

Emory University  
Department of Sociology  
Fall Semester 2018  
MWF 3-3:50; Tarbutton 218

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Office Hours: M 2-3:00, W 11-noon

## **SOC 457: DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY**

### **Content and goals**

This course shows how sociological theory developed. We will analyze, apply, and compare the ideas of major theorists and place those ideas in context. The main purpose of the course is to convey and reflect on the rich and diverse insights contained in sociological theory. We will repeatedly address three central problems:

1. The problem of **explanation**: How can we best account for how people do things together and how societies work?
2. The problem of **modernity**: How can we best describe, understand, and assess the rise of modern societies?
3. The problem of **relevance**: What light can theory shed on problems and changes in American and world society?

By the end of the course, you will have a good sense of the main lines of sociological thought and the way they inform current work in sociology. You should also be able to address contemporary issues with the intellectual tools provided by the major theorists. This writing-intensive course will also help you refine your academic skills.

### **Structure**

Most of the course is divided into sections focused on specific types of theory. Within each section, we will study

1. *Classic sources*: We will examine the ideas of a classic figure using original readings and focusing on the main themes.
2. *Contemporary developments*: We will illustrate with specific examples how contemporary scholars extend classic ideas and how we can use current evidence to test them.
3. *Applications*: We will apply core ideas to an issue in modern society, especially in the form of assignments that also contribute to class discussion.

### **Readings**

All readings will be supplied via Canvas or on Course Reserves.

## Requirements

- 1. Two exams**, each worth 30% of your final grade. The exams will consist of short-answer and essay questions. Study questions for the individual readings will serve as study guides. Midterm: Oct. 3, 3:00 p.m. Final: Wed., Dec. 19, 11:30 a.m. The midterm can only be rescheduled due to documented medical emergencies. The final can only be rescheduled in response to a note from the dean.
- 2. Short assignments.** Several classes will have short assignments, to be submitted via Canvas prior to class. These will help you prepare for discussion. Satisfactory completion of these assignments will count for 10% of your final grade, to be used to reduce the weight of your lowest exam grade. You will get feedback from the instructor and the TA.
- 3. Five writing assignments**, about 4 pages each. All assignments will be graded, but only the **best three** will count toward your final grade (10% each). To satisfy the College writing requirement in this course your average grade for all assignments must be at least a C.
  - Essays that are seriously incomplete (e.g., because they do not cover all parts of the assignment) or do not reflect due care (e.g., because of sloppy writing) will be graded F and count as one of the three assignments that determine the assignment grade.
  - The TA and I stand ready to provide assistance. We especially encourage you to submit a draft of one of the first two essays 48 hours before it is due, so that we can provide timely feedback. We will also comment on submitted essays.
  - The schedule lists six assignments; you may choose to **skip one**. When you do skip, you must still **write, bring to class, and hand in a one-page outline (200 words max)** to indicate that you have thought about the subject and as a basis for your contribution to the relevant class discussion.
- 4. Preparation, participation, and attendance**, worth 10% of your final grade. I expect you to be well prepared for each class and participate in discussion. You will get credit for solid preparation and active participation.
  - Because this is a 4-credit class with a significant writing component, you should anticipate spending about two hours preparing for one class session.
  - Adequate preparation means being able to answer questions thoughtfully, giving evidence that you have read the assigned material. Being unprepared counts as an absence.
  - Less than three unexcused absences will increase your p/p/a grade by a full point, but each absence over three will lower your p/p/a grade by a full point (except in case of documented emergencies, major religious holidays, and prior approval from the instructor).
  - Scheduled class debates will offer opportunities to earn extra participation credit.

## Course etiquette

- To avoid disruptions, be sure to arrive on time; repeated late arrival will be counted as an absence.
- No food of any kind, including gum, is allowed; please finish lunch prior to class.
- To maximize our collective attention and participation, use of laptops is not allowed in this class. If you have specific, documented reasons to request laptop use, let me know. (I will post fairly detailed slides on Canvas.)
- **Follow the Honor Code**, especially with regard to plagiarism. Please note:  
The honor code is in effect throughout the semester. By taking this course, you affirm that it is a violation of the code to cheat on exams, to plagiarize, and to commit any form of academic misconduct. You also affirm that if you witness others violating the code you have a duty to report them to the Honor Council.

## Assistance

- The TA, Chris Smith (see contact info on Canvas), and I are available to answer questions or discuss any issues pertaining to the course. Chris can be especially helpful in giving feedback on essay ideas and drafts.
- For assistance with writing, consult tutors in the Emory Writing Center or through the ESL program. For assistance with access or disability issues, contact [adsrstudent@emory.edu](mailto:adsrstudent@emory.edu).

## Schedule of classes, readings, and exams

- I will often give specific assignments in class and/or via Canvas
- For several readings, I will identify key passages or pages ahead of time
- The schedule is subject to adjustments, changes, or additions
- Italicized titles below refer to excerpts from relevant books, posted on Canvas or Course Reserves

### *Introduction*

- 8/29 Introduction  
Lechner, "Introduction" (recommended)
- 8/31 What was the point of founding "sociology"?  
Comte, "Plan of the Scientific Operations Necessary for Reorganizing Society"  
Lechner, "Auguste Comte"

### *Adam Smith and Rational Choice Theory*

- 9/5 How do we form and follow norms?  
Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*  
Lechner, "Adam Smith"
- 9/7 What causes economic and social progress?  
Smith, *Wealth of Nations*

- 9/10 What will make liberty flourish?  
Smith, *Wealth of Nations*
- 9/12 Is it really true that labor markets and features of jobs explain income inequality?  
Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, section on income inequality; short assignment
- 9/14 Does rational choice explain religious behavior?  
L. Iannacone, "Rational Choice: Framework for the Scientific Study of Religion"
- 9/17 Does current globalization fit Smith's expectations?  
**Assignment 1:** Smith and globalization today

*Karl Marx and Marxist Theory*

- 9/19 What are the driving forces in history?  
Marx, *The German Ideology*, other short texts
- 9/21 What makes social classes powerful?  
Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, other short texts
- 9/24 What are the prospects of revolution?  
Marx, *Capital, Vol 1*, other short texts
- 9/26 Is it really true that capitalism will unravel and socialism works better?  
Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*; short assignment
- 9/28 How do classes today fit Marx's model?  
E. Wright, *Class Counts*
- 10/1 Is capitalism becoming more unequal and exploitative?  
**Assignment 2:** Accumulation and exploitation in the gig economy  
Debate: Critics vs. defenders

10/3 **First exam**

*Durkheim and Durkheimian theory*

- 10/5-10 How do social forces shape religious life?  
Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*
- 10/12 How can a complex society create solidarity?  
Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*
- 10/15 How can sociology remedy social "pathologies"?  
Durkheim, "Individualism and the Intellectuals"
- 10/17 Is it really true that lack of integration increases suicide (rates)?  
Durkheim, *Suicide*; short assignment
- 10/19 How does interaction produce commitment and solidarity?  
R. Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*

- 10/22 Does new technology drive us together or apart?  
R. Ling, *New Tech, New Ties*  
J. Simpson et al., "Virtual Rituals: Community, Emotion, and Ritual in Massive Multiplayer Online Role-playing Games"  
**Assignment 3:** Technology, ritual, and cohesion  
Debate: the Durkheimian pros and cons of new social media

*George H. Mead, W.E.B. Du Bois, and American Social Theory*

- 10/24 How does the self emerge in interaction?  
Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*
- 10/26 How does American social structure shape a racialized self?  
Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*
- 10/29 How can science foster democracy and social reform?  
Mead, "The Problem of Society"
- 10/31 Is it really true that we develop a self by taking the attitudes of others?  
Mead; short assignment
- 11/2 How do situations and society shape our gendered selves?  
E. Goffman, "The Arrangement between the Sexes"  
H. Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*
- 11/5 How does society shape our selves?  
L. Smith-Lovin, "The Strength of Weak Identities"
- 11/7 Are we forming different selves/selves differently in (post-)modern society?  
**Assignment 4:** Mead and social selves today

*Weber and Weberian Theory*

- 11/9 How can we best understand human action?  
Weber, "Origins of Industrial Capitalism," "Bureaucracy"
- 11/12 What caused the "rise of the West"?  
Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*
- 11/14 What good is science?  
Weber, "Science as a Vocation"
- 11/16 Is it really true that science and theory can point the way to the good life and a better society?  
Weber; short assignment
- 11/19 How do groups get ranked unequally?  
Weber, "Class, Status, and Party"; T.W. Chan/J. Goldthorpe, "Class and Status"

- 11/26 What does rationalization mean today?  
G. Ritzer, "Credit Cards, Fast Food Restaurants, and Rationalization"  
**Assignment 5:** Examining how one sector is becoming "McDonaldized"  
Debate: how rational is rationalization?

*Simmel and Simmelian Theory*

- 11/28 How do people create social forms?  
Simmel, *Sociology*
- 11/30 How does modern society affect the individual?  
Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life"

Interlude. *Theory Jeopardy*

- 12/3 Preparation
- 12/5 Competition
- 12/7 Is it really true that fashion maintains class distinction?  
Simmel, "Fashion"; short assignment
- 12/10 Are we going through another great transformation?  
B. Pescosolido/B. Rubin, "The Web of Group Affiliations Revisited"  
**Assignment 6:** Metropolis, suburb, and mental life
- 12/19 **Final exam**  
11:30-2:00 p.m.