Society and the Individual

SOAN 105 / Spring 2019 / McCallum / Axinn 219 / MW 2:50-4:05
COURSE DESCRIPTION

Every day we make sense of our world by formulating simple sociological theories about why people do the things they do, about the forces that hold our society together, and about its major problems. This course seeks to nurture the amateur social theorist lurking inside all of us, to allow us to make clearer judgements, predictions, decisions, and, ultimately, to build better theories.

To do this, we will examines the human condition from the standpoint of sociological thought. Students will learn to engage issues facing the world today by asking classic sociological questions. Ultimately, the course material constructs “the individual” as a product and constituent of large scale structural forces and historical developments—modernity, capitalism, the state, rationality, classes, families, races, genders, etc. Sociologists do not have all of the answers. But the discipline offers the most ambitious range of social theories in all the social sciences. And yet, even these grand academic theories, many of which we will examine this semester, are built upon our simple, everyday intuitions that many ordinary people already have. As it is an introductory course, we explore these ideas through a dialogue with the founding giants of modern social theory: Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, Max Weber, Sigmund Freud, WE.B Du Bois, and others. However, by exploring recent texts and current events, students will learn to see the relevance of these classical ideas today. In fact, one of the main strengths of this class is that it allows us the chance to make sense of our current moment, and how it differs from the past. What changed, in other words, to make the world modern? Overall, you should leave this course closer to the edge of your understanding than when we began. You will have a few new lenses with which to analyze the world, and an appreciation for how sociologists think.

Class Environment
You are expected to attend every class and out-of-class event. Come fully caffeinated, prepared to discuss readings and join group discussions. Class participation means you regularly attend class and take part in meaningful ways. Since critical dialogue is probably where most learning happens anyway, this should be in our mutual interests. Learning is a conspiracy, a group activity where we work, play, plot, and debate together. Students should be prepared to take notes without laptops. Cell phones, laptops, and all other non-airplane-approved devices must be switched off. At the end of this syllabus is an addendum that describes helpful communication tips between professors and students when you have questions outside of class.

In our discussion sections, set yourself goals to participate in ways that challenge your habits and usual modus operandi. You are encouraged to have an opinion, be audacious, act out, and risk your pride (what you risk shows what you value). Please bring a written question for discussion to every time your section meets. We will use those questions as the basis for our discussions in your sections.

Assignments
You will complete two short analytic projects in response to particular readings and take one in-class written exam. There will also be a final project where you will create your own exam. You will have the option to do one analytic project in a non-traditional format. Talk to me well in advance if this option interests you. I will give you more specific information on the details of each of these assignments when the time comes.
A Note on Written Work
Written work is the primary way you will be evaluated, and your writing will be graded according to its readability, grammatical accuracy, and creativity, in addition to the substantive ideas it conveys. We will discuss the challenges posed by sociological writing, but if you have any concerns about your writing ability, please see me and consider visiting the CTLR: http://www.middlebury.edu/academics/resources/ctlr

Grades
Your grades come from the assignments stated above, plus class participation. Class participation is derived from a combination of attendance, frequency of participation in class discussions, and observed struggle to engage the material. Late work is lowered half a grade for the first week late, and then a full grade the week after. My overall philosophy on grading emphasizes struggle, not mastery. The breakdown is as follows:

One Theory Paper  25 %
One In-Class Exam  25 %
One Reflection Paper  20 %
One Final  20 %
Class Participation  10 %

A - Outstanding: Expectations exceeded.
B - Excellent: All expectations met with excellence.
C - Good: All expectations met with moderate success.
D - Poor: Expectations inconsistently met.
F - Failure: Work incomplete by culmination of the course.

Most students can expect to receive a grade in the B range, as As at Middlebury are generally reserved for outstanding work above and beyond high expectations. If you object to a grade you receive, email me a detailed explanation as to why you think the grade should be changed. In that email, also include a few times when you can meet me as soon as possible to discuss the matter further.

Honor Code and Academic Integrity
The Middlebury Honor Code forbids cheating and plagiarism. For details on what constitutes these breaches of conduct, please see Middlebury policy here: http://www.middlebury.edu/academics/administration/newfaculty/handbook/honorcode
Failure to abide such regulations will result in my notifying the proper college authorities. The academy is not known for its sense of humor, but plagiarism is truly no joke. For information on how to avoid plagiarizing, see Ear Babbie's article: http://wwwcsub.edu/ssric-trd/howto/plagiarism.htm
COURSE CONTENT

Class Texts: All texts are available here: http://blogs.middlebury.edu/soan0105mccallum/

Note: The course schedule that follows may be revised as the course progresses

Week 1—

Karl Marx. 1845. “Theses on Feuerbach” (in class)

2/13:  C. Wright Mills. 1959. The Sociological Imagination

Week 2—
2/18:  Emile Durkheim. 1895. Rules of the Sociological Method

2/20:  Emile Durkheim. 1912. “Conclusion” in The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (pgs 462-478)


Week 3—
2/25:  Emile Durkheim. 1893. Selections from The Division of Labor in Society (skip pages 34-38 and 50-59)


Week 4—


Week 5—
3/11:  Karl Marx. 1846 (published 1932). Selections from The German Ideology, pg 146-175


3/13:  Marx / Durkheim Review
Week 6—
  3/22: Marx Durkheim Paper Due

Week 7—
  3/25: SPRING RECESS
  3/27: SPRING RECESS

Week 8—
  4/1: Max Weber. 1922. “Discipline” and “Class, Status Party”

Week 9—


  https://prospect.org/article/born-way

  Adolph Reed Jr. “From Jenner to Dolezal: One Trans Good, the Other Not So Much.”

  https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/6d7a/2b98ca719a81f0d80e987b44343500cb.pdf

Week 10—

  4/17: W.E.B Du Bois. 1903. The Souls of Black Folk


Week 11—


  4/24: Location TBD 7PM, “How to Survive a Plague” film screening
Week 12—
4/29: Send me a selfie by the night before class. We are going to use them in class. Please put “Selfie” in the subject line of the email. It can be one from your past or you can take a new one.

Erving Goffman. 1956. The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. (pay attention to the idea of “the front”)

The Sociology Snapshot of Selfies: http://www.everydaysociologyblog.com/2014/01/a-sociological-snapshot-of-selfies.html


5/4: In-Class Exam

Week 13—
5/6: Michael Burawoy. 2004. For Public Sociology (ASA Presidential Address.) (read up to p. 7 – the introduction and Thesis 1)

Benjamin Kline Hunnicut. 2013. Free Time: The Forgotten American Dream


5/8: Semester Review / Course Response Forms

Week 14—
5/13: Finals Due on paper in mailbox in MNR 201
HOW TO EMAIL YOUR PROFESSOR

The following tips are useful when exchanging emails with your professors. They are not meant to present a code of conduct or create unnecessary formality. The point is to facilitate improved student-professor communication. I have heavily borrowed this text from a few sources online. Another useful guide on Medium is by Laura Portwood-Stacer.

1. Read this syllabus. The question you would like to ask is often answered there or in material that was provided at the beginning of class. Requesting a professor go over this again makes you look like you are not a serious student and reflects on your personal standing in the class.

2. Make sure email is really the best way to communicate your issue. Emailing a professor to ask "what did I miss?" is not cool. You're basically expecting the professor to take the time to write up an entire class just for you. Ask another student instead and review any materials posted online. Then if you have specific simple questions, email may work, but if your questions are complex, then you should go to office hours or make an appointment.

3. Use your academic account. People are deluged with emails every day, and by using your school account, you'll have a better chance of avoiding the spam filter, or your professor skipping right over your email because it's from an unknown address.

4. Use a professional subject line heading. Combining your academic account with a well-titled subject line helps the professor to know who you are and exactly what you want, even before clicking "open." This information helps the professor organize and prioritize student emails. Including the section info is important for professors who teach multiple sections of the same course. If you can't remember your section number, then give the day and time the course meets.

5. Always use a greeting. Do not begin with "Hey" or similar colloquialisms. Generally speaking, you should use "Dear Professor Last-name." Do not use "Miss Last-name," especially when the professor has a PhD, where the only alternative acceptable honorific is "Dr." Do NOT address female faculty as Ms., Miss or Mrs. unless you have been explicitly instructed to do so. It is very unprofessional to call attention to marital status in the workplace – it is actually illegal in job interviews. Also, Mrs. means 'wife of.' Many women do not take their husband's last names, or they may have their husband's last name but be divorced.

6. Briefly and politely state the reason why you are emailing. Offer only as much information as is relevant to the situation and likely to interest the professor. Get to the point right away. The professor should already know your name from the email headings and from the signature of your message. Simply get to the point, i.e. Professor XYZ I am in SOAN XYZ and I'm writing about XYZ.

7. If you are emailing with a problem, suggest a solution. Be considerate, however, of how your solution might create additional work for the professor.

8. Sign with your name. Use your first and last name, even if you know that your professor knows you by name.

9. Read it over. If you do not have spell-check on your email, then you can copy the message, paste it into a word-processing program, and run spell-check there. Consider not only the mechanics, but also what you have said. Strive for a polite tone, concise language, and clear purpose.

10. Write back. When your professor responds to your email asking for advice on classes, information on summer internships, a letter of recommendation, etc, write back to acknowledge receipt of the email or confirm an appointment to meet.
THINKING ABOUT TALKING: NOTES ON CLASS DISCUSSION

This class depends on us having open, honest, and critical conversations. How can we do that? I’d like to suggest you consider a few tips that I think will improve our chances. Think about what makes you feel encouraged to join a conversation with a group of people you don’t know. Assuming that some of those things might be true for other people, try to participate in ways that expand them. Here are a few ways that I think can enhance our conversations. Feel free to add to this list.

1. **Learn people’s names and use them.** When you speak in class, especially for the first few weeks, say your name so that others can remember it. When you refer to someone’s point, either to agree or disagree, use their name. “As Janice said a minute ago…”

2. **Look at each other.** Since this is a conversation among all of us, it makes sense to look at more than just the front of the room. Eye contact can help bring people into a conversation.

3. **Be critical and respectful.** “Calling people out,” denouncing them, is a quick way to shut down a conversation. It generally leads to one person feeling cut off without understanding why, and others feeling less confident to speak up. Critique ideas, not individuals.

4. **Affirm others.** Say “thank you” when people clarify your question, and speak up when others share your question or concern to support them asserting something they don’t know.

5. **Step up, step back.** If you find yourself talking a lot, try to be quiet for a bit and focus on listening. If you find yourself not speaking up, challenge yourself to weigh in.

6. **Ground rules.** Together we will set ground rules for our discussions, but my suggestion is that we err on the side of openness. A safe space—one in which all points of view are welcome and open to critical evaluation by all others—should be a goal. A space in which some people aren’t offended by some points of view is unlikely and undesirable in a classroom environment.