



Sociology 310: Social Theory

MW 2:00-3:20, 229 McKenzie

Ryan Light - light@uoregon.edu - Office Hours: Thursday, 2:00-4:00, Zoom via Calendly (<https://calendly.com/light-sociology/15min>) or schedule alternative arrangement, including in-person, via email.

Graduate Employees:

Nicholas Theis - ntheis@uoregon.edu - Office Hours: TBD

Brandon Folsie - bfolsie@uoregon.edu - Office Hours: TBD

*I regard as sociologists those who assume this title
- of honor or disgrace, as you will. - Raymond Aron*

Course Description: Sociology is a set of theories and methods that facilitate the analysis of society and the individuals, organizations, institutions, and so forth that comprise it. This is both a simplifying statement - "Oh, sociology is just two things!" - and a complicating one because sociological theories and methods are varied and often times at odds with one another. It is also an explanatory statement: This is why theory and methods are required for sociology majors at the University of Oregon and at nearly every other college and university. Theory and methods interlock to form the cornerstone of sociological labor.

Despite the privileged place of theory and methods, required courses can often feel like a burden (In this course, we will actually discuss some of the reasons why this may be the case to help you articulate your frustration). This course offers the additional burden of containing dense required reading often written in an unfamiliar, dated language that is also occasionally insensitive to issues of difference including the pervasive use of masculine pronouns and identifiers. We will discuss and criticize these conventions, but we will also plow forward. Why?

Our hard work has some sizable potential payoffs: First, theory is essential to any social scientific enterprise. Theory provides the lens that allows one to view the world social scientifically. Second, practicing theorizing - systematically working through complex issues - builds skills that translate to problem-solving generally. Last, theory touches upon core contemporary debates that affect our everyday lives. A greater understanding of these issues may make us better thinkers, critics, and citizens.

Learning Objectives:

At the completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. You will be able to recognize and evaluate key works in social theory. You will gain first-hand experience comparing major theoretical ideas.

2. You will be able to describe how theory relates to empirical social scientific analysis and draw connections between how ideas in the classical sociological tradition relate to contemporary work.
3. You will practice using sociological theory as a lens for understanding contemporary issues in writing and through class discussion.

Estimated Student Workload

This course will require approximately 12 hours of work per week with most of that work (about 9 hours) occurring outside of class. A typical week will include 6 hours of reading and 3 hours of in-class time. The three essays will take approximately 3 hours of dedicated time to complete (e.g. if you complete without “multitasking”). The final essay will likely take twice that or a bit more.

Course Policies

Communicating with Me: How and Why

Our class will communicate through our Canvas website. Announcements and emails are available there and are archived. They are automatically forwarded to your UO email and can be sent to you via text if you prefer (adjust this setting under account/notifications). I respond to emails in 48 hours or fewer, usually excluding the weekends. If I do not respond in two days, please send a follow-up email as the original likely got “lost in the shuffle.”

Office Hours and Questions

I will host office hours via Zoom on Thursdays from 2-4pm. To book a meeting, please use this link: <https://calendly.com/light-sociology/15min>. If you need more time than 15 minutes, feel free to book two slots in a row. If you cannot meet during this time, please contact me via email to set up a meeting at an alternative, agreed-upon time. We will also have a running discussion called “General Course Questions” that I will monitor and that the class is free to use to ask/answer questions.

Why Office Hours?

When I was an undergraduate, I remember feeling intimidated by my instructors and confused about how to best use office hours. I didn’t want to waste anyone’s time or risk looking like I was behind other students. As a faculty member, I find office hours to be one of the best, in underused, aspects of my job and I’ve never felt that my time was wasted or that attending office hours conveyed anything negative about a student. Students have attended office hours for many reasons from clarification on assignments, to working through difficult course material, to discussions about career goals, to fill me in on something interesting they read, listened to, or saw. Any of these reasons or more are good reasons to come to office hours in my courses. If you think that you may want a recommendation from me later – even years later – you could come to office hours at least once during the course as it is far easier for me to remember students who I know personally via these meetings.

How Grades Will Be Determined:

Exercises: We will work through about 7 exercises in small groups or alone during class –

you can also complete outside of class - and will grade them from completion. Complete five of the seven exercises and you will have a perfect score for this section.

Reading Essays: You will write three relatively short essays for this course (about 750-1,000 words). The first two essays – I call them “Theory Explained” – ask that you dissect a concept from one of the theorists. The third essay asks you to dissect a concept and apply it to a contemporary social issue outlined in one of two provided news articles. A rubric will be distributed at least a week in advance of the first “Theory Explained” and the “Theory-in-Action” essays will help structure your essays.

Final Essay: The final essay consists of a deep exploration of a contemporary issue of your choice - such as racism, climate change, economic inequality, and social media engagement – through the various lenses developed through the course material and discussion. You will build a thorough description of the selected social issue and then introduce at least five theoretical tools to examine that issue. You will clearly define each tool or concept and examine the implications of using that perspective to examine the social issue. In conclusion you will describe the best theoretical tool for examining the social issue.

Late work and Attendance Policies

Assignments are due on Canvas on their assigned dates/times. Late assignments **may** receive a 5% deduction for every day that they are late excluding weekends up to a 20% deduction. Attendance is not required but is highly correlated with success in this class. In the past most students who have received As had nearly perfect attendance. If circumstances may affect your participation, attendance, or your ability to turn work in on time, please contact me as soon as those circumstances arise. I will work with students in these situations and do not need to know any details about your situation. In accordance with UO policy, you are not required to provide documentation of these circumstances.

Grade Summary

Every Assignment is Turned in on Canvas

Exercises 20%

Reading Essays 45%

Final Essay 35% (including 5% for proposal)

Grades

A	93+	C	73-76
A-	90-92	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	83-86	D	63-66
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	77-79	F	<60

An A+ will only be awarded for coursework that significantly exceeds A-level performance, which generally applies to work that earns above 100% for the course.

Course Outline:

The schedule is subject to change with appropriate notice in class or through email. All readings are available on Canvas.

Day	Topic	Content
3/28	Introduction	
3/30	Introduction (2)	Edles, Laura Desfor, and Scott Appelrouth. <i>Sociological theory in the classical era: Text and readings</i> . Sage publications, 2014. (Chapter 1)
4/4	Theory and Sense-making	Du Bois, William Edward Burghardt. <i>The souls of black folk</i> . Oxford University Press, 2008. (Excerpt)
4/6	Theory and Sense-making	Okotie-Oyekan, Aimee. 2020. "A Tale of Place-Taking." <i>Places</i> : August Issue. Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo, Amanda Lewis, and David G. Embrick. "'I did not get that job because of a Black man...': The story lines and testimonies of color-blind racism." In <i>Sociological Forum</i> , vol. 19, no. 4, pp. 555-581. Kluwer Academic Publishers-Plenum Publishers, 2004.
4/13	Macro: How structure shapes action	Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. <i>The economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist manifesto</i> . Prometheus Books, 2009. (Excerpt)
4/18	Macro: How structure shapes action	Harvey, David and Denvir, Daniel. "Why Marx's Capital Still Matters: An Interview with David Harvey." <i>Jacobin Magazine</i> (2018).
4/20	Macro: How structure shapes action	Reading: Wright, Erik Olin. "Class and Inequality in Piketty." <i>Contexts</i> 14, no. 1 (2015): 58. ESSAY #1 – THEORY EXPLAINED – DUE
4/25	Macro: How structure shapes action	Durkheim, Emile. "Suicide: A study in sociology (JA Spaulding & G. Simpson, trans.)." <i>Glencoe, IL: Free Press.(Original work published 1897)</i> (1951). (Excerpt)

		Mueller, Anna S., and Seth Abrutyn. "Adolescents under pressure: A new Durkheimian framework for understanding adolescent suicide in a cohesive community." <i>American Sociological Review</i> 81, no. 5 (2016): 877-899.
4/27	Meso: Organizations mediate structure and action	Weber, Max. <i>Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology</i> . Vol. 1. Univ of California Press, 1978. (Excerpt)
5/2	Meso: Organizations mediate structure and action	Graeber, David. "On the phenomenon of bullshit jobs: A work rant." <i>Strike Magazine</i> 3 (2013): 1-5.
5/4	Meso: Organizations mediate structure and action	No reading.
5/9	Meso: Organizations mediate structure and action	Acker, Joan. "Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations." <i>Gender & society</i> 4, no. 2 (1990): 139-158. ESSAY #2 – THEORY EXPLAINED – DUE
5/11	Meso: Organizations mediate structure and action	Wingfield, Adia Harvey, and Koji Chavez. "Getting In, Getting Hired, Getting Sideways Looks: Organizational Hierarchy and Perceptions of Racial Discrimination." <i>American Sociological Review</i> 85, no. 1 (2020): 31-57.
5/16	Micro: Action and interaction make the world	Goffman, Erving. <i>The presentation of self in everyday life</i> . London: Harmondsworth, 1978. (Excerpt) Short Proposal for Final Due
5/18	Micro: Action and interaction make the world	Goffman, Erving. <i>Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity</i> . Simon and Schuster, 2009. (Excerpt)
5/23	Micro: Action and interaction make the world	Gardner, Carol Brooks. "Analyzing gender in public places: Rethinking Goffman's vision of everyday life." <i>The American Sociologist</i> 20, no. 1 (1989): 42. ESSAY #3 – THEORY ENGAGED – DUE

5/25	Micro: Action and interaction make the world	Kang, Sonia K., Katherine A. DeCelles, András Tilcsik, and Sora Jun. "Whitened résumés: Race and self-presentation in the labor market." <i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i> 61, no. 3 (2016): 469-502.
5/30	Rest	Memorial Day
6/1	Social theory in action	Collins, Patricia Hill. "Black feminist thought in the matrix of domination." <i>Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment</i> 138 (1990): 221-238. -
6/8	FINAL ESSAY	DUE AT 5PM

Additional University and Course Policies¹

Encouraging Inclusive Learning Environments: The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center in 360 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoaec@uoregon.edu.

Academic Misconduct: The University Student Conduct Code (available at conduct.uoregon.edu) defines academic misconduct. Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. By way of example, students should not give or receive (or attempt to give or receive) unauthorized help on assignments or examinations without express permission from the instructor. Students should properly acknowledge and document all sources of information (e.g. quotations, paraphrases, ideas) and use only the sources and resources authorized by the instructor. If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic misconduct, it is the students' obligation to clarify the question with the instructor before committing or attempting to commit the act. Additional information about a common form of academic misconduct, plagiarism, is available at www.libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students.

Being A Good Academic Citizen: What it means to be a good academic citizen is changing at a rapid pace. Classroom norms differ between departments and professors. Technology and our relationship to it have much to do with these ambiguities. So, being a good academic citizen means following traditional norms of good academic behavior: don't plagiarize, including non-appropriated paraphrasing and quotation (see full statement below), be respectful of others ideas, and so forth. But, it is also worth considering newer norms. For my class your phones should be

¹ From Professor Light and/or the Teaching Engagement Program (tep.uoregon.edu)

put away. It is distracting to others to have people fidgeting with their text messages. You *can* use a laptop, but you should stay on task and respectful of others around you. If someone is being distracting, please contact me or a GTF. Last, you may NOT sell material for this class (notes, study guides, etc.). Any student who needs help with note-taking should talk to me.

Remote Learning:

Note that the same ethics and responsibilities of the face-to-face classroom apply to remote learning and our Zoom meetings. Please be respectful of one another and courteous to one another both in our large meetings and in breakout rooms.

Your Well-being:

Life at college can be very complicated. Students often feel overwhelmed or stressed, experience anxiety or depression, struggle with relationships, or just need help navigating challenges in their life. If you're facing such challenges, you don't need to handle them on your own--there's help and support on campus.

As your instructor if I believe you may need additional support, I will express my concerns, the reasons for them, and refer you to resources that might be helpful. It is not my intention to know the details of what might be bothering you, but simply to let you know I care and that help is available. Getting help is a courageous thing to do—for yourself and those you care about.

[University Health Services](#) help students cope with difficult emotions and life stressors. If you need general resources on coping with stress or want to talk with another student who has been in the same place as you, visit the Duck Nest (located in the EMU on the ground floor) and get help from one of the specially trained Peer Wellness Advocates.

University Counseling Services (UCS) has a team of dedicated staff members to support you with your concerns, many of whom can provide identity-based support. All clinical services are free and confidential. Find out more at counseling.uoregon.edu or by calling 541-346-3227 (anytime UCS is closed, the After-Hours Support and Crisis Line is available by calling this same number).

Basic Needs

Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean of Students Office (346-3216, 164 Oregon Hall) for support.

[The UO Basic Needs Resource Guide](#) includes resources for food, housing, healthcare, childcare, transportation, technology, finances, and legal support.

Grade Culture

A+ Quality of student's performance significantly exceeds all requirements and expectations required for an A grade. Very few, if any, students receive this grade in a given course.

A: Quality of performance is outstanding relative to that required to meet course requirements; demonstrates mastery of course content at the highest level.

B: Quality of performance is significantly above that required to meet course requirements; demonstrates mastery of course content at a high level.

C: Quality of performance meets the course requirements in every respect; demonstrates adequate understanding of course content.

D: Quality of performance is at the minimal level necessary to pass the course, but does not fully meet the course requirements; demonstrates a marginal understanding of course content.

F: Quality of performance in the course is unacceptable and does not meet the course requirements; demonstrates an inadequate understanding of course content.