Overview

This course introduces students to concepts and perspectives of sociology, the study of social interaction and the culture and structure of society. We will examine sociological theories and methods of research, and we will read and critically assess the works of several contemporary sociologists. The course will raise questions important both for their sociological interest and for their relevance to everyday life:

- What do we mean when we talk about "community" and "society"?
- What are the major sources of order and disorder in our everyday lives?
- How do we develop our own identities as individuals within the families, groups, and communities in which we live?
- How do inequalities of gender, race, ethnicity, and social class distort our perceptions and limit our freedom of action, and how can such problems be overcome?
- How have social, cultural, and economic trends affected our lives, and how can we best respond to these changes?

Objectives of the Course

1. To become familiar with the kinds of questions sociologists ask, the research methods they use for seeking answers to their questions, and the theories they use for interpreting their findings.

2. To understand how social structures and cultures make human actions and interactions possible but limit our options for change.

3. To understand the perspectives sociologists use in analyzing the major institutions of contemporary societies, such as family, education, the economy, and government.

4. To examine, using sociological perspectives, important issues and controversies in contemporary societies, especially issues relating to inequality and diversity.

5. To turn a sociological lens on our own experiences and trajectories through life.

6. To improve skills in critical thinking, writing, discussing, listening, and presenting one’s own ideas in an enthusiastic and compelling manner.

Design of the Course

This course demands a high level of interaction, participation and involvement. Most class meetings will intersperse some lecture with small-group and large-group discussions. Many classes will feature group exercises, presentations, or videos—a variety of activities designed to encourage active participation and engagement. I expect everyone to contribute to discussion, so you will need to read and think carefully about the assignments before every class. You will also need to listen to each other, which takes patience, a sense of humor, and mutual respect.

Working in small groups is particularly useful in sociology classes, since sociologists often give close attention to group behavior. I will be setting up discussion groups of four or five students each, and these groups will receive a variety of assignments as the class progresses. Groups will meet every week to exchange ideas about assigned readings and sociological concepts. The group meetings will be a way of absorbing the course material while getting better acquainted with some of your classmates.
One important goal of this course is to help students improve their writing. If you are concerned about the quality of your writing, please schedule an office appointment to discuss the assignments with me. I also encourage you to use the Writing Lab for advice on writing. Because you can learn a great deal by revising your papers, my standard policy is to allow you to turn in a second draft of any paper with a grade below an A-, and I will average the grades for the two drafts. In order to take advantage of this revision policy, you must schedule an office appointment with me to discuss the paper, and the revised draft must be turned in within two weeks of the date that the first draft of the paper is returned to you.

Another course objective is to help students improve their skills in making oral presentations and leading discussions. At least once in the semester, you will be asked to act as “expert for a day” by serving in class as presenter and discussion leader for one of the assigned readings from the Ferguson reader.

Words to the Wise

1. In this course, as in every course you take, you must abide by the college’s rules on honesty in academic work, outlined in the Student Handbook, which require each student to “acknowledge explicitly any expressions, ideas, or observations that are not his or her own.” If you are unsure of your obligations about acknowledging sources, please see me.

2. In addition to acknowledging sources, academic protocol demands that you include a written note of thanks to all the people who help you in producing academic work. Specifically, every formal paper for this course must contain a footnote or appended paragraph acknowledging any assistance of any kind that you received in producing the paper, including any advice you got from the professor or a Writing Lab staff member, or any help or advice from another student. In the case of cooperatively produced work, you must include a note that indicates who produced which part of the product.

3. For citations of sources in papers, I will accept any commonly used footnote or reference style, but I strongly recommend that you use the American Sociological Association reference style, described in detail on a page in the course web site.

4. All written assignments must be printed out and handed in. I do not accept emailed assignments. Whenever possible, please print double-sided. Assignments may either be handed in during class or given to secretaries in Carnegie 115 to put in my mailbox by 5:00 PM on the due date.

5. Your work must be turned in on time. I will not accept any late work unless you contact me and get my permission for an extension before the day the assignment is due. Even if you have been granted an extension, assignments turned in late will be subject to a grade penalty.

6. Class attendance is essential. I will keep track of attendance, and if I don’t see you in class or get a note from the Health Center that you are ill, I will be contacting you for an explanation. Class attendance and participation will be among the factors I consider in assigning a final grade.

7. If you have a physical or learning disability that requires you to make some adaptations to this course, please contact me to discuss arrangements. All conversations will be confidential. For help with disability services, contact Joyce Stern in the Academic Advising Office (3700).

8. I will post a weekly schedule of my office hours outside my office (ARH 116). Please sign up for an appointment if you want to discuss course content, share your thoughts or concerns about assignments, get extra assistance, or for any other reason. If none of the posted office hours works for you, give me a call at 3134 to arrange an appointment. (I prefer phone calls to emails.)

9. Readings or other assignments may be adjusted as the semester goes along. It is your responsibility to stay abreast of any changes in assignments. Any changes in assignments will be posted on the course web site.
Course Requirements

1. TWO SHORT ESSAYS (30 percent) These short papers (2-4 pages each) will require you to analyze material selected from the books and articles we read and then to relate these sociological ideas to “real life.”

2. MID-SEMESTER EXAM or LONGER ESSAY (20 percent) You will have the option of taking an hour exam in class or writing a medium-length paper (4-6 pages).

3. FINAL EXAMINATION (25 percent) This comprehensive exam will be a take-home examination.

4. DISCUSSION GROUP PROJECTS (10 percent) At the beginning of the semester you will be randomly assigned to participate in a discussion group of four or five students. These discussion groups will provide an informal setting in which students can reflect on and exchange ideas about sociological concepts and issues. The discussion groups will be required to meet out of class for at least an hour each week to review the assigned readings and to consider other ideas and questions discussed in class. Your discussion group will be graded on the record of attendance of group members and the relevance and liveliness of your exchanges, as determined from your own reports on each week’s discussions. The group will also have additional assignments, including a field-study project and a class presentation.

5. CLASS PARTICIPATION (15 percent) Students will receive individual grades for their participation in discussion groups, for class presentations, and for class participation more generally. The responsibility of writing reports about group discussion meetings will be rotated among the group’s members, and each student will be expected to write at least two of these reports. Students must also write at least two “sociological field notes,” informal one-or two-page notes relating real-life observations to an assigned reading for the course, and these field notes will be shared with other members of the discussion group. In addition, attendance at meetings of your discussion group and regular class sessions will have an impact on your class-participation grade, as will the quality and frequency of your contributions to class discussions. At the end of the semester, you will be asked to turn in a self-evaluation of your contributions to your discussion group and to the class overall.

Required Books


Daily Topics and Assigned Readings

Tue Jan 23  What is Sociology?

Thu Jan 25  Social Structures and Sociological Imagination
Ferguson 1 Mills "The Promise"
Ferguson 3 Romero "The Intersection of Biography and History"
Ferguson 7 Velliquette and Murray "The New Tatoo Subculture"
Erikson "Introduction" 9-17
Erikson "February 29, 1972" 21-48

Tue  Jan 30  Social Structure in Buffalo Creek
Erikson "Notes on Appalachia" 51-78
Erikson "The Mountain Ethos" 79-93
Erikson "The Coming of the Coal Camps" 94-114
Erikson "Buffalo Creek" 115-132

Thu  Feb 1  What is Culture?
Ferguson 8 Anderson "The Code of the Streets"
Ferguson 9 Kaw "Opening' Faces"
Ferguson 10 Trask "Lovely Hula Hands"
Ferguson 18 Colvin "Descent into Madness"

Tue  Feb 6  Disasters and Communality
Erikson "Looking for Scars" 135-155
Erikson "Individual Trauma" 156-185
Erikson "Collective Trauma" 186-245

Thu  Feb 8  Erikson's Methods of Research
Erikson "Conclusion" 246-259
Ferguson 4 Schwalbe "Finding Out How the Social World Works"
Ferguson 5 Haney et al. "Interpersonal Dynamics in a Simulated Prison"
Ferguson 6 Kaplan "Not Our Kind of Girl"

Tue  Feb 13  Lois's Methods of Research
Lois "Introduction" 1-24
Lois "Studying Peak Search and Rescue" 1: 25-43
Lois "Joining Up" 2: 44-63

Thu  Feb 15  Individuals and Groups
Ferguson 15 Adler & Adler "Peer Power"
Ferguson 16 Jankowski "Gang Business"
Ferguson 17 Blee "Becoming a Racist"

Tue  Feb 20  "Rules & Routines" presentations
Thu Feb 22  Socialization
   Ferguson 11 Lorber "Night to His Day"
   Ferguson 12 Messner "Boyhood, Organized Sports"
   Ferguson 13 Granfield "Making It by Faking It"
   Ferguson 14 Dyer "Anybody's Son Will Do"

Tue Feb 27  The Sociology of Emotions
   Lois "Socializing Heroes" 3: 64-84
   Lois "Dealing with Crisis" 4: 85-113
   Lois "Dealing with Others in Crisis" 5: 114-143

Thu Mar 1  What is Gender?
   Ferguson 27 Risman "Gender as Structure"
   Ferguson 22* Boswell & Spade "Fraternities and Collegiate Rape Culture"

Tue Mar 6  Gender, Emotions, and Heroism
   Lois "Labeling Heroes" 6: 144-155
   Lois "Heroic Efforts" 8: 172-196

Thu Mar 8  Sociological Theories I
   Ferguson 23 Davis et al. "Some Principles of Stratification"
   Ferguson 47 Parsons "The Social Structure of Medicine"
   Ferguson 44 (41) Weber "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism"

Tue Mar 13  Sociological Theories II
   Ferguson 41 Marx & Engels "Manifesto of the Communist Party"
   Ferguson 35 Mills "The Power Elite"
   Ferguson 24 Domhoff "Who Rules America?"

Thu Mar 15  MIDSEM EXAM (optional)

SPRING BREAK

Tue Apr 3  NO CLASS (optional paper due)

Thu Apr 5  What is Race?
   Ferguson 31 Omi & Winant "Racial Formations in the United States"
   Ferguson 32 Lee & Bean "Beyond Black and White"
   Ferguson 33 Rubin "Is This a White Country, or What?"

Tue Apr 10  Race, Social Class, and Schooling
   Lopez "Unequal Schooling" 1: 1-14
   Ferguson 21 Bourgois "In Search of Respect"
   Ferguson 25 Oliver & Shapiro "Black Wealth/White Wealth"
   Ferguson 26 Ehrenreich "Nickel-and-Dimed"
Thu Apr 12  Race, Gender, and Education
   Lopez "From 'Mamasita' to 'Hoodlum'" 2: 15-38
   Lopez "Urban High Schools" 3: 39-66
   Lopez "Problem' Boys" 4: 67-88

Tue Apr 17  Race, Gender, and Education II
   Lopez "Rewarding Femininity" 5: 89-112
   Lopez "Homegrown" 6: 113-140
   Ferguson 30 Sadker & Sadker "Failing at Fairness"
   Ferguson 52 Ferguson "Bad Boys"

Thu Apr 19  Race, Gender, and Work
   Lopez "After Graduation" 7: 141-162
   Lopez "Education as a Way Out" 8:163-174

Tue Apr 24  Race, Gender, and Work II
   Ferguson 28 Williams "The Glass Escalator"
   Ferguson 34 LeDuff "At a Slaughterhouse, Some Things Never Die"
   Ferguson 42 Wilson "When Work Disappears"
   Ferguson 55 Hochschild "The Time Bind"

Thu Apr 26  Birth Order and Families
   Conley "Inequality Starts at Home" 1: 3-29
   Conley "Butterflies in Bialystok, Meteors in Manila" 2: 30-53
   Conley "Love Is a Pie" 3: 54-73

Tue May 1  Families and Social Mobility
   Conley "Death, Desertion, Divorce" 4: 74-95
   Conley "Movin' on Up, Movin' on Out" 5: 96-112
   Conley "Legacies and Role Models, Fat and Skin" 6: 113-132

Thu May 3  GROUP PRESENTATIONS — Social Change
   Ferguson 56 Ritzer "The McDonaldization of Society"
   Ferguson 57 Kanagy and Kraybill "How Will the Internet Change Society?"
   Ferguson 58 Derber “The Wilding of America: Iraq and the War Against Terrorism”
   Ferguson 59 Etzioni “Community Building: Steps Toward a Good Society”
   Ferguson 60 Johnson "What Can We Do? Becoming a Part of the Solution"

Tue May 8  Social Mobility in Perspective
   Conley "Random Acts of Kindness (and Cruelty)" 7: 133-166
   Conley "From Tribes to Markets" 8: 167-190

Thu May 10 Theory and Methods Revisited (REVIEW FOR FINAL)

Fri May 18 TAKEHOME FINAL EXAM DUE AT 4:00 PM