

Introduction to Sociology – Fall 2017

Professor: Dr. Jeffrey Dowd **Email:** jdowd@rci.rutgers.edu
Class hours: MTH 10:05 – 11:00AM **Location:** Scott Hall 135
Office: Davison Hall (Douglas Campus) 040 **Office Hours:** TH 1:00 – 3:30

Broadly speaking, the purpose of this course is to provide a basic understanding of sociology. To accomplish this goal, we will employ a sociological analysis to understand the social hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality as well specific public issues, such as immigration, welfare, education, globalization and world hunger. We will look beyond individualistic explanations to the larger economic, social, political and historical contexts that shape social outcomes.

We will explore sociological concepts with an eye toward their utility. The goal of this class, then, is not to memorize definitions and facts and regurgitate them onto a test, but rather to learn useful knowledge – knowledge that you can use to more fully understand the world around you and the social forces that shape your lives and the lives of the other 6 billion people with whom we share this planet.

Course Objectives:

- **Introduce students to basic sociological concepts**
- **Examine the relationship between the individual and society**
- **Develop an understanding of how institutions shape social life**
- **Explore race, class, gender, and sexuality as socially constructed hierarchies**
- **Apply a sociological imagination to current events**
- **Move beyond a narrow focus on our immediate relationships to a consideration of the role of larger social forces at the local and global level**

All of the readings are available on-line on Sakai.

Required and Recommended Readings: The recommended readings are for those who would like additional information.

Course Grade: 35% midterm exam (multiple choice/short answer)
15% 2-3 page paper
5% Short daily writings
35% final exam (multiple choice)
10% recitation/participation

Recitation: Recitation sections will employ discussions and class exercises designed to reinforce the concepts presented in lecture and the reading materials. **Recitation grade:** Everyone begins with 9 points for recitation/participation. Those who distinguish themselves through consistent and meaningful contributions to class discussions will receive an additional point. Missed classes will result in losing a point for each missed session (see below).

Attendance Policy: Attendance is required. There will be a **sign in sheet** for lecture and recitation. One absence is automatically excused. For each unexcused absence beyond that, you will lose 1 point on your final grade.

NOTE: If you miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me and excused absences are recorded.

Daily Writings: The questions on this syllabus are there to guide your reading. You must answer one question for each class. I am not expecting a polished essay. A paragraph demonstrating your understanding of the material is sufficient. You should do these before class begins. Give yourself 5 minutes to complete these assignments. I will collect and grade these papers (I will randomly pick 3 for each student).

These writing assignments have several functions. First, they help me assess your understanding of the material in a way that multiple-choice tests cannot. Second, I find that if students are allowed to think about the material before class it allows students to better process the lectures (this is why it might be a good idea to write these right before class). Third, the questions will help guide your reading and give you an idea of what kind of knowledge I am looking for on the tests. Lastly, I want students to focus on learning concepts rather than the kind of memorization of disconnected facts that can often accompany expectations of multiple-choice tests.

Multiple Choice: Questions will focus on understanding and application of ideas from the articles. Questions will not test your ability to memorize statistics or definitions but measure your ability to interpret the meaning of the author's argument and/or follow the sociological implications of the question.

Paper: After the midterm, I will assign a 2-3 page paper due December 7th. This assignment will ask you to write two narratives about how you got to college. The first narrative must rely on individualistic explanations. The second narrative must rely upon social explanations (i.e. contextualizing the individual choices, behaviors, and attitudes that explain how you ended up at Rutgers). I will provide detailed instructions on this assignment after the midterm. In addition, writing tips will be available on the website. (Rutgers policy on academic integrity [can be found here](#)).

Grading Scale: A 90-100, B+ 86-89, B 80-85, C+ 76-79, C 70-75, D 66-69, F 65 or below.

Current Events: The concepts from class will make more sense if you can recognize them outside of the classroom. Below are a few high quality news sources:

Daily Newspaper: [The New York Times](#) **Magazine:** [The Atlantic](#) ; [Vox](#)
Radio/Podcasts: [WNYC \(93.9 FM\)](#) [NJPR](#) **TV:** PBS [Frontline](#), [American Experience](#),
[Newshour](#)

September 7th (Thursday) – Introduction

This first class will introduce some of the key sociological concepts that we will explore in greater depth throughout the course.

Lecture: What is Sociology?

Recommended Reading: How We Get Tall

September 11th (Monday) – Sociology and Conventional Wisdom

All of us can offer explanations of the social world and the different social phenomenon that we encounter. A sociological analysis, however, may conflict with our “common sense” understanding of social phenomena. Mills argues that we need a “sociological imagination” to better understand the forces that shape our lives. The accompanying news article shows how applying a sociological imagination (e.g. looking to cultural and structural forces) can help solve problems, like obesity, that are often depicted as purely individual in origin.

Q. What does Mills mean when he says, ‘ordinary men are ... bounded by the private orbits in which they live’?

Readings: Mills – The Promise of Sociology (1-5)

How One of America’s Most Overweight Cities Lost...

Recommended: Cerulo and Ruane – The Sociological Perspective (3-8)

Cerulo and Ruane – Why do Conventional Wisdoms ...
The Shame of Fat Shaming

September 14th (Thursday) – Social Research Methods

Sociology is the systemic study of social behavior and human groups. The systemic part of that definition often gives students and the general public the most difficulty. The following articles explore some of the methods used to produce sociological claims as well as mistakes we make when making social claims.

Q. Contrary to conventional wisdom, Schwalbe argues that facts don’t speak for themselves. What does he mean?

Readings: Schwalbe – Finding Out How the Social World Works (32-42)

What Journalists Get Wrong About Social Science

Recommended: Cerulo and Ruane – Numbers Don’t Lie (3-10)

September 18th (Monday) – The Self and Society

We often think of ourselves as distinct from society. This is only partly true. While we are all unique individuals, “the self” is born of social experience. The following articles demonstrate how social interaction forms and reforms who we are and furthermore, how norms of social interaction dictate management of our “self”.

Q. What does Mead mean when he says, “Selves can only exist in definite relationships to other selves?” According to Goffman, how does one create a “moral entitlement”?

Readings: Mead – The Self (33-40)

Goffman – The Presentation of Self (41-46)

Recommended: Johnson – Privilege, Oppression, and Difference

September 21st (Thursday) – Defining Social Class

Social class at first glance appears to be an individually achieved status. The following articles, however, define class and show how it is not solely the result of individual achievement or attitudes. The articles further discuss how class functions to shape life chances for members of different classes.

Q. How is class an ascribed status? What are social capital and cultural capital and why do they matter?

Readings: McNamee and Miller Jr. – Social and Cultural Capital

The Unique Tensions of Couples Who Marry Across Classes

Why so Many Rich Kids Come to Enjoy the Taste of Healthier Foods

Recommended: Nine New Findings About Inequality in the US

A Cartoon Explanation of American Inequality

September 25th (Monday) – Globalization and Capitalism

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, political elites declared that the “neoliberal consensus,” meaning free-market capitalism, had ended ideological debate. The “consensus” began to fall apart as economic programs did not meet expectations - first in Asia, then Latin America and now in Europe and the United States. The following article provides important concepts for understanding the economy and the tensions between democracy and the free-market.

Q. How do “fictitious commodities” explain the “embedded market?”

Reading: Block – Introduction to The Great Transformation (excerpt)

Horn – Pope Francis’s Theory of Economics

Recommended: Karl Polanyi for President

Standing – The Precariat

September 28th (Thursday) – Social Construction of Race

There is nothing natural about race. Science has proven that races, except the human race, do not exist. So, this leaves the question: What is Race? The article begins to answer this question. In lecture I will explore some of the socio-historical causes behind the modern conception of race with a specific focus on racial formation from the end of the Civil War to the Civil Rights Era.

Q. What does it mean to say that race is a social construction? Why do you think most people continue to think of race as biological?

Readings: Omi and Winant – Racial Formations (19-28)

Lecture: Reconstruction to Jim Crow

Recommended: The Easiest Way to Get Rid of Racism?

5 Ways Millennials View Race

October 2nd (Monday) – Social Class and Race

Politicians often depict American history as one of steady progress toward greater racial equality. In doing so, they distort history and thereby ignore key factors that contribute to racial inequality. The following readings explore how a perpetual racial wealth gap is key to understanding relative outcomes for black and white families.

Q. How do wealth disparities condition life chances?

Readings: Shapiro – Inheritance and Privilege (82-92)

Shapiro et al. – The Racial Wealth Gap Increases Fourfold

Segregation Now, Segregation Tomorrow, Segregation Forever?

Recommended: Shapiro – Cost of Being Black and the Advantage of ...

How Much Do Racial Wealth Gaps...

October 5th (Thursday) – Sex and Gender

Sociological theory separates gender and sex. Sex refers to biological characteristics while gender refers to the socially constructed categories. Institutions and cultural practices shape the meaning of sex (i.e. masculinity and femininity). The following articles examine how social actors continually recreate the norms and cultural practices that we call gender.

Q. Armstrong et al. don't really offer a clear yes or no to their query. What do you think their main point is?

Readings: Lorber – The Social Construction of Gender (112-119)

Armstrong et al. - Is Hooking Up Bad for Young Women? (22-27)

Recommended: Many Working Women Won't See Themselves in ...

Home Economics: The Link Between Work-Life Balance...

October 9th (Monday) – Sexuality

Since sex organs are biological, sexuality appears biological at first glance. A closer look reveals that not all sexual practices are biological. Indeed, the categories that we use to denote different sexualities are themselves social inventions. In contemporary politics, debates over biology and sexuality play a large role in several controversial issues. The articles examine how our society conceptualizes sexuality.

Q. How are sexuality and the categories we use to distinguish divergent sexuality socially constructed? Does that mean there is no biological basis for sexuality?

Reading: Kimmel and Plante – Sexualities (63-65)

Veliz – Out of the Closet, Onto the Field (72-74)

Recommended: Ghaziani – There Goes the Gayborhood (64-66)

October 12th (Thursday) - The Family and the State

Governments, as well as the populations, have long-considered the family an area of national concern. In the United States birth control, abortion, and reproduction in general have been divisive political issues. Here we will take a look at reproduction controversies in Turkey and India.

Q. On the surface, the case in Turkey is one of denying choice, while women in India are making their own choices. How can we complicate this simple dichotomy?

Readings: Altioek – Reproducing the Nation (46-51)

Rudrappa - India's Reproductive Assembly Line (22-27)

Markens – The Continuing Significance of Gender

Recommended: Killian – Could There be a Silver Lining to Zika?

October 16th (Monday) – Immigration and Assimilation

Assimilation is associated with the ideal of 'the melting pot' – the idea that all the different ethnicities would mix and come out as Americans in the end. Pluralism is a more recent idea. In this model, all of America's different identities will preserve their distinctiveness and live in peaceful coexistence. Telles examines these ideas using a historical comparison with early 20th Century immigration.

Q. What does Telles argue is different about Mexican immigration as compared to earlier immigration from Italy?

Readings: Telles – Mexican Americans and Immigrant Incorporation (29-33)

Rumbaut – Immigration's Complexities (72)

Pew Research Center – Public Divided Over Increased Deportation...

Recommended: Carr et al. – Can Immigration Save Small-Town America

October 19th (Thursday) – Global Migration

About 3.3% of the world's population are migrants. The following articles explore some of the conditions faced by specific populations of migrants. The articles deal with vastly different populations and types of migration in different countries.

Q. Given the differences between French Second-generation immigrants, native-born US blacks, and migrant workers in the UAE, what sociological concepts can we employ to understand these social conditions without collapsing the different experiences?

Readings: Parrenas and Silvey – Domestic Workers Refusing Neo-Slavery (37-41)

Beaman – From Ferguson to France (65-67)

Recommended: Bylander and Maillard – Borders and Margins (58-65)

International Migration: Key Findings

October 23rd (Monday) – Midterm Exam

October 26th (Thursday) – Education and Inequality

Ideally, our education institutions should create equal opportunity, train children to fill adult roles in society, and provide an informed citizenry for democracy. While most Americans agree with the principle of equal education, the actual battle for equal education has met intense resistance. The following articles explore equality and education.

Q. Both articles focus on the same topic. However, they are answering slightly different questions. As specifically as you can, what are the unique questions each article asks?

Readings: Downey and Gibbs – How Schools Really Matter (50-54)

Lareau – Social Structure and Daily Life (1-8) (14-32)

Recommended: Living In a Poor Neighborhood...

Promise and Perils of School Vouchers

October 30th (Monday) – Beer and Circus

A significant portion of one's college education is derived through experiences outside of the classroom. In the hopes of most educators what we do in the classroom compliments and enhances what happens outside of it. On the other hand, educators are aware that financial and social pressures often compete with the scholarly mission of the university. The articles focus on the latter phenomena.

Q. How do institutions of higher education “miseducate” some students?

Readings: Sperber – Beer and Circus (Intro and Chp. 1)

Hamilton and Armstrong - The Miseducation of Monica ... (22-27)

Recommended: Excerpt from Latina/o in Higher Ed

November 2nd (Thursday) – Sociological Theory

Most Introduction to Sociology textbooks situate material about major theoretical perspectives at the beginning of the course. However, major theoretical paradigms may mean little to students who have not previously encountered sociology. In other words, now that you have seen some of the more concrete sociological explanations for contemporary social phenomena these theories should appear more grounded. The collection of excerpts pulls from a number of prominent classical and contemporary theorists.

Q. What purpose do you think theory serves?

Reading: Collection of Short Excerpts from Theorists

Recommended: Giddens et al. - Sociological Theory (13-23)

W.E.B. Dubios – Double-Consciousness (164-168)

Bateson – The Deadly Span (49-53)

Mini-Course: America in the 1970s: Culture and Change

The late 1970s was a period of intense social, political, and economic change. Despite this, the decade is often overlooked or depicted as a meaningless period between the idealistic and volatile 1960s and the materialistic and placid 1980s. The period between the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 and the 1980s, however, explains much of the contours of our present-day society. We still live, I think, in the era that began in the late 1970s. Therefore, we would do well to apply a sociological imagination to the period. Through a focus on the late 1970s we will discuss nationalism, masculinity, feminism, economics, and social disorder.

November 6th (Monday) - The End of the War

America was bitterly divided over Vietnam in the early 1970s. In some ways, less so about whether the war was wrong and more over who was right. Americans have, for the most part, never fully dealt with Vietnam and its aftermath. The excerpt below discusses the early attempts to grapple with and, in some ways, forget about the Vietnam War.

Q. How does the reading and/or the film fit with what you knew about the Vietnam War and the late 1970s prior to this class?

Reading: Appy – Victim Nation

The War That Killed Trust

Recommended Film: My Lai

Recommended Reading: Self – Last Man to Die (57-74)

November 9th (Thursday) – Second-Wave Feminism and the Collapse of Breadwinner Liberalism

The economy of the New Deal Era (1930s to the late 1970s) was embedded, in Polanyi's sense, in the social norm of the male-breadwinner. In other words, the class-based notion that any man should be able to earn enough to support his family (i.e. a family wage) underlay the post-War economic order. In the 1970s, both corporate power (from the political right) and feminism and civil rights (from the political left) challenged "breadwinner liberalism."

Q. Why do you think feminism's challenge to breadwinner liberalism ultimately led many men (particularly white men) to reject liberalism in the late 1970s and beyond?

Reading: Self – A Strange But Righteous Power...

Recommended: Self – The Price Of Liberty: Antifeminism and...

The Two Women's Movements

November 13th (Monday) - The 1970s Economic Impacts

While the social democratic arrangements of the New Deal Era expanded and became more egalitarian in terms of race and gender, the movements pushing for equality began to falter as reactionary forces gained strength. The economic upheavals of the 1970s were, like all economic strife, not simply

about material interests. Instead, gender, age, and especially race fueled how much of the public saw the economic challenges of the late 1970s.

Q. How were the economic impacts of the 1970s interpreted as racial?

Reading: Cowie – A Collective Sadness

Recommended: Born to Run and the Decline of the American Dream

Film Screening: Saturday Night Fever (Location TBA) [You are required to watch this film before next class even if you cannot attend]

November 16th (Thursday) – The 1970s Cultural Shifts

The 1970s was a period of economic uncertainty and anxiety. Cities had begun to feel the effects of both deindustrialization and white flight leaving them in serious financial trouble. At the same time, the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War had reshaped American politics and divided the country.

Q. Discuss one of the things that, according to Cowie, was “falling apart”?

Reading: Cowie - The Important Sound of Things Falling Apart

Film (required): Saturday Night Fever

Recommended Reading: The Bronx is Burning (excerpt)

Recommended Film: Blackout

November 20th (Monday) – Civil Rights and Busing

When people think of the Civil Rights Movement of the late 20th Century, we tend to focus on the American South in the late 1950s and early 1960s. That Civil Rights Movement and many of its achievements didn't take hold until the 1970s. The 1970s also saw a considerable backlash against the Civil Rights Movement in both the South and the North. Attempts to desegregate Northern schools, which meant busing students across towns (as whites and blacks lived in different neighborhoods and sometimes different municipalities), were often met with fierce hostility – Boston, MA was the site of some of the fiercest resistance to integration.

Q. How does the resistance to integration in the late 1970s matter today?

Reading: The Lasting Legacy of the Boston Busing Crisis

Recommended: 'Forced Busing' Didn't Fail

Lassiter – The Suburban Origins of “Color-Blind” ...

Tuesday is Thursday this week. In other words, go to your Thursday classes on November 21st. No classes November 22-24th.

November 21st (Tuesday) – Paper Guide

We will spend this entire class discussing the final paper and how we can use a sociological imagination to explain our own lives.

November 27th (Tuesday) – Adulthood

C. Wright Mills wrote that we cannot understand the biography of a person without understanding history. He meant that without an understanding of the social forces surrounding individuals we cannot hope to explain their lives. To understand the private troubles this generation faces and will face we need a better understanding of the public issues. The following articles explore some of the public issues facing young people today, as well as the shifting norms around adulthood.

Q. How do you see the relationship between adulthood and debt in your own life or the lives of people close to you?

Readings: Furstenberg Jr. et al. - Growing Up is Harder to Do
Ross – Anti-Social Debt

Recommended: Stop Spending Money on Avocados?

November 30th (Thursday) – Immigration and Nationalism

We live in the era of the nation-state. As such, how we define the nation and particularly who belongs as a member of that nation are hotly contested within states. While few areas of the globe have not grappled with these issues, here we will focus on controversies concerning national identity and Islam in Europe.

Q. We will watch several videos in class, and I will ask you to respond to them in class.

Readings: Hokenos – Europe's Rising Islamophobia (1-6)
Younge – Europe's Homegrown Terrorists (1-4)

Recommended: French 'Burkini' Ban Provokes Backlash...

December 4th (Monday) – Global Poverty

While global poverty statistics are contested, virtually all numbers present a grim picture. One particularly disturbing statistic comes from UNICEF, which estimates that 30,000 children die every day from malnutrition or vaccine preventable diseases. This poverty exists within a highly unequal world. For example, a few hundred elites now own as much wealth as 2.5 billion of the poorest people. Scheper-Hughes documents poverty in rural Brazil. While Scanlan et al. examine the causes of world hunger.

Q. According to Scanlan et al., why is the popular explanation for world hunger flawed? According to Scheper-Hughes what is the cultural effect of poverty?

Readings: Scheper-Hughes – Death Without Weeping (323-328)
Scanlan et al. – The Scarcity Fallacy (34-39)

December 7th (Thursday) – Sense and Nonsense

Invocations of “fake news” and battles over “controversial” speakers on college campuses may depict a society where reality itself is increasingly open to debate. The Internet combined with bitter cultural divides in America (and around the world) seem destined to destroy any sense of a shared reality, if they haven’t already. While there is cause to worry about this phenomenon, it is equally important to remember that there is no “golden age” of a truthful and accurate shared reality. In other words, battles between sense and nonsense are not new. The academy (e.g. colleges and universities) is uniquely positioned to counter nonsense, or as scholars call it “pseudoscience.”

Check out some of the recommended readings. I will lecture on the role of fiction, truth, and how we can discriminate between pseudoscience and science, sense and nonsense etc.

Lecture: Science and Psuedoscience
Recommended: TBA

Final Paper Due!

December 11th (Monday) - Social Change

Sometimes it seems that we have no power; that things just happen to us; that “they” do this or “they” do that, but people just like you have caused change throughout history... especially people like you (i.e. college students) and people like you will hopefully be (the educated). The accompanying lecture will examine how and why social movements develop.

Lecture: Social Movements

Final Exam: TBA