

# INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY - SYLLABUS

## THEORIES, RESEARCH AND DISCOVERIES ABOUT SOCIETY, FOCUS ON SOCIAL ISSUES IN THE USA

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course helps students develop a working understanding of the “sociological imagination” – a perspective on the **origins, components, development, and meanings** of the **institutions and social relationships** that make up what we call society.

With an eye on **how and why** things happen in society, the unique sociological perspective has led to discoveries about visible and less obvious processes that shape social experiences. These findings have been produced by **social research** carried out over the past two centuries in the spirit of the sociological imagination.

This sociological point of view is also expressed in the **theories** that we use to guide our investigations and analyses of features of the social world that interest and profoundly influence us.

With its origins in the upheavals in Europe associated with the industrial revolution and the transitions to post-monarchical forms of governance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, sociology today continues to seek the advancement of the well-being of individuals, groups and society itself. Throughout this course you will learn about important **theories, discoveries and analyses, and research processes** in this field that reflect these intentions.

The sociological imagination has led scholars to develop new and powerful explanations for many features of experience that we often take for granted, which appear ordinary and unremarkable in everyday life. But they appear curious, significant, and amazingly complex when we ask questions about their origins, their purposes, and the ways they change in societies over time.

## TOPICS OF STUDY IN THIS COURSE

As we deepen our understanding of the tools of sociological analysis – the social theories and methods -- we will apply them to some familiar institutions that affect us all personally, but which have larger social meanings for society itself – holding it together, bringing individuals into cooperative alignment with one another, and enabling human communities to survive and develop over time.

Therefore, we will focus on concepts enabling us to talk about the formation and change in the structural framework and institutions of societies, with a focus on **families, cultural processes like religions, and workplaces and technologies**, as they influence the development of **individuals and society** itself.

We will also go deep and explore the **quality** of the **experiences of individuals** in *institutions* like families, with technology, with culture and workplaces, mostly in the US context.

Taking a cue from studies of the complexities of American life, we will look at how systems of social differentiation embodied in the emerging **globalized division of labor** and productive system, in **the class structure, the gender system, and the racial order** shape the experiences and **identities** of individuals and groups through the ways they have affected family life, and other processes.

## AMERICAN STYLE, PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

As we explore these principles of sociology and different perspectives on familiar institutions, this course will ask that you acquire some basic sociological skills *in carrying out research yourself*.

Under the instructor's guidance, you will design some small study projects, gather some data, and analyze it to reflect on the claims of established research on particular topics. I encourage you to examine facets of Chinese social life using tools and templates from US sociology, to discover what sociology can illuminate about Chinese life, and equally, what Chinese life shows us about the limitations and potential of US-style sociology.

The key to success in US colleges and universities is the ability to identify a problem in any field of study and develop a reasonable analysis of its origins, consequences, and significance. Learning to apply ideas found in books to better understand the nature and dynamics of social experience in the real world is a fundamental feature of most social science courses in the US. We will apply ideas in this course in exercises aimed at creating new knowledge or new interpretations of familiar features of experience.

A related talent required for success in the US is critical analysis of scholarly materials in a field. In our course, you will take steps to identify thesis claims that writers present in their books, chapters and articles, and which they develop or support with logic or evidence from fresh observations and other studies. Please note: course materials will be resources for you to carefully use in developing your own work. They will help you challenge established ideas, and to support new ones with convincing evidence, new findings and new interpretations of classic ideas.

This course, finally, will help you refine your skills in formal, written, academic English. It will also help find your own voice as a thinker and writer within the conventions of this scholarly field. You will develop confidence and skill in oral discussion of complex ideas, especially to defend a position that you find important or to constructively criticize and challenge those of others.

We will use course time for lectures and formal presentation by the instructor, in discussions among students, in quick reflective writings on course topics and materials, in workshops on conducting social research, and in analysis and discussions of visual and other media that illuminate course themes and features of American life.

## **COURSE DETAILS**

- Class Meetings: MTWThF – 8.30 to 10.30
- Meeting Location: TBA Hotel Conference Room
- Course Materials: Distributed via we chat and hard copies
- We Chat contact: bpowers1017

## REQUIRED WORK, WEIGHTED VALUE, AND DUE DATES (W/D OR WEEK NUMBER/DAY NUMBER)

- **RL** Reading Logs – Two submissions covering 2 readings each, at 1 page for each reading **10 percent**
- Several in-class or overnight one paragraph thematic reflections (P/NP) **5 percent**
- **Midterm Paper** – 3-5 pages Reflective Writing and Cross Cultural Journal **25 percent**

The midterm paper will ask students to critically examine an assigned piece of US scholarship and evaluate its relevance to Chinese society. How would the author's ideas be modified to be relevant to an analysis of issues in Chinese life.

- **Final Course Paper** -- one, 5 pages **40 percent**

This paper will be a description and an analysis of aspects of the personal experience of two individuals in their family settings that have introduced them to their positions in the gender system, cultural/ethnic hierarchy, or class structure of the society in which they have been raised. The paper should identify several macro features of the gender system, cultural/ethnic hierarchy, or class system which have been influential in the ways families work and prepare their youth for participation in the institutions of the wider society.

- **Final Exam**, in-class essay on a topic distributed in advance **10 percent**
- Participation in class, office hours, leadership in group work **10 percent**

## GROUND RULES

- Regular Attendance
- Work Submitted on Time
- Written Work in English and Typed in Conventional American Format
- Prepare for Active Participation in Whole Class and Small Group Activities.
- Grading: On US 4.0 scale – holistic method
- All work must be submitted for credit! Skipped assignments can mean a failure. Missed work can be made up with consent of the instructor.
- Attend an office hour, alone or with other students.

## SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND CLASS TOPICS

Materials highlighted in green will be provided electronically by the instructor.

Items with no highlights are in the course anthology: David M. Newman, Jodi O'Brien, and Michelle Robertson. *Sociology: Exploring the Architecture of Everyday Life. Readings*. 10<sup>th</sup> edition. Los Angeles: Sage, 2015.

### **Week 1 July 15 Sociological Knowledge – Its Components, Production, Contributions**

*Class July 15 The Field, the Sociological Imagination and Introductions: Self and Society*

*Class July 16 Key Themes in Sociological Analysis: Order, Power, Continuity and Change, Difference, Inequality*

*Class July 17 Levels of Analysis – Globalization and Micro Analysis*

*Making the “System” and Creating Social Selves*

*Class July 18 A Structural Explanation for Personal Experience: “The End of Men” – Changing Gender Roles in Advanced Societies; Hikikomori in Japan --Alienation and Disengagement of Individuals in societies with material abundance*

### **Week 2 July 22 Understanding Social Structure: Categories of Social Organization and Identity**

*Class July 22 Defining Problems for Research and Gathering Data – Surveys and Interviews*

*Class July 23 Social Class*

*Class July 24 Social Class*

*Class July 25 Gender as a Social Category*

*Class July 26 Gender as a Social Category*

**Week 3 July 29 Formation of Social Individuals: Culture, Religion, Families**

*Class July 29 Ethnicity and Race*

*Class July 30 Ethnicity and Race*

*Class July 31 Families as a social institution*

*Class August 1 Families as a social institution*

*Class August 2 Cultural Institutions, Ideology, Religion*

**Week 4 August 5 Technologies, Workplaces**

*Class August 5 Cultural Institutions Ideology, Religion*

*Class August 6 Workplaces and Technologies*

*Class August 7 Workplaces and Technologies*

*Class August 8 Presentation on Course-Long Research: What you found, what it means, and why it matters?*

*Class August 9 In class, Reflective Writing*

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