Sociological theory sometimes has the unfortunate reputation of being (a) removed from empirical matters and (b) done by people who are now long dead. That reputation cannot be further from the truth. In fact, sociological theory remains vibrant in the present and, in both its classical and contemporary formulations, it has remained tied to understanding the world in which we live.

One thread that runs through sociological theory is the concern with inequality – both in terms of understanding why it occurs and what needs to be done to eliminate it. To that end, sociologists have put forward theories that address inequality by emphasizing race, gender, class, status and the like (as well as the interplay and intersections found between them).

We take that thread as the organizing principle of this theory class. Indeed, we focus on sociological theory on the mechanisms by which inequality is produced and reproduced, as well as sociological theory that offers solutions about those mechanisms. In the process, we will show, on the one hand, how sociological theory is firmly linked to empirical research and, on the other hand, how sociological theories are formulated and refined by people addressing the present world – both in understanding and improving it.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A) Attendance

You are strongly encouraged to attend class, especially because we use class time to integrate the assigned readings and to present additional information not found in the readings. Regular attendance, moreover, will raise your final grade. If you miss only one class during the semester, I will add two points to your final grade. If you miss only two classes, I will add one point.

B) Electronic Device Policy

Electronic devices, such as laptops and tablets, can be very useful in terms of taking notes. However, when students use them in class to do other things (e.g., surf the Internet, order from
online stores, check social media posts) that proves detrimental both to student participation and discussion. Note that using devices in a non-curricular way will, most definitely, affect your final grade in a negative fashion.

C) Written Assignments

You are required to complete four short assignments (i.e., “memos”). In these 3- to 4-page memos, you will synthesize the readings and the issues that emerge as the class progresses. The due dates for the memos, as well as the dates for when I distribute memo questions, are listed below. These four memos comprise 60% of your final grade (15% per each of the four memos).

Note that these four memos will also form an important part of the other requirement: a final paper that that deals with sociological theory (worth 40% of your final grade). Indeed, you will use the memos to work out and refine in cumulative fashion this final paper. I will circulate initial instructions and options regarding this paper in class on February 8th. This theory paper is due May 6th. In between those two dates, you will meet with me on the substance and progress of your paper.

D) Honor Code

The Emory University honor code applies fully to this course. When you submit your assignments, you are pledging to the honor code. For reference, please consult: http://catalog.college.emory.edu/academic/policies-regulations/honor-code.html.

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COURSE RESOURCES

As the semester progresses, class materials (e.g., syllabus, overheads) will be posted on the Canvas site for SOC 457w (see http://classes.emory.edu/).

The assigned readings are drawn from many sources, so there is no textbook. Instead, the required readings will be available at both our Canvas site and at the Woodruff electronic reserves (see https://ereserves.library.emory.edu/index.php).

If you have any special needs, please contact me at the beginning of the semester and we will discuss the necessary arrangements. For additional information, visit the Emory Office of Accessibility Services website (see http://equityandinclusion.emory.edu/access/index.html).

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THREE POINTS ABOUT THE COURSE READINGS

Please keep in mind two points regarding the readings below. (1) Sociological theory is found across a sprawling and wide body of scholarship. There is far too much theorizing to address in this course. Thus, the readings below constitute the “tip of the iceberg,” so to speak. Yet, at the same time, I have picked readings that help us grapple with key ideas and lessons. (2) The readings below provide a mixture of classics, “modern classics,” and brand new articles. Both types of classics matter because they put forward important theoretical formulations and provide
an important comparison with contemporary situations. Meanwhile, the newest articles help us keep apprised of the latest developments. (3) Some of these articles are written for specialists. Consequently, they sometimes make use of jargon and sophisticated techniques of analysis. But, have no fear! My job will be to translate those articles for you and, in the process, show you the usefulness of those articles for making sense of sociological theory and everyday life. Put another way, we will use class-time both to ground and go beyond the readings below.

COURSE SCHEDULE
(subject to revision)

January 16: Introductions

SOUNDS AND INEQUALITY


January 21: NO CLASS (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Observance)


February 1: Section Set-Up


February 6: Section Wrap-Up

CREDENTIALS AND INEQUALITY

IN-CLASS DISCUSSION OF FINAL PAPER


MEMO #1 ASSIGNMENT DISTRIBUTED


February 25: Section Wrap-Up

MEMO #1 DUE

COMMODIFICATION AND INEQUALITY


March 8: NO CLASS (Spring Break Travel Time)
March 11-15: NO CLASS (Spring Break)


MEMO #2 ASSIGNMENT DISTRIBUTED

WORK AND INEQUALITY


MEMO #2 DUE


MEMO #3 ASSIGNMENT DISTRIBUTED


April 5: Section Wrap-Up
CONNECTIONS AND INEQUALITY


MEMO #3 DUE


MEMO #4 ASSIGNMENT DISTRIBUTED


April 22: Section Wrap-Up

MEMO #4 DUE

CODA: CONCEPTS AND INEQUALITY


April 29: Class Wrap-Up

May 6: FINAL PAPER DUE (5:00 pm)