

Recording/broadcasting class discussions and sharing course materials are strictly forbidden without my explicit permission.

## Course Assignments:

Typically, this course is taught over an entire semester. Each day of class here corresponds to roughly a week of material in a typical 3-credit introductory class. Accordingly, you should expect to be doing a reasonable amount of reading (2-3 articles) and writing between classes. The table below summarizes assignments and how your grade will be calculated.

Assignment	Percentage of Grade
Class Participation	15%
Written Reflections (10 out of 14)	40%
Short Presentation	5%
Midterm Examination (In-Class)	20%
Final Examination (Take-Home)	20%
Extra Credit: Literature Review	5%
Extra Credit: Course Evaluation	1%

Material is better retained through slow and cumulative consideration of ideas as opposed to merely "cramming" before an exam. The majority of your grade will be determined from short

written reflections on daily readings and class participation. If you have questions about your grade, please attend my office hours rather than contacting me by email.

### ***40% - Reading Reflections:***

Writing Assignments (40%) – Over the course of the semester you will compose 10 short (1.5-2 pages; Times New Roman, 12-point font, double-spaced – I will stop reading after 3 pages) written reflections on the assigned readings.

**Reflections are due at 10:00 AM**, they are to be written on the readings that will be discussed later in class that day. (*Note: no reflections are required or will be accepted on reading for the first day of class.*)

If you complete more than 10, I will count your 10 best assignments for the calculation of your final grade. The purpose of these assignments is for you to show me two things:

1. That you have put forth an effort in carefully completing the readings and composing an assignment.
  - You understand many of the core components of the article.
  - You turn this understanding into a coherent piece of writing with minimal grammatical errors and a logical structure.
2. That you have reflected on the readings critically. The point of this is to force you to think of points to contribute to a larger class discussion. (I will read all assignments each day before class and use your points to help guide a larger class discussion.) There are several ways that you can do this, including:
  - Pointing out tensions between readings.
  - Relating them to ideas earlier in the class
  - Applying the ideas in the article to current events, other topics of interest, etc.

You will be graded on a scale of 0-4 on both criteria (4 = Excellent, 3 = Strong, 2= Adequate, 1 = Unsatisfactory, 0 = Unacceptable). Each memo is graded on an 8-point scale:

8 =A+(100), 7 = A(96), 6 = A-(92), 5 = B+(88), 4 = B(84), 3 = B-(80), 2 = C(75), 1 = D(65), 0 = F(50)

Late reflections will be accepted with penalties – any assignment turned in late but before the beginning of class will receive 85% credit, a written reflection turned in before 10:00 AM the next day will receive 70% credit, and all assignments turned in more than 24 hours after the original due date will receive 60% credit. No written assignments will be accepted after 11:59pm on Wednesday, June 20<sup>th</sup>.

### ***15% - Class Participation:***

This consists of two main components: *attendance* and *participation*.

#### ***Attendance:***

You are permitted one absence over the course of the class. The first absence after that will result in 5% deducted from your participation grade, the second will result in an additional 10% from your participation grade, and so on. If you do have to miss more than one class for legitimate reasons (illness, personal or family emergencies, important extracurricular obligations), I am happy to work with you to make these absences up, but absences must be cleared with me ahead of time (barring exceptional cases).

***Participation:***

You will be graded on your contribution to class discussions/lectures. If you are engaged with class conversations and help create an environment that encourages others to participate, you will receive full credit.

You can lose points not only by not contributing, but also by regularly impeding the contributions of your fellow classmates. As stated in the course policies, disagreement and debate is encouraged, but excessive interruptions, shouting, and *ad hominem* arguments do not lead to productive sociological discussion.

In other words: *If you show up and make my job easier, you will get full credit for this part of your grade.*

***5% - Short Presentation:***

In the last few classes you will take turns giving a short presentation (about 10 minutes) of one of the longer research articles assigned: you will share the main points of the authors and broadly discuss the methods they use to make their case.

***20% - Midterm Examination:***

This will be in class on Monday, June 11<sup>th</sup> and consist of term identifications and short essay questions. I will distribute a list of potential terms and topics after class on Friday, June 8<sup>th</sup>.

***20% - Final Exam:***

This will be a take-home final, that I will post online at 3pm on Thursday, June 21<sup>st</sup>, and will be due on blackboard at 3pm on Friday, June 22<sup>nd</sup>. It will consist of 2-3 longer essay questions (with a reasonable word limit placed on each response).

***5% - Extra Credit – Independent Literature Review***

If you wish, you may write a 4-6 page literature review that summarizes articles (about 10-20) in an area of sociology that you would like to explore more thoroughly. ***You must clear your topic with me (either in person or by e-mail) before writing!*** I will award 1-5 points of extra credit – 1 point would be awarded to a review that simply summarizes a handful of papers one at a time – 5 points would be awarded to a review that substantially contributes to my understanding of your

area of interest. (If you think you only have the time to write a 1 or 2-point quality assignment – I still encourage you to do so.) This will be due by 5pm on Wednesday, June 20<sup>th</sup>.

### ***1% - Extra Credit – Course Evaluation***

You will receive one point of extra credit for completing your course evaluation.

### **Final Grades:**

Grades will be awarded based on the following cutoffs – I will not curve – but I suspect that in the absence of extra credit a satisfactory performance in the class would correspond to an A-/B+.

A+: 98 or Higher	A: 94-97.99	A-:90-93.99
B+: 86-89.99	B :82-85.99	B-:78-81.99
C: 70-77.99	D: 60-69.99	F: Less than 60

### **Course Calendar:**

*Note: Readings are subject to change as the course progresses. I will make a good faith effort to not change any readings less than 72 hours before the beginning of class for which they are assigned.*

\* = skim

#### **Wednesday, May 30<sup>th</sup>: What is sociology? Is it just ‘common sense’?**

Readings:

Watts: ‘The Myth of Common Sense’ (Chapter 1 from *Everything is Obvious*)

*No reflection due today*

#### **Thursday, May 31<sup>st</sup>: What is a sociologist and what do they study?**

Readings:

Mills: The Promise (Chapter 1 from *The Sociological Imagination*)

Berger: Sociology as an Individual Pasttime (from *An Invitation to Sociology*)

Durkheim: What is a Social Fact? (Chapter 4 from *Rules of the Sociological Method*)

#### **Friday, June 1<sup>st</sup>: Sociology as science: how do sociologists analyze the social world?**

Reading:

Adler & Adler: The Promise and Pitfalls of Going into the Field

Best: The Importance of Social Statistics

Anonymous: Chapter 2 of *Sociology: Understanding and Changing the Social World*

#### **Monday June 4<sup>th</sup>: Sociology from the top-down I: How does society resemble a large functioning organism?**

Readings:

Anonymous: “Functionalism” section of *Sociology: Understanding and Changing the Social World*

Durkheim: Selections from *The Division of Labor in Society*  
Davis & Moore: *Some Principles of Stratification*

**Tuesday, June 5<sup>th</sup>: Sociology from the top-down II: Does society function for everyone? Marxism and conflict theory.**

Readings:

Anonymous: "Conflict Theory" section of *Sociology: Understanding and Changing the Social World*  
Marx and Engels: *Manifesto of the Communist Party*  
Firestone: *The Dialectic of Sex*

**Wednesday, June 6<sup>th</sup>: Sociology from the bottom-up I: How do individuals create society and understand themselves through interactions?**

Readings:

Anonymous: "Symbolic Interactionism" section of *Sociology: Understanding and Changing the Social World*  
Cooley: *The Looking Glass Self*  
Mead: Selections from "Mind, Self, and Society"  
Becker: "Becoming a Marijuana User"  
Goffman: *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Excerpt)

**Thursday, June 7<sup>th</sup>: Sociology from the bottom-up II: Can society emerge from rational individuals?**

Readings:

Anonymous: "Utilitarianism" section of *Sociology: Understanding and Changing the Social World*  
Olson: *The Free-Rider Problem*  
Henrich et. al: *In Search of Homo Economicus: Behavioral Experiments in 15 Small-Scale Societies*

**Friday, June 8<sup>th</sup>: Everywhere in chains: how do cultures, institutions, and networks shape individual behavior?**

Readings:

Wray: Introductory from an *Introduction to Cultural Sociology*  
Christakis and Fowler: Excerpt from *Connected*  
Risman: 'Families, A Great American Institution'

***List of Terms and Topics for Midterm Distributed***

**Monday, June 11<sup>th</sup>:**

**Midterm Examination (In Class)**

**Tuesday, June 12<sup>th</sup>: Markets, Organizations, and Movements: What and how do we produce together?**

Readings:

Weber: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

Swedberg: Economic and Sociological Approaches to Markets from *Principles of Economic Sociology* (p.118-129) (Skip parts on 'Markets and Fields', 'Price Formation')

Anonymous: "Organizations" section of *Sociology: Understanding and Changing the Social World*

Anonymous: "Social Movements" section of *Sociology: Understanding and Changing the Social World*

~~Edwards and Gillham: "Resource mobilization theory" from *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*~~

### **Wednesday, June 13<sup>th</sup>: Dimensions of Inequality I: Class: What is class and how does it reinforce itself within and across generations?**

Readings:

Hout: "How Class Works"

Lareau: "Concerted Cultivation and the Accomplishment of Natural Growth"

~~Kraus and Tan: "Americans overestimate social class mobility"~~

Kraus et. al "American Dream? Or Mirage?" (NYT Article)

Paul "The Real Marriage Penalty" (NYT Article)

### **Thursday, June 14<sup>th</sup>: Dimensions of Inequality II: Gender: What accounts for differences between men and women in terms of behaviors, outcomes and social position?**

Readings:

Kane: "Parents Responses to Gender Nonconformity"

Lorber: "The Social Construction of Gender"

\*Costa, Terracciano & McCrae: "Gender Differences in Personality Traits Across Cultures: Robust and Surprising Findings"

Ridgeway: "The Puzzle of Persistence"

### **Friday, June 15<sup>th</sup>: Dimensions of Inequality III: Race: Why is race strongly correlated with outcomes? Is race more social or genetic?**

Readings:

Omi & Winant: "Race and Race Theory"

Massey & Denton: *American Apartheid*

Conley & Fletcher: *The Genome Factor* (Chapter 5: Is Race Genetic? A new take on the most fraught, distracting and nonsensical question in the world.)

(Watch or Read: Interview with Dalton Conley <http://nautil.us/issue/48/chaos/ingenious-dalton-conley>)

### **Monday, June 18<sup>th</sup>: Globalization, Polarization, and Technology – Are we pulling together or coming apart?**

Main Readings:

Eitzel: The Atrophy of Social Life

Mills: Globalization and Inequality

Readings for Presentation:

\*Watts: "The Collective Dynamics of 'Small-World' Networks"/\*Dodds: "An Experimental Study of Search in Global Networks"

\*Isaksen. et. al "Global Care Crisis"/\*Hochschild "The Nanny Chain"

\*McPherson et. al – Social Isolation in America

\*Della Posta, Shi & Macy: “Why do Liberals Drink Lattes?”

**Tuesday, June 19th: Deviance and Control: What behaviors are socially acceptable? How do we enforce those decisions?**

Main Readings:

Bayer and Stuber: “Tobacco Control, Stigma, and Public Health”

Black: “Crime as Social Control”

Readings for Presentation (Skim unless presenting):

Goffman: “On the Run: Wanted Men in a Philadelphia Ghetto”

Nisbett and Cohen: “Self-Protection and the Culture of Honor: Explaining Southern Violence”

McLorg and Taub: “Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia: The Development of Deviant Identities”

Papachristos: “Murder by Structure”

**Wednesday, June 20th: Sex, Drugs, and Illness: How are personal behaviors and perceptions related to health outcomes socially constructed and influenced?**

Main Readings:

Conrad & Barker: “The Social Construction of Illness: Key Insights and Policy Implications”

Braverman et. al – “Socioeconomic Disparities in Health in the U.S.”

Readings for Presentation (Skim unless presenting):

Christakis & Fowler: “The Spread of Obesity in a Large Social Network over 32 Years”

King, Jennings & Fletcher: “Medical Adaptation to Academic Pressure: Schooling, Stimulant Use, and Socioeconomic Status”

Bearman & Bruckner: “Promising the Future: Virginity Pledges and First Intercourse”

*Optional Literature Review assignments due at 5pm*

*List of Topics for Final Exam Distributed*

**Thursday, June 21<sup>st</sup>:**

*No Class, Take Home Final Exam to be distributed at 3 PM.*

**Friday, June 22<sup>nd</sup>:**

*Final exams due to blackboard at 3 PM.*