

Contemporary Sociological Theory

Fall 2017
Course Syllabus

Course: SOC314:03/04

Instructor: Steph Peña-Alves

Instructor Contact: salves@sociology.rutgers.edu

Instructor Office Hours: Thurs 2:40 – 3:40 pm & by appointment (Davison Hall #013)

TA: Amanda Kaplan

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TA Office Hours: Tues 2:40 – 3:40 pm and by appointment (Davison Hall #140)

Lecture Time: Tuesday and Thursday 3:55 – 5:15 pm

Lecture Location: [Dr. Ruth M. Adams Building \(RAB\)](#) 206

Recitation Time: Tuesday/Thursday 5:50 – 6:45 pm

Tuesday (Section 03) Location: [Waller Hall \(WAL\)](#) 210

Thursday (Section 04) Location: [Regina B. Heldrich Science Building \(HSB\)](#) 206

Course Description and Goals

In this course, we will approach contemporary sociological theory in two distinct ways. First, you will become acquainted with the various theoretical perspectives that have shaped the discipline of sociology. We will examine primary texts, historically situate the scholars of those texts, and explore the ways these theories have been used to explain a wide range of social phenomena in our contemporary world. To this end, one goal of this course is for you to gain a structural understanding of sociological theory and its trajectory within our discipline.

Second, we will treat contemporary sociological theory as a set of conceptual tools for theorizing understudied or taken-for-granted phenomena and for reexamining existing areas of inquiry from new analytical angles. To this end, another goal of this course is for you to actively theorize the social world by appropriately and creatively applying sociological concepts to the issues, debates, and phenomena that concern or interest you, in so doing, cultivating serious analytical mastery.

To achieve these goals, class sessions will involve both lectures and dialogue. When new arguments and concepts are introduced, we will not only examine the ways they are employed by the theorist at hand, we will also practice applying their logic to the world around us. Rather than evaluate theory on moral, normative grounds (right/wrong, fair/unfair, should be the case/should not be the case) – an all too seductive form of reasoning – we will instead practice evaluating theoretical frameworks for their validity and utility. While our moral responses to competing explanations of social life are important parts of our experience and our thinking, in this course I expect you to be *supremely analytical*, to examine the social world through multiple theoretical lenses regardless of which view(s) you might ultimately prefer. Such analytical thinking

empowers us to move beyond the assumption that a single, ultimate explanation can be reached and to embrace the deep complexities of social life.

Required Readings

There is no textbook for this course. All required readings are posted to Sakai. *You are expected to read all assigned materials at least once before class.* Many of these readings are *difficult* and *dense*, so I encourage you to read through them a couple of times – first, to gain a general sense for the piece, and second, to apply your analytical thinking and take notes. Another way of describing that second reading is “focused reading,” whereby you read the text with particular attention to the basic elements of theory (units and level of analysis, arguments, concepts, variables, etc.); approaching your reading in this focused manner often makes the task feel less daunting and instead much more manageable. Reading is a necessary prerequisite for comprehension and engagement in this course, so make every effort not merely to do it, but to do it *well*.

Evaluation

The final grade for this course will be measured through your attendance, your classroom presence (active listening, engaging in dialogue), your thinking, and your writing. There are, thus, multiple ways in which you can showcase your knowledge, engagement with the material, and analytical skill. See below the structure of evaluation for this course and the final grading scheme. Note that some of these measures are necessarily hinged on the others. Showing any form of engagement (verbal or non-verbal) in class, for example, requires that you *attend* class.

Evaluation Breakdown

<i>Classroom Engagement</i>	15 points	(15% of grade)
- Attendance (5 points)		
- Active listening (5 points)		
- Participation (5 points)		
<i>Short Essays (3 x 20 points)</i>	60 points	(60% of grade)
<i>Mini-Assignments (5* x 5 points)</i>	25 points	(25% of grade)

Final Grading Scheme

A = 90% to 100%
B+ = 87.5% to 89.9%
B = 80% to 87.4%
C+ = 77.5% to 79.9%
C = 70% to 77.4%
D = 60% to 69.9%
F = below 60%

Short essays will be assigned at least 2 weeks before they are due and should be roughly 4-5 pages in length (this is a guide – quantity is not measured, but *quality*). Mini-assignments will be assigned sporadically across the semester and will vary in type and format. Write-ups for mini-assignments will be short (a page or two).

** I will assign six or seven mini-assignments throughout the course of the semester. You may choose any **FIVE** of those assignments to complete toward this part of your grade. That means you may skip any two of these submissions with no consequence. You may also submit mini-assignments beyond those required five to earn extra credit. I encourage you to be strategic with this flexibility whether it is using this leeway to ease your load during a difficult point in the semester or using it to lift your grade. The ideal approach, of course, is to submit all assigned work. After all, the only way I can reward your good thinking is if you showcase it!*

Academic Integrity

I adhere strictly to the university code of academic integrity and, as such, will not tolerate any form of academic dishonesty in this class. This includes, but is not limited to: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, and preventing others from obtaining information/material. Academic dishonesty also includes assisting others engaged in these actions. You may find the university's full academic integrity policy at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-at-rutgers/> and information about violations and sanctions at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/levels-of-violations-and-sanctions/>. I will not hesitate to report a suspected breach to the Dean of Students.

Student Conduct

The Department of Sociology encourages the free exchange of ideas in a safe, supportive, and productive classroom environment. To facilitate such an environment, students and faculty must act with mutual respect and common courtesy. Thus, behavior that distracts students and faculty is not acceptable. Such behavior includes cell phone use, surfing the internet, checking email, text messaging, listening to music, reading newspapers, leaving and returning, leaving early without permission, discourteous remarks, and other behaviors specified by individual instructors. Courteous and lawful expression of disagreement with the ideas of the instructor or fellow students is, of course, permitted.

If a student engages in disruptive behavior, the instructor, following the University Code of Student Conduct, may direct the student to leave class for the remainder of the class period. Serious verbal assaults, harassment, or defamation of the instructor or other students can lead to university disciplinary proceedings. The University Code of Student Conduct is available at: http://policies.rutgers.edu/sites/policies/files/10.2.11%20-%20current_0.pdf.

Disability Support

If you require accommodations for a disability, please contact me during the first week of

class. Note that you must also contact the Rutgers Office of Disability Services. More information about this group and how to request accommodations can be found at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>.

Diversity Statement

The Rutgers Sociology Department strives to create an environment that supports and affirms diversity in all manifestations, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, social class, disability status, region/country of origin, and political orientation. We also celebrate diversity of theoretical and methodological perspectives among our faculty and students and seek to create an atmosphere of respect and mutual dialogue. We have zero tolerance for violations of these principles and have instituted clear and respectful procedures for responding to such grievances.

Lecture Schedule

Tuesday, 9/5

Introduction to Course

Thursday, 9/7

**Foundations of Contemporary Social Thought /
Elements of Theory**

Reading: Durkheim, "What is a Social Fact?" from
The Rules of the Sociological Method (1895)

Tuesday, 9/12

Early Functionalism

Reading: Parsons, "The System of Modern Societies"
edited excerpt from *The System of Modern
Societies* (1971)

Merton, "Manifest and Latent Functions"
edited excerpt from *Social Theory and
Social Structure* (1968) &
"Unintended Consequences of Purposive
Action" (1936)

Thursday, 9/14

CLASS CANCELED

Tuesday, 9/19

Problemetizing Functionalism, (Re)Addressing Conflict

Reading: Gans, “The Positive Functions of Poverty”
AJS (1972)

Turner, “Marx and Simmel Revisited:
Reassessing the Foundations of Conflict
Theory” (1975) [Read pg. 618-620; Read
only roman numeral italicized headings on
pg. 621-626]

Thursday, 9/21

Conflict and Power

Reading: Mills, “The Structure of Power in America”
edited excerpt from “The Structure of Power
in American Society” *BJS* (1958)

Dahrendorf, “Social Structure, Group
Interests, and Conflict Groups” from *Class
and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*
(1959)

Tuesday, 9/26

Authority and Hegemony

Reading: Weber, “Types of Legitimate Domination”
from *Economy and Society: An Outline of
Interpretive Sociology* (1978)

Gramsci, “Culture and Ideological
Hegemony” edited excerpt from *Selection
from the Prison Notebooks* (1971)

Thursday, 9/28

Power and Classification

Reading: Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to
Reflexive Sociology* (selections)

Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (selections)

Bourdieu, *Distinction* (selections)

Tuesday, 10/3

Power and Classification / Position and Capital

Reading: Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in J. G. Richardson, ed., *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (1986)

Thursday, 10/5

Power, Knowledge, and Disciplinary Regimes I

Reading: Foucault, “Lecture Two: 14 January 1976,” from *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (1976)

Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (selections)

Tuesday, 10/10

Power, Knowledge, and Disciplinary Regimes II

Reading: Foucault, *History of Sexuality* (selections)

Thursday, 10/12

Structural Oppression: Race, Gender, and Sexuality

Reading: Collins, “Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination” (1990) (selections)

Connell, “Femininity and Masculinity” (1995)

Omi and Winant, “Racial Formation” from *Racial Formations in the United States* (1986)

(*OPTIONAL additional reading*) Ramírez, “¡Mira, Yo Soy Boricua y Estoy Aquí!”: Rafa Negrón’s Pan Dulce and the Queer Sonic Latinaje of San Francisco.” (2007)

1ST SHORT ESSAY ASSIGNMENT POSTED ON SAKAI

Tuesday, 10/17

Colonialism, “the Other,” and Nationalism

Reading: Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (selections)

Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (selections)

Bhabha, "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism" from *The Location of Culture* (2004)

Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (selections)

Thursday, 10/19

Analytical Mapping Session*

**No reading; bring class notes*

Tuesday, 10/24

Self and Society

Reading: Du Bois, "The Souls of Black Folk" (selections)

Simmel, "Web of Group Affiliations" & "The Stranger" (selections)

Thursday, 10/26

Structure of the Social Self

Reading: Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* (selections)

1ST SHORT ESSAY DUE

Tuesday, 10/31

The Dramaturgical Self I

Reading: Goffman, *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (chapter 1)

Thursday, 11/2

The Dramaturgical Self II

Reading: Goffman, *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (chapter 2)

Goffman, *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (chapter 3)

Tuesday, 11/7

Emotions and Society

Reading: Hochschild, "Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure" (1979)

2ND SHORT ESSAY ASSIGNMENT POSTED ON SAKAI

Thursday, 11/9

Meaning and Society: Symbolic Interactionism

Reading: Blumer, "Society as Symbolic Interaction"

Tuesday, 11/14

Meaning and Society: Ethnomethodology

Reading: Garfinkel, "Studies in Ethnomethodology" (selections) & "Studies of the routine grounds of everyday activities"

Thursday, 11/16

Social and Cultural Phenomenology

Reading: Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (selections)

Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (selections) & "On Multiple Realities"

Tuesday, 11/21

CLASSES FOLLOW THURSDAY SCHEDULE

Analytical Mapping Session*

**No reading; bring class notes*

2ND SHORT ESSAY DUE

Thursday, 11/23

NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

Tuesday, 11/28

Cognitive Sociology I

Reading: Zerubavel, *Hidden in Plain Sight: The Social Structure of Irrelevance* (selections)

Zerubavel, “Social Memories” from *Social Mindscapes*

Thursday, 11/30

Cognitive Sociology II

Reading: Zerubavel, “Social Meanings” from *Social Mindscapes*

Brekhus, “Social Marking and Mental Coloring”

3RD SHORT ESSAY ASSIGNMENT POSTED ON SAKAI

Tuesday, 12/5

Method and Theory Building I

Reading: Jackson, *Harlemworld: Doing Race and Class in Contemporary Black America* (2001) (selections)

Friedman, *Blind to Sameness: Sexexpectations and the Social Construction of Male and Female Bodies* (2013) (selections)

Thursday, 12/7

Method and Theory Building II

Reading: Brekhus, *Peacocks, Chameleons, Centaurs: Gay Suburbia and the Grammar of Social Identity* (selections)

Tuesday, 12/12

In-Class Mini-Assignment

Thursday, 12/14

NO CLASS (Finals)

3RD SHORT ESSAY DUE

Enjoy the break and stay in touch!