Classical sociology developed in response to massive social change in European societies in the wake of the Industrial and French revolutions. It focused on the various social and political problems that resulted as societies transitioned to modern industrialism; for example, the disintegration of community, the decline of the sacred, the emergence of new forms of class conflict and exploitation, the pervasive rationality and routinization of life. Three distinct traditions of sociological theory – Durkheimian, Marxist, and Weberian – were created and much sociological research today has its roots in one (or more) of these three traditions.

This course explores these classical theories, while also covering their contemporary extensions. The course is divided into three four-week segments, each one devoted to one of the three traditions. Each four-week segment is divided into two parts: 1) two weeks devoted to canonical works of the original thinker; 2) two weeks devoted to their theoretical elaborations and empirical applications in contemporary sociology.

Course goals & objectives

The major goal of this course is to develop your knowledge and application of classical and contemporary sociological theory. By the end of this course students are expected to have achieved the following:

1) Demonstrate knowledge of the major perspectives in sociological theory.

2) Critically assess the development of sociological theory.

3) Sharpen your spoken and written ability to evaluate and assess theoretical claims.

Course requirements

Attendance, Participation, and Blackboard

Attending class and participating are of vital importance in this course. As of the third week of class, attendance will periodically be taken. Unexcused absences will negatively affect the participation portion of your grade. This is the type of class whose readings build upon each other; therefore it is important to keep up with assigned readings. Being in class will help to clarify what you have been reading. This is a four credit course mandatory for all sociology majors. You are expected to devote the appropriate amount of time and effort for what is one of the most important classes sociology majors will take at Oberlin.

In order to encourage continuity and participation in the class you will write six required Blackboard postings this semester. You are required to pose questions and/or write short summaries of the readings. These will not be formally graded, but the frequency, length, and quality of your postings will be taken into account when determining your final grade (frequency and quality being the most important). All postings will be due on the dates specified in the course schedule below. The combination of attendance, participation, and Blackboard is worth 20% of your final grade.
Papers

There are two 6-7 page papers you are required to write. Details on these assignments will be distributed in class. The combination of the two papers is worth 40% of your overall grade.

Examinations.

There are 3 exams for this course; the final examination is not comprehensive. These exams are written. I will distribute exam review sheets that you should rely on when preparing. The questions will come directly from assigned readings and lecture/discussion in class. These exams make up 40% of your overall grade.

Other relevant course information

Sociological research can descriptively map the contours and proportions of social life by simplifying features of the social world relevant to a particular interest and representing them with symbols...All such descriptions oversimplify the complexity of the real social world in which we live...But, as with maps generally, such simplified descriptions can help to provide an overarching sense of our social world, where we stand within it, and what it looks like beyond our immediate field of vision.

- Christian Smith, Soul Searching

1 – I am generally easier to reach by email than by phone.

2 – Laptops are permitted in class for course related work only. Please do not come to class if you plan to surf the web. You are wasting both of our time.

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:


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.

Required course materials


5) All other readings will be distributed on Blackboard.

**Course Schedule and Reading list**

*The history of sociology and sociological theory*

2/5 Syllabus overview and course introduction

2/7 Classical sociological theory in its context


**THE DURKHEIMIAN TRADITION**

*Community and Society. From Mechanical to Organic Solidarity.*

2/12 Collective Consciousness and Mechanical Solidarity

Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, pp.1-68.


2/14 The Division of Labor and Organic Solidarity

Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, pp.69-87; 101-149.

*The Crisis of Community, Excessive Individualism, and Suicide*

Assignment – 1st Blackboard posting due Monday, 2/18 by 11 PM

2/19 The Problem of Social Integration


2/21 Suicide as a Sociological Phenomenon


*The Durkheimian Tradition: Structural Functionalism*

2/26 Structural Functionalism: Talcott Parsons


2/28 Functionalist Theory Modified


Assignment – Screening of American Beauty (at scheduled time)

Anomie, Gemeinschaft, and Gesellschaft

Assignment – 2nd Blackboard posting due Monday, 3/4 by 11 PM

3/5 Social Structure and Anomie


Discussion of American Beauty

3/7 1ST EXAM

THE MARXIST TRADITION

Marx as a Theorist of Class Conflict and Capitalism

Assignment – 3rd Blackboard posting due Monday, 3/11 by 11 PM

3/12 Marx’s Historical Materialism

Lewis Coser, Masters of Sociological Thought, pp.42-87.


3/14 The Rise of the Bourgeoisie and Class Conflict


Capitalism, Systemic Crisis, and Alienation

Assignment – 1st paper due Monday, 3/19 by 11 PM

3/19 The Systemic Crisis of Capitalism

3/21 Alienation in Capitalist Society


*Marxism as Sociology: Social Class and Culture*

4/2 Cultural Capital and Social Reproduction


Assignment – 4th Blackboard posting due Wednesday, 4/3 by 11 PM

4/4 Social Class and Language Use


Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods. Class, Race, and Family Life*, pp.1-103

*Marxism as Sociology: Social Class in Institutional Settings*

4/9 Social Class, Family, and Schools


4/11 2ND EXAM

**THE WEBERIAN TRADITION**

*Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*

Assignment – 5th Blackboard posting due Monday, 4/15 by 11 PM

4/16 Western Rationality, Capitalism, and the Capitalist Spirit


4/18 The Concept of the Calling and Calvinist Predestination

**Capitalism, Rationality, Bureaucracy**

4/23 The Protestant Ethic and Its Unintended Consequences


4/25 Bureaucracy as Institutionalized Rationality


**Critical Theory: Turning Weber Against Weber**

4/30 Critical Theory: Instrumental Rationality and New Forms of Domination

Tom Bottomore, *The Frankfurt School*.


5/2 Critical Theory II: Modernity, Totalitarianism, and the Holocaust


Assignment – 2nd paper due by 5/3 at 11 PM

**The Sociology of Rationalization and the Uses of the Classics**

5/7 George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*, pp.1-133.

5/9 Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*, p.133-end


5/? 3RD EXAM

**Grading scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>97-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This syllabus is tentative and may be subject to change.