Course description

The fundamental concept in social science is power, in the same sense in which energy is the fundamental concept in physics.

- Bertrand Russell

Who defines morality? Who creates law? How is order sustained? In whose interests is society shaped? An enduring question in the social sciences is how order is maintained in a constantly changing society. This course investigates questions of social order. Specifically, it seeks to understand the social conditions that create conformity in some and nonconformity in others. It considers why some become labeled as deviant or maladapted, while others are just considered “normal”. Using primary texts from both classical and contemporary readings, we will examine mechanisms of social control and analyze their effectiveness within specific social and economic circumstances. A core concern throughout the course is how class, race, and gender inequalities are produced and reproduced.

Course goals & objectives

This course introduces students to what is (arguably) the most long running topic of analysis in sociology – social order. Therefore, students taking this course will develop an understanding of how societies remain orderly – through both coercion and consent. It requires that students apply critical thinking skills and apply them to the social world. In addition, this course helps students develop writing skills. It gives them the opportunity to make an evidence based argument. This skill can be utilized in a variety of academic and “real world” contexts. A major goal is for students to develop empirically grounded ideas and arguments, an effort to move away from opinion-based analysis. The overarching goal I have for my students is that they leave my classroom with an ability to negotiate, interpret, and analyze their own social world in a more critical way by connecting individual action to social organization.

Course requirements

Participation/attendance. Class participation and attendance is integral to your success in this course. Your presence in discussions is important. You will “participate” in three ways. You will turn in discussion questions to me – due dates listed below. You’ll use these same discussion questions to participate in small groups in class. Participation in groups will be monitored via the assessment of your group members. This will occur periodically throughout the course as both a measure of your participation and as a diagnostic tool to change anything that may need it, to ensure a high quality learning environment. We will be watching three films in the course. I will distribute a set of short essay questions related to each film that you are required to respond to. These are due one week after completing the film. The combination of the film questions, individual discussion questions, and your small group participation makes up 20% of your overall grade.

Midterm exam. Midway through the semester is the midterm examination. It is a written exam that takes place over two course periods. It is worth 25% of your overall grade.
Final exam. During finals week you will take the final exam. It will be a similar format to the midterm examination – essay based. It is worth 25% of your overall grade.

Final paper. The purpose of the final paper is for you to focus on a topic of interest as it relates to mechanisms of social control and social order more generally. Because you'll be spending an extensive amount of time on this paper I want you to choose a topic that will motivate you to do well. Research topics are due to me on 9/21. Don't feel bad if you're still unsure. This is the time to work this out. The earlier we converse about your topic, the better you will do in the end. On 11/16 you will give me an annotated bibliography of 10 sources you plan to use in your final paper. For each reference:

1. Describe the main question the author engages and the method that the author uses to address the question. Note that theoretical works are perfectly acceptable; if you use them, note how the author builds a case for the question they engage.

2. Explain what the author’s main conclusion is, to whom the author deems this relevant, and any critical notes on the work.

The final paper is due by 9 PM on December 20th via email or a hard copy. It should include a description of the topic addressed, a literature review outlining what is already known about your topic, and any suggestive policy or program that you might advocate (if applicable). You are to consult at least 10 sources. The paper should be 12-15 pages. Resources need to be referenced at the end of the paper. More details on this later in the course. The combination of annotated bibliography and final paper is worth 30% of your overall grade.

Late papers. The last day to turn in written work is December 20th. One letter grade per week turned in late will be deducted from late papers.

Required course materials


Reading list

9/7 (a) Syllabus overview

(b) Course introduction

9/9 *A sociological refresher*

(a) “Three Sociological Perspectives” by Paul Colomy

(b) “The Promise” by C. Wright Mills

9/12 **DUE:** Discussion (3) questions sent to me via email by 315 PM

*Classical readings on social order*
(a) “Bureaucracy” by Max Weber
(b) “The Division of Labor” by Harry Braverman
(c) “Community and Society” by Ferdinand Tonnies
9/14 (d) “Industrialization and Problems of Social Disorder” by Herbert Blumer
(e) “On Mechanical Solidarity and Organic Solidarity” by Emile Durkheim
9/16 Outsiders – defining deviance
(a) Becker – chapter 1
9/19 DUE: Discussion (3) questions sent to me via email by 315 PM
(b) Becker – chapter 2
9/21 DUE – research topic - write a page, but no more than 2, on what you would like your paper to be about. This does not have to be completely focused yet, I just want you to start thinking about it. This also allows me to give you some feedback as you consider your topic.
A case study in deviance – becoming a marijuana user
(a) Becker – chapters 3 and 4
9/23 (b) Becker – chapter 4
9/26 DUE: Discussion (3) questions sent to me via email by 315 PM
The development of rules and their enforcement
(a) Becker – chapter 7
9/28 (b) Becker – chapter 8
9/30 Labeling theory
(a) Becker – chapter 10
10/3 DUE: Discussion (3) questions sent to me via email by 315 PM
(a) Becker – chapter 10
(b) “The Dynamics of Welfare Stigma” by Robin Rogers-Dillon
10/5 Film #1 – “Devil’s Playground”
10/7 Film #1 – “Devil’s Playground”
10/10 DUE: Discussion (3) questions sent to me via email by 315 PM
On the social situation of mental patients and other inmates
DUE: Film #1 response paper
(a) Goffman – “On the Characteristics of Total Institutions”

DUE: Discussion (3) questions sent to me via email by 315 PM
(a) Goffman – “On the Characteristics of Total Institutions”

On the social situation of mental patients and other inmates
(a) Goffman – The Moral Career of the Mental Patient”

DUE: Film analysis #2 AND Discussion questions to me via email by 315 PM
Social order and disorder in cities
(a) “The Metropolis and Mental Life” by Georg Simmel
(b) “Societal Changes and Vulnerable Neighborhoods” by William Julius Wilson
(c) “Segregation and the Making of the Underclass” by Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton

Code of the Street – urban ecology
(a) Anderson – preface, introduction

DUE: Discussion questions to me via email by 315 PM
Ideal types in an urban neighborhood
11/16  
**Social capital in an urban neighborhood**

(a) Anderson – chapter 1 – Decent and Street Families

11/18  
**DUE:** Discussion (3) questions sent to me via email by 315 PM

**Social pathology in an urban neighborhood**

(a) Anderson – chapter 2 – Campaigning for Respect

11/21  
(a) Annotated bibliography due in class or via email. You must include at least 10 sources. Further instructions to be provided - this paper should be about 6 pages.

**Growing up on Germantown Avenue**

(a) Anderson – chapter 3 – Drugs, Violence, and Street Crime

11/23  
**Fatherhood in the face of uncertainty**

(a) Anderson – chapter 4 – The Mating Game

11/25  
No class

11/28  
**DUE:** Discussion (3) questions sent to me via email by 315 PM

**Escaping the streets?**

(a) Anderson – conclusion – The Conversion of a Role Model: Looking for Mr. Johnson

11/30  
**Public policy and the urban underclass**

(a) “Cycles of Deprivation and the Ghetto Underclass Debate” by William Julius Wilson

(b) “Race Specific Policies and the Truly Disadvantaged” by William Julius Wilson

12/2  
**DUE:** Discussion (3) questions sent to me via email by 315 PM

(c) “The Limited Visions of Race Relations and the War on Poverty” by William Julius Wilson

Film – “Brick City”

12/5  
Film – “Brick City”

12/7  
Film – “Brick City”

12/9  
Social Order and Disorder in London - 2011 – Readings TBA

12/12  
Social Order and Disorder in London - 2011 – Readings TBA

12/20  
(a) Final exam – 9 AM
Other relevant course information

1 – I am generally easier to reach by email than by phone. Do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns, I am happy to help and want you to succeed in this course. I’m also typically in my office from 9 to 5, so you can set up appointments with me on most days of the week.

2 – I’ll be checking email frequently Monday through Friday from 9 to 5, but will not check as often at night or on weekends.

3 – Laptops are permitted in class for note taking or reading the assigned articles, but I ask that you turn off your wireless connection while in class. Anyone found to be surfing the web will be asked to leave class.

Grading scale

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Course behavior expectations

Who speaks, sows. Who listens, reaps.

- Argentine proverb

I do want you to speak in class (in fact I will implore you to almost every day), but keep in mind that the most effective way for you to be an effective speaker is to also be an effective listener. This allows for actual discussion and not just people talking past each other. Learning in my classroom is a collective endeavor therefore the success of the whole depends on the ability of individuals to participate with this goal in mind.

Please turn off cell phones during class. If there is a specific reason you need your phone on (i.e. emergency) let me know. Please stay off of the internet (especially Facebook!). I have no problem with you using your laptop in class, but it must be used for class. Do not talk or whisper conversations with your neighbors (unless otherwise directed) during class, it is distracting to the rest of the class and to me. We only meet for 2.5 hours per week. Be present (not just in the physical sense)! If I see you using your laptop inappropriately I will ask you to leave. When interacting in class be respectful of other opinions and listen intently. Intelligent and thoughtful discussion about social issues can be intense, so be certain you frame your comments in a respectful manner.

Honor code

This course is covered by the Oberlin College honor code which means that you are to produce your own work unless otherwise instructed. Consulting with librarians, tutors, and me is okay, but the work you submit must be yours. Any case of suspected plagiarism will be reported to the Honors Committee. For every assignment you must write/type at the top of the first page, “I affirm that I have adhered to the honor code in this assignment.” For more information see this website:
Special needs

I encourage students with documented disabilities, including non-visible disabilities such as chronic diseases, learning disabilities, head injury, attention deficit/hyperactive disorder, or psychiatric disabilities, to discuss appropriate accommodations with me. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to the Office of Disability Services in Peters G-27/G-28.

This syllabus is tentative and may be subject to change.