

# Sociology 401A: Contemporary Sociological Theories

Spring 2006

MWF 1:10-2 p.m.  
211 East Hall

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## Course Overview and Objectives

Sociology 401 (section A) is an overview of historical and contemporary sociological theories. The class has three major objectives:

1. Students will become familiar with a number of significant sociological theoretical perspectives.
2. Students will learn to read abstract, difficult and sometimes poorly-written sociological writing and figure out what it means.
3. Students will learn to use sociological theory to theorize about aspects of contemporary social life.

## Required Texts

Farganis, James. 2004. *Readings in Social Theory: The Classic Tradition to Post-Modernism*, 4th edition. McGraw-Hill. **(F)**

Kivisto, Peter. 2005. *Illuminating Social Life*, 3rd edition. Pine Forge. **(K)**

Wallerstein, Immanuel. 1995. *Historical Capitalism with Capitalist Civilization*. Verso. **(W)**

Ritzer, George. 2004. *The McDonaldization of Society*, revised new century edition. Pine Forge Press. **(R)**

Best, Joel. 1999. *Random Violence: How We Talk About New Crimes and New Victims*. University of California Press. **(B)**

Lowney, Kathleen. 1999. *Baring Our Souls: TV Talk Shows and the Religion of Recovery*. Aldine de Gruyter. **(L)**

Students are expected to read each assigned reading before the class in which it will be discussed. The *Schedule of Assignments* lists the readings for each day. Since some of the assigned readings are entire books, students should begin these readings far enough in advance that they can finish them.

## Assignments

### 1. Reading summaries (20% of course grade; 10 assignments; 8 counted at 2.5% each)

The 10 reading summaries require students to summarize complicated theory readings in a single page. Students may collaborate with each other in groups of any size to produce these summaries. However, each member of a group must have read the reading and contributed to the summary. (The instructor may unilaterally modify this provision for collaboration if he suspects that equal collaboration is not taking place.) Computer-produced and -printed summaries are preferred but diagrams may be drawn by hand. The summaries must be handed in at the beginning of the class period in which they are due. (See due dates in the *Schedule of Assignments*.) Since the readings are discussed in class the day the assignments are due, late assignments will not be accepted. Each student's two lowest scores on the reading summaries will be thrown out, i.e., 8 of 10 scores will be counted toward the course grade.

### 2. Theory papers (30%; 4 papers; 3 counted at 10% each)

Students may submit up to four papers. Each paper will be about one of the six theory clusters discussed in the class. Each is due one week after class discussion of the cluster is complete (with the exception of the section 6 paper, which is due on the final day of class). (See due dates in the *Schedule of Assignments*.) The paper options are discussed in *Paper Option Descriptions* (p. 5). General requirements for the papers are found in *General Considerations for Your Paper* (p. 6). Each student's three highest scores will be counted toward the course grade.

### 3. Quizzes (10%; 12-20 quizzes; 10 counted at 1% each)

The unannounced quizzes are designed to encourage students to keep up with their readings. The quizzes will take place at the beginning of class. Students who don't attend class or are late will not be able to take them or make them up. Each student's top 10 scores will be counted toward the course grade.

### 4. Class attendance (8%)

Class attendance is critical for learning course material. (During the fall 2001 semester second exam the correlation between attendance and test score was .54.) In order to encourage attendance and participation, points will be awarded as follows:

First 20 days of class attended:	1 point per day
Days 21-30 of class attended:	2 points per day
Days 31-40 of class attended:	4 points per day

Each student can earn up to 80 attendance points by attending 40 days of class. Since there are 44 class days, students can miss up to four days of class without penalty.

Attendance will be recorded using an attendance sheet. If the professor forgets to distribute the sheet, no one gets attendance credit for that day. Therefore, it will be beneficial for the class to remind the professor to distribute the sheet each day.

### 5. Class participation (2%; professor's discretion)

Students are expected to read the assigned readings before class, attend class and discuss the readings in class. The instructor will assign points for class participation at his discretion.

### 6. Examinations (30%; 3 exams at 10% each)

There will be three examinations, one at the end of each third of the course. Each will consist of questions drawn from lectures and readings and will account for 10% of the final course grade.

## Letter Grades

Students have the opportunity to earn 1000 points from their assignments and exams, to be distributed as follows:

Reading summaries	200 pts.	8@25 pts each
Theory papers	300 pts	3@100 pts each
Quizzes	100 pts	10@10 pts each
Class attendance	80 pts	80 pts
Class participation	20 pts	20 pts
Exams	300 pts	3@100 pts

Students must earn 900 points for a grade in the 'A' range, 800 for a grade in the 'B' range, 700 for a grade in the 'C' range and 600 for a grade in the 'D' range. There are no ways to earn points in the course other than those described in this syllabus either during the course or after it ends.

In general, the instructor will give grades in the 'A' range (90–100%) for work which is exceptional, e.g., in its creativity, thoroughness or insight. Grades in the 'B' range (80–89%) are for work which fulfills all of an assignment's requirements but which is otherwise unexceptional. Grades in the 'C' range (70–79%) are for work which fails to meet an assignment's requirements in some way, e.g., in its accuracy, completeness or writing. Grades in the 'D' (60–69%) and 'F' range (below 60%) are for work which fails to meet an assignment's requirements in some significant way.

The instructor will not grade assignments written in substandard English. Such assignments will be returned for a revision, which can be resubmitted for partial credit.

**Note:** The class is designed so that enterprising students can earn over 80% of their potential points by March 27. Consider taking advantage of this opportunity.

## Make-Up Work

Students are expected to complete all assignments by the due date and take tests at the scheduled times. Students will not be able to make up work or exams unless they have a legitimate excuse, e.g., illness, funeral, family emergency. **Quizzes and reading summaries cannot be made up.** Students with legitimate excuses should obtain appropriate documentation and contact the instructor AS SOON AS POSSIBLE regarding their situation.

## Office Hours

The instructor will hold office hours from 2-4 p.m. Wednesday. He will also meet with students by appointment. Students should take advantage of these opportunities to meet with the instructor to review and discuss class material and assignments.

Students are also encouraged to meet with classmates to review course material and work on assignments. Students should attempt to get information from classmates before they call the instructor at home and before asking the instructor to review lectures the students did not attend.

## **Academic Integrity**

Speaking and acting truthfully are skills acquired through practice. These skills are indispensable for successfully living and working with other people. If you practice dishonesty, you will endanger all of your relationships. You will be a bad spouse, a bad parent, a bad employee and a bad citizen.

Participating in academic life is an important opportunity to practice truthfulness since dishonesty is incompatible with and abhorrent to the purposes of the university. Therefore, students in this course are expected to adhere to the highest standards of academic honesty.

Examples of academic dishonesty include plagiarism, cheating on exams, submitting assignments to which you didn't contribute, and signing someone else's name on the attendance sheet.

The standard punishment for academic dishonesty is failure in the course and referral to the Dean of Students. Students who are expelled from Iowa State or otherwise punished for academic dishonesty are encouraged to see their punishment as an opportunity to reflect upon their failure to practice truthfulness and to commit themselves to a new life of integrity.

## **Special Accommodations**

Students should address any need for special accommodations with me at the beginning of the semester or as soon as you believe you need them. Accommodations will be provided to students with a Student Academic Accommodation Request (SAAR) from the Disability Resources (DR) office (515-294-6624). DR is located in Room 1076 of the Student Services Building.

## **Sociology Code of Ethics for Human Relations**

The Department of Sociology is committed to providing a professional and educational environment that is free of discrimination and harassment. The department's Code of Ethics for Human Relations and the Procedures for Filing Complaints of Discrimination or Harassment are posted on the bulletin boards on all five floors of East Hall.

## **Paper Option Descriptions**

Students may hand in as many as four papers, all of which will be graded, but only three of which will count toward the final grade. Each of these three theory papers will be worth 100 points and count as 10% of the course grade. Students may choose from three paper options. **Each student must submit at least one theory application paper and at least one cultural analysis paper.**

### **1. Theory application paper**

A theory application paper takes a theoretical concept from the assigned readings and applies it to some aspect of contemporary life. The paper should briefly summarize the concept being used and then (1) use it to make sense of some contemporary social phenomenon, (2) use it to forecast some development regarding the social phenomenon, and/or (3) explain how the concept should be altered or extended in light of the social phenomenon. The papers should not argue that the concept is worthless for understanding the social phenomenon; if you think a concept is worthless, don't write a paper about it.

### **2. Cultural analysis paper**

A cultural analysis paper takes a theoretical concept from the assigned readings and uses it to analyze some contemporary cultural text, e.g., a motion picture or novel. The paper should briefly summarize the concept being used and then (1) explain how the work demonstrates that concept, (2) show how the concept deepened your appreciation of the work; and/or (3) critique the work using the concept. The papers should not argue that the concept is worthless for understanding the work; if you think a concept is worthless, don't write a paper about it.

### **3. Student-designed theory paper**

Students may propose to the instructor an alternative project or projects to take the place of one or more of the theory papers. The proposal must be formalized in a written description approved by the instructor. This proposal will include a due date. An alternative project might consist of a library research paper, research project, book report, historical analysis, photographic essay, computer simulation, dramatic performance, motion picture, original artwork, epic poem, or a plan to overthrow the government of the United States, the administration of Iowa State University or some other institution and reconstitute it along the lines suggested by some sociological theory.

## **General Considerations For Your Paper**

1. When writing your paper, keep in mind Erving Goffman's concept of "impression management." The content and presentation of your paper send messages about who you are. The message you want to send is, "I am an excellent student who cares about this course and this assignment." Bad writing, spelling and punctuation send the message: "I don't care about this assignment so I didn't put any effort into it."
2. There is no minimum or maximum length, but ordinarily your paper should be 4 to 7 pages long. The guiding principle should be the overall quality of your paper. Conciseness is good; padding is bad.
3. Your paper must have a thesis, which should be made explicit near the beginning of the paper. Your thesis should be derived from one of the three choices given for each paper option. For example, "In this paper I will explain how concepts from Alfred Schutz's version of phenomenology deepened my appreciation of the movie *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*."
4. The most difficult part of writing a paper is re-writing. You cannot write a quality paper on the first draft, especially if it is written the night before the assignment is due. After you have outlined, organized and written a first draft, review and edit what you have written.
5. Double-check the spelling, grammar, and punctuation of your paper. You do not want to annoy the reader or detract from the overall quality of your paper.
6. Use quotation marks and citations to indicate words and ideas which belong to someone besides yourself. Plagiarism is one of the most serious offenses against academic integrity. It is grounds for failing this course and could result in more serious penalties as well.
7. After you are satisfied with your paper, you should have a trusted friend (perhaps a member of the class) read your paper. Your friend should proofread your paper for clarity, coherence and style. After reading your paper, your friend should be able to tell you its main points. If your friend doesn't understand your paper, chances are the instructor won't be able to either.
8. The instructor will be happy to meet with you about your paper and/or to read a draft of your paper. However, this draft should already be fairly complete and proofread. Your draft should be submitted no later than two class days before the due date so the instructor will have time to read it.
9. Your paper must be printed on a laser-quality printer, double-spaced and stapled in the upper left-hand corner. Do not add extra space between paragraphs. Do not use a title page or binder.
10. Be sure to keep an electronic copy of your paper, in case something happens to the copy you hand in before it is graded.
11. Your grade will be based on two factors: 1) whether your paper meets the specific requirements of the paper option you chose, and 2) the overall impact of your paper, including its organization, style, coherence and insight. Take note of the grading standards described on p. 3 of this syllabus.

## **Guidelines for Success**

The following are guidelines for success in this class. They are what I expect from students. They are designed to help individual students and to create a positive learning environment in the class.

### **Attend class regularly and on time.**

Class attendance is critical for learning course material. Come to class on time and stay until class is over. Do not set appointments that would require you to miss any class time. It is your responsibility to sign the attendance sheet each class period.

### **Be an active participant.**

Read the assigned readings before class, attend class and discuss the readings in class. Be on the lookout for material from media, conversations, and other classes that you can use to illuminate class material. Your active participation will contribute to a more enjoyable class for everyone.

### **Communicate with your professor.**

Talk to your professor about any problems you are having with the course. If you do not understand the material or have questions about any assignments, make an appointment to talk. If you have problems with other students or any other issues that are impeding your learning process, tell your professor.

### **Develop high standards for yourself.**

I have high standards for all students. I expect that students will submit carefully developed and revised papers, be prepared for class, and take the course seriously. The best way to meet these standards is to adopt high standards for yourself. Your job is to be a student. Be a professional at your job. You will take the skills and attitudes you develop as a student with you when you leave school.

### **Employ effective study skills.**

Before class, read the assigned readings. After class, review your notes and the readings. The ability to apply the material (in exams and papers) takes a deeper understanding than a casual reading of the text will give you. The course material is requiring you to learn new ideas and ways of thinking. You need to be patient with yourself and commit enough time to the material before you will "get it." Do not be satisfied with a surface understanding of the course material. This type of understanding does not generally translate to excellent work in the assignments or your ability to apply the material outside of class.

### **Follow common rules of respect.**

Turn off your cell phones. Do not have "side conversations" during class. The noise that you make makes it difficult for others to listen and concentrate. Speak loudly when participating in class discussion so that everyone in the class can hear. When others are talking, please listen quietly. Show courtesy toward other students even if you disagree with them.

Adopted from Nancy Berns, Department for the Study of Culture and Society, Drake University.

# Schedule of Assignments

## OVERVIEW

Mon	1/9	(1)	Course overview	
Wed	1/11	(2)	Overview of sociological theory	
			Farganis. "Introduction. The Classic Tradition to Post-Modernism: An Overview"	<b>F</b> pp. 1-19
			Kivisto. "Classical Sociological Theory," "Contemporary Theories and Their Connections to the Classics"	<b>K</b> pp. 1-4, 119-124
Fri	1/13	(3)	Overview of sociological theory, continued	

## SECTION 1: FUNCTIONALISM

Mon	1/16		NO CLASS	
Wed	1/18	(4)	Durkheim on Social Facts	
			Farganis. Introduction to Durkheim	<b>F</b> pp. 55-58
			Durkheim. "The Rules of the Sociological Method"	<b>F</b> pp. 59-64
Fri	1/20	(5)	Durkheim on Suicide and Religion	
			Durkheim. "Egoistic Suicide and Anomic Suicide"	<b>F</b> pp. 64-72
			Durkheim. "The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life"	<b>F</b> pp. 73-81
			<b>Summary of "Egoistic Suicide and Anomic Suicide" due</b>	
Mon	1/23	(6)	Illuminating Durkheim	
			Hornsby. "Surfing the Net for Community"	<b>K</b> chapter 3
Wed	1/25	(7)	Functionalism and Robert Merton	
			Farganis. Introduction to Functionalism	<b>F</b> pp. 181-182
			Merton. "Manifest and Latent Functions"	<b>F</b> pp. 201-217
Fri	1/27	(8)	Functionalism and Social Stratification	
			Kingsley & Moore. "Some Principles of Stratification"	<b>F</b> pp. 183-191
			Parsons. "Age and Sex in the Social Structure of the United States"	<b>F</b> pp. 191-200
			<b>Summary of "Some Principles of Stratification" due</b>	
Mon	1/30	(9)	Illuminating Neofunctionism	
			Colomy & Greiner. "Criminalizing Transgressing Youth"	<b>K</b> chapter 5



## SECTION 2: CONFLICT THEORY

Wed	2/1	(10)	The Communist Manifesto	
			Farganis. Introduction to Marx	F pp. 23-25
			Marx & Engels. "The Manifesto of the Communist Party"	F pp. 26-37
Fri	2/3	(11)	Marx, continued	
			Marx & Engels. "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844"	F pp. 37-43
			Marx. "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof"	F pp. 47-54
			<b>Summary of "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts" of 1844 due</b>	
Mon	2/6	(12)	Marx Illuminated	
			Walsh & Zacharias Walsh. "Working Longer, Living Less."	K chapter 1
			<b>Section 1 paper due</b>	
Wed	2/8	(13)	Conflict theory	
			Farganis. Introduction to conflict theory	F pp. 219-221
			Mills. "The Structure of Power in America."	F pp. 241-249
			Zweigenhaft & Domhoff. "The Ironies of Diversity"	F pp. 250-262
Fri	2/10	(14)	Immanuel Wallerstein	
			<i>Historical Capitalism</i>	W pp. 1-110
			<b>Summary of "Truth as Opiate: Rationality and Rationalization" due</b>	
Mon	2/13	(15)	Immanuel Wallerstein	
			<i>Capitalist Civilization</i>	W pp. 111-163
Wed	2/15	(16)	Immanuel Wallerstein	
Fri	2/17	(17)	<b>Examination #1</b>	

## SECTION 3: MAX WEBER

Mon	2/20	(18)	Max Weber, part 1	
			Farganis. Introduction to Weber	F pp. 91-94
			Weber. "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism"	F pp. 95-98
			<b>Summary of "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" due</b>	
Wed	2/22	(19)	Max Weber, part 2	
			Weber. "Bureaucracy," "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," and "'Class, Status, Party'"	F pp. 99-125

Fri	2/24	(20)	Max Weber, part 3	
	<b>Section 2 paper due</b>			
Mon	2/27	(21)	George Ritzer, part 1	
			Ritzer. <i>The McDonaldization of Society</i>	R Chapters 1-10
	<b>Summary of "The Irrationality of Rationality" (chapter 7) due</b>			
Wed	3/1	(22)	George Ritzer, part 2	
	<b>SECTION 4: SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM &amp; DRAMATURGY</b>			
Fri	3/3	(23)	George Herbert Mead	
			Farganis. Introduction to Mead	F pp. 143-144
			Mead. "Mind, Self and Society"	F pp. 145-163
Mon	3/6	(24)	Herbert Blumer and Illuminating Interpretivism	
			Farganis. Introduction to Symbolic Interaction	F pp. 349-351
			Blumer. "Society as Symbolic Interaction"	F pp. 351-358
			Fine and Sandstrom. "Wild Thoughts: An Interactionist Analysis of Ideology, Emotion, and Nature."	K chapter 9
	<b>Summary of "Society as Symbolic Interaction" due</b>			
Wed	3/8	(25)	Erving Goffman	
			Goffman. "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life"	F pp. 359-368
	<b>Section 3 paper due</b>			
Fri	3/10	(26)	Illuminating Goffman	
			Kivisto and Pittman. "Goffman's Dramaturgical Society: Personal Sales and Service in a Commodified World"	K chapter 10
	<b>SPRING BREAK (March 13-17)</b>			
Mon	3/20	(27)	Lowney	
			Lowney. <i>Baring Our Souls</i> .	L chapters 1-3
Wed	3/22	(28)	Lowney	
			Lowney. <i>Baring Our Souls</i> .	L chapters 4-6
	<b>Summary of "Recovery Rules" (chapter 4) due</b>			
Fri	3/24	(29)	Phone conference with Kathleen Lowney	
Mon	3/27	(30)	<b>Examination #2</b>	

**SECTION 5: SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE,  
PHENOMENOLOGY & SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM**

Wed	3/29	(31)	Marx & Engels; Schutz	
			Marx and Engels. "The German Ideology"	<b>F</b> pp. 43-47
			Farganis. Introduction to "Phenomenological Sociology and Ethnomethodology"	<b>F</b> pp. 303-304
			Schutz. "Common-Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action"	<b>F</b> pp. 305-331
Fri	3/31	(32)	More on the Sociology of Knowledge	
Mon	4/3	(33)	Berger & Luckmann	
			Berger & Luckmann. "Foundations of Knowledge in Everyday Life"	<b>F</b> pp. 331-339
<b>Summary of "Foundations of Knowledge in Everyday Life" due</b>				
Wed	4/5	(34)	Garfinkel	
			Garfinkel. "Studies of the Routine Grounds of Everyday Activities"	<b>F</b> pp. 340-348
<b>Section 4 paper due</b>				
Fri	4/7	(35)	Best	
			Best. <i>Random Violence</i>	<b>B</b> chapters 1-6
Mon	4/10	(36)		
			Best. <i>Random Violence</i>	<b>B</b> chapters 7-8
<b>Summary of "Declaring War on Social Problems" (chapter 7) due</b>				
Wed	4/12	(37)	Phone conference with Joel Best	

## SECTION 6: FEMINISM, CRITICAL THEORY & POST-MODERNISM

Fri 4/14 (38) Feminist Theory  
Farganis. Introduction to Feminist Theory F pp. 369-371  
Smith. "Women's Experience as a Radical Critique of Sociology" F pp. 372-380  
Barrett. "Words and Things: Materialism and Method in Contemporary Feminist Analysis" F pp. 381-393

Mon 4/17 (39) Illuminating Feminist Theory  
Lorber and Martin. "The Socially Constructed Body: Insights from Feminist Theory" K chapter 8

### Section 5 paper due

Wed 4/19 (40) Critical Theory  
Farganis. Introduction to Critical Theory F pp. 397-400  
Marcuse. "One-Dimensional Man" F pp. 400-413  
Habermas. "Three Normative Models of Democracy" F pp. 413-422

Fri 4/21 (41) Critical Theory Illuminated  
Dandaneau. "Critical Theory, Legitimation Crisis, and the Deindustrialization of Flint, Michigan" K chapter 7

Mon 4/24 (42) Foucault; Postmodernism  
Farganis. Introduction to Postmodernism F pp. 423-424  
Foucault. "The Carceral" F pp. 425-434  
Lyotard. "The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge" F pp. 435-449

Wed 4/26 (43) Illuminating Postmodernism  
Ritzer. "The 'New' Means of Consumption: A Postmodern Analysis" K chapter 11

Fri 4/28 (44) Review for examination

### Section 6 paper due

**The final exam is tentatively scheduled for Friday, May 5, from 9:45-11:45 a.m.**