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 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 the application of critical thinking skills. In addition, this course helps students develop writing skills. It requires learning how to craft 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, in 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

Midterm exam. April 3rd is the midterm examination. It is a written exam. A review sheet will be provided. The exam is worth 35% 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 will 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 3/4. The earlier we converse about your topic, the better you will do in the end. On 3/18 you will give me an annotated bibliography of 6 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.

On April 17th, the first draft of your paper is due to me. I will provide feedback on how to improve the draft and you will turn in a final draft by 9 PM on May 9th via email attachment. You are to consult at least 8 sources. The paper should be 10-12 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 40% of your overall grade.

Late papers. The last day to turn in written work is May 9th. One letter grade per week turned in late will be deducted from late papers.

Required course materials


Reading list

2/4 Syllabus overview and course introduction

2/6 A sociological refresher

(1) “Three Sociological Perspectives” by Paul Colomy

Classical readings on social order

(1) “On Mechanical Solidarity and Organic Solidarity” by Emile Durkheim

(2) “Industrialization and Problems of Social Disorder” by Herbert Blumer

2/11 Outsiders – defining deviance

(1) Becker – chapter 1

(2) Becker – chapter 2

2/13 No class
2/18  

*Case study in deviance – becoming a marijuana user*

(1) Becker – chapter 3

(2) Becker – chapter 4

2/20  

*The development of rules and their enforcement*

(1) Becker – chapter 7

(2) Becker – chapter 8

2/25  

*Labeling theory*

(1) Becker – chapter 10

2/27  

Film #1 – “Devil’s Playground”

3/4  

*Research paper topics due*

*On the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*

(1) Goffman – “On the Characteristics of Total Institutions”

3/6  

(1) Goffman – “On the Characteristics of Total Institutions”

3/11  

(1) Goffman – “On the Characteristics of Total Institutions”

3/13  

(1) Goffman – “On the Characteristics of Total Institutions”

3/18  

*Annotated bibliography due via email attachment by 5 pm*

(2) Goffman – The Moral Career of the Mental Patient”

3/20  

(2) Goffman – The Moral Career of the Mental Patient”

4/1  

Film #2 – “Quiet Rage: the Stanford Prison Study”

4/3  

Midterm examination

4/8  

*Social order and disorder in cities*

(1) “The Metropolis and Mental Life”  
by Georg Simmel

(2) “Societal Changes and Vulnerable Neighborhoods”  
by William Julius Wilson

(3) “Segregation and the Making of the Underclass”  
by Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton

4/10  

*Code of the Street – urban ecology and ideal types in an urban neighborhood*

(1) Anderson – preface, introduction

(2) Anderson – chapter 1 – Decent and Street Families
4/15  *Social capital and social pathology in an urban neighborhood*

(1) Anderson – chapter 2 – Campaigning for Respect

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

4/17  *First draft of paper due to me via email attachment by 5 pm*

*Growing up on Germantown Avenue*

(1) Anderson – chapter 4 – The Mating Game

(2) Anderson – chapter 5 – The Decent Daddy

5/1  *Escaping the streets?*

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

5/6  *Public policy and the urban underclass*

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

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

5/8  (3) “The Limited Visions of Race Relations and the War on Poverty”  
by William Julius Wilson

5/?  Final exam

**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.

2 – Laptops are permitted in class for note taking or reading the assigned articles.

**Grading scale**

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<tr>
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<td>D</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>0-59</td>
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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 a high quality speaker is to also be a high quality 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. 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:

http://new.oberlin.edu/arts-and-sciences/academic-resources-and-support/honor-code.dot

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.