

Rutgers University
Syllabus
Contemporary Sociological Theory
920:314:01 and 02

Main lecture: M/H 12:00 until 1:20 (LSH Room B267, Livingston Campus)

Recitation: M (section 01 in BE 011) or H (section 02 BE 011) at 10:35AM

Instructor: Dr. Eleanor LaPointe

Office: 049 Davison Hall (DGLS) Time: Wednesday 12:00-1:00 PM

Also by appointment. See me before or after class or send me a note to schedule.

(Email: eleanor@sociology.rutgers.edu Phone: 732-278-9576)

Recitation leader: Aghil Daghighaleh (Email: adaghighaleh@sociology.rutgers.edu)

Required texts:

1. Introduction to Sociological Theory: Theorists, Concepts, and Their Applicability to the Twenty-First Century by Michele Dillon (Edition 2). 2014. Wiley-Blackwell. ISBN: 978-1-118-47192-0
2. All other readings are available within our course Sakai site.

Main sakai portal: <https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal>

Grading

Attendance and Engagement (including recitation).....	13%
Scheduled in-class warm-ups (writing exercises). (Lowest of the six is dropped).....	5%
First 2 Exams	27% each
Last Exams.....	28%
Total.....	100%

It is your responsibility to keep up with the material. Please be prepared for each session by having completed and reviewed the assigned readings for that day. Constructive participation in class and section discussions can benefit your final grade, especially if your average is border line. NOTE: Sleeping, texting, and Facebook surfing do NOT count as classroom engagement and may negatively impact your grade.

Attendance is important. Points will be deducted for absences beyond **one** missed class and **one** missed recitation. If you must miss a class, be sure to find out from someone in class what you missed.

Please note that I have included six questions on various dates throughout the semester. These questions will be used for quick writing assignments or assessments with other formats at the start of class. This is so that I can ascertain how well everyone is keeping up with the readings. **If you are late to class, or if you miss class, you cannot make these up!** The lowest score out of these six will be dropped.

Testing

Make-up tests are strongly discouraged!! Please plan on being here for exams when they are due. A make-up may be given only at the discretion of the instructor. Written proof (from a physician, mortician, clergy member...) of an illness or other crisis is required for a make-up to be considered.

Please be forewarned that, to ensure fairness, make-up tests *may* be more difficult compared to tests taken on due dates. (You have longer to prepare for them!) The format may also be different.

Examinations include a combination of multiple choice, true/false, short answer (a paragraph), or essay questions.

Academic Integrity

Wondering about academic dishonesty? Please see the following RU site for guidelines on academic integrity expected at RU: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>

Grading Scale:

90-100 = A 77-79 = C +

87-89 = B + 70-76 = C

80-86 = B 60-69 = D 59 or below = F

Students are expected to write complete, grammatically correct, sentences during ALL correspondence, including emails sent to me, the instructor. Minor typing errors are acceptable, but the abbreviated words and run-on sentences sometimes used in casual chats with friends online are NOT acceptable.

Grading Criteria for written essays:

Points:

Clear and logical statements; explanation and/or examples provided to support ideas; shows insight; provides complete bibliography; submitted on time	100
Clear statements with appropriate explanations or examples	90
Clear statements with some explanation or examples	80
Some unclear statements or incorrect explanations or examples	70
Confusing, lacks explanation or reasoning. Has not been proofed for wording, punctuation and other grammatical errors.	60 or lower

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1

9/7

First Meeting and Introduction

Read: "Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology" by Hunter and McClelland
(Listed in our course Sakai site.)

Week 2

9/11

Read: Introduction chapter (Dillon text)

I strongly suggest reviewing chapters 1, 2, 3 as well. These deal with the foundations of sociological theory and many of the ideas provide building blocks for more recent theories. You will not be tested on these chapters unless I specify otherwise in class.

9/14

Structural-Functional analysis: **Talcott Parsons, Kinsley Davis and Wilbert Moore, and Robert Merton.**

Read: Chapter 4 (Dillon text)

Suggested: Review Chapter 2 on Emile Durkheim.

Week 3

9/18

Structural-Functional analysis continued:

Read: **Kinsley Davis and Wilbert Moore:** "Some Principles of Stratification" (Listed in our course Sakai site.)

9/21

Conflict analysis: **C. Wright Mills and Ralf Dahrendorf**

Read: Chapter 6 (Dillon text) You will not be responsible for pp. 234-239.

Suggested: Review Chapter 1 on Karl Marx.

Q. Is inequality necessary? What do the functionalists Davis and Moore say? How might this view differ from a conflict perspective? What do You think?

Week 4

9/25

Read: C.Wright Mills (Listed in Sakai.)

Also: Web-based slide show on **C.Wright Mills** by Dr. Frank Elwell
(Listed in Sakai.)

Slide show Link:

<http://www.faculty.rsu.edu/~felwell/Theorists/Mills/Presentation/Mills.ppt#256>

9/28 Q. Compared to Dahrendorf, C.W. Mills offers a view that is perhaps more pessimistic about the possibility of society advancing toward greater equity and fairness. Explain why. (Hint: What role does bureaucratic and institutional enlargement play in perpetuating inequality? How about the mass media and consumer-based cultural practices?)

Week 5

10/2

Immerse yourself in prior readings and class notes as you prepare for exam. (In class review if time permits.)

10/5

Exam 1

Week 6

10/9 Rational Choice and Network Theory: **George Homans, Peter Blau, Karen Cook, Mark Granovetter, James Coleman**

Read: Chapter 7

Read: "Power in Exchange Networks" by **Karen Cook**
(Listed in Sakai.)

Suggested for thought/discussion: Google Stanley Milgram's Small World Experiment. How might we find out if there are six degrees of separation at Rutgers?

The idea of an exchange network seems straightforward, but real-life exchange networks can be very complex and tricky to map. For some network visuals see the following:

1. <http://www.mpi-fg-koeln.mpg.de/~lk/netvis/substanz.html>

10/12 Film: "Lost Children of Rockdale County"...How does this documentary demonstrate the impact of social networks? How "rational" were these children? (Use the perspectives in chapter 7 for application.)

Week 7

10/16 Symbolic Interaction Perspectives: **Erving Goffman, Arlie Hochschild**

Read: Chapter 8

10/19 Read: "Protecting One's Self from a Stigmatized Disease" by Lee and Craft
(Listed in Sakai.)

Q. The concept of social stigma is important because it involves having to manage a self that has become tainted because of societies negative definitions. When confronted by the need to cope with social stigma, what are some strategies that individuals might utilize? (Use the article by Lee and Craft and your own examples.) Does "coping" at the individual level necessarily result in widespread change in what is or isn't considered a stigmatized attribute? Explain. What are some collective strategies?

Week 8

10/23 Read: "Asylums" by **Goffman** (Listed in Sakai.)

Film: "Titicut Follies" This documentary was filmed a few years after Goffman wrote on asylums. It was part of a social movement to expose the abuses that were going on in mental health facilities across the country. In what specific ways does this documentary demonstrate Goffman's perspective on total institutions?

Suggested but not required: "The Jail as Degradation" by John Irwin (Listed in Sakai.)

10/26 Read: Chapter 10 (pp.355-362 only)

Read: "The Effect of Smiling on Helping Behavior" by Gueguen and De Gail
(Listed in Sakai.)

Suggested but not required: "Working at Bazooms" by Meika Loe (Listed in Sakai.)

Q. Explain how Hochschild's approach to smiling differs from Gueguen and DeGail's approach. Which one reflects more of a conflict perspective tradition? (Bonus: If these authors were to meet and have a conversation, how would they present, argue, or clarify their points of view?)

Week 9

10/30 Phenomenology: **Alfred Schutz, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann**

Read: Chapter 9 (pp.301 through the top of 313 only)

11/2 Read: "Moral Panics: The Case of Satanic Day Care Centers" (Listed in Sakai.)

Q. While there are certainly lots of things that we should be gravely concerned about, the concept of "moral panic" suggests that sometimes the public is bamboozled into thinking that trivial (or non) issues are serious and that serious issues are trivial. What are the elements that propelled the moral panic surrounding day care centers in the 1980's? Can you think of other moral panics? How can we know if a social phenomenon really is something that we should be afraid of – something that we need to be aware of and collectively work on changing?

Week 10

11/6 Social and Cultural Reproduction of Inequality: **Pierre Bourdieu**

Read: Chapter 13

Read: "Who Rules America" by **G.William Domhoff**. (Listed in Sakai.)

Suggested Film: "Two American Families" (PBS Frontline) Available online.

11/9 Q. Many would argue that social class is insignificant because, after all, the U.S. class system is an open one; everyone has the opportunity to advance if they choose to do so. How would Bourdieu respond to this? And Domhoff? What do you think?

Week 11

11/13 Prepare for exam.

11/16 **Exam 2**

Week 12

11/20 and 11/21 (Across the campus Thursday classes are held on Tuesday this week.)

Postmodern Perspectives: Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard

Read: "Poststructural and Postmodern Theories" (Listed in Sakai.)

Suggested but not required: Chapter 14 (Dillon Text)

Suggested for thought/discussion: Baudrillard might enjoy this website on the Museum of Weird Consumer Culture: <http://www.indiana.edu/~wanthro/museum.htm>

See also: The Dove Evolution Ad (Enter this in a search engine, like Google)

See also: www.transparencynow.com/overview/viewtable.htm

Also suggested: "Wag the Dog," "The Matrix," or "Blade Runner" (films). How can we discuss these films using Baudrillard's ideas on simulacra, etc.? Do an internet search on relevant essays. I found the following: www.geocities.com/licuria/wagthedog.html

Week 13

11/27 Read: "From Panopticon to Disneyland" by Shearing and Stenning
(Listed in Sakai.)

11/30 Film: "The Persuaders"

Week 14

12/4 Read: "Globalization" by P. Callero from The Myth of Individualism
(Listed in Sakai.)

Read: Textbook chapter 14 (pp.452-463) and chapter 15 (pp.508-510)

Review: Parsons on Modernization theory (Dillon text pp.171-172)

12/7 Read: "Nearest Neighbors" by Sherry Turkle (excerpt from Alone Together) (Listed in Sakai.)

Week 15

12/11 **Exam 3** (Part 1: In-Class portion worth 12% out of 28%)

Week 16

Exam 3 (Part 2: Take-Home essays. Worth 16% out of 28%. Due on the date scheduled by Rutgers.)

Here is the official final exam schedule for your information: <http://finalexams.rutgers.edu>