

**Sociology 101: Introduction to Sociology**  
**Section 1**  
**Tuesday & Thursday 10:00am – 11:25am**  
**Fowler 202**

**Instructor:** John T. Lang

**Office Hours:** Tuesday & Thursday, 11:45am – 1:15pm, and by appointment

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**Course Website:** <http://moodle.oxy.edu>

### **INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to Sociology! Sociology is the systematic, scientific study of the patterns and processes of social life, touching on all of its major dimensions—economic, political, religious, familial, and criminal, to name a few—and investigating it at both the level of grand social and historical developments, and the level of everyday, mundane interactions. It studies both individual actors, and the informal groups and formal organizations that populate the social landscape.

This course cannot be comprehensive in its coverage of the discipline of social science. But it will introduce you to some basic concepts in sociological analysis, to some fundamental arguments about the constitution of society and the individuals who comprise it, and to important substantive topics and problems in a variety of the subfields of sociology.

We will explore some of the big questions we face as social beings, and talk about some of the intriguing answers - and questions, for that matter - that sociologists have provided.

### **COURSE GOALS**

I have two main goals for this course. First, I want to help you develop a “sociological imagination.” This means you will gain the ability to understand human lives as shaped by historically conditioned social forces. Second, I want to help you develop polished writing skills. This means that you will think honestly and critically about your own assumptions and ideas, distilling them into succinct, coherent, and clear statements that others can easily understand.

You will need to examine your own experiences and observations, and you may need to be open, as assumptions about our society are challenged by sociological data and analysis. Doing this enables you to develop a more sophisticated understanding of your social world and, thus, yourself. For this reason, I take the cultivation of a sociological imagination very seriously and believe that each person with such an ability makes for a better world.

### **REQUIRED READING**

For this class you buy one book and access the other readings on the course website. This means that this class does not cost a lot and you can access the materials for the class from nearly any computer. There are times, however, that our computers or the Internet are not as reliable as we would like. Avoid disaster. Get the readings well before the class in which they will be discussed. Definitely make sure you get the readings long before we have a test. Connectivity problems are not acceptable excuses for not being ready.

There is one required text for you to buy. It is available at the Occidental College Bookstore or online at your favorite book seller.

Klinenberg, Eric. 2003. *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.  
Paperback. ISBN: 978-0226443225

### **GRADING**

I do not give extra-credit assignments. I will base your final grade on the following:

10% = Quizzes	30% = 2 <sup>nd</sup> Exam
30% = 1 <sup>st</sup> Exam	30% = 3 <sup>rd</sup> Exam

### **Attendance**

Our time together is brief and we have a wealth of ideas to exchange and explore in that limited period. I expect you to come to class on time and remain here until class is over. You may miss 2 class sessions without penalty. After that, for each missed class the your final course grade will drop one fraction of a letter grade. For example, if your work is above average and earns you a B, that absence will cause your final grade to drop to a B-. For every additional absence, the grade will continue to fall by the same fraction of a letter grade. Arriving late or departing early twice equals one absence. I have this policy to encourage students to attend class and to do well in the course. I do not distinguish between "excused" and "unexcused" absences. You are, therefore, strongly encouraged not to miss class carelessly because of the possibility of unexpected or unavoidable absences during the semester. No matter the reason, it is always your responsibility to contact other students to learn what you've missed and to get notes.

### **Exams – 90%**

You will be tested on all the required reading, the films, and all the information presented in the lectures. The lectures will cover the assigned readings, but they will also contain material not found in the reading.

Exam 1: 30% on Thursday, February 19, 2009  
Exam 2: 30% on Thursday, March 26, 2009  
Exam 3: 30% on Monday, May 4, 2009 at 8:30am

I will give you the exam question(s) in email before the exam. You will write your answer in class on the paper I provide. No notes will be allowed. There will be no review session. Attending class, taking responsibility for understanding the material, taking copious notes, and studying them thoroughly will be important for earning a high score on the exams. I do not give extra-credit assignments, nor will I allow make-ups on the exams without a superb, legitimate explanation (bring me medical records, phone numbers of surviving relatives, etc.). Weddings, personal holidays, oversleeping, car problems, and so forth are not acceptable excuses for missing exams. Drop the course now if there is a conflict between the test days and your personal schedule.

### **Quizzes – 10%**

There will be 5 short quizzes throughout the semester. Each quiz is worth 2 percent of your final grade. They will NOT be announced. You cannot make up a quiz if you miss class.

## COURSE GRADES

Do NOT count on a curve. I will assign letter grades for the entire course as follows:

93.0 and higher = A	73.0 to 77.99 = C
90.0 to 92.99 = A-	70.0 to 72.99 = C-
87.0 to 89.99 = B+	67.0 to 69.99 = D+
83.0 to 86.99 = B	63.0 to 66.99 = D
80 to 82.99 = B-	60 to 62.99 = D-
77.0 to 79.99 = C+	59.99 and lower = F.

Letter grades in this class have the following meaning:

- A *Outstanding performance.* You have demonstrated very thorough knowledge and understanding of all the material, truly superior critical thinking, and expressed insightful and original thoughts clearly. You have completed all required assignments and they have been among the best in the class.
- B *Good performance.* You have demonstrated solid knowledge and understanding of the material and good critical thinking. You have also shown the ability to express your ideas clearly. You have completed all required assignments and they have been of good quality.
- C *Satisfactory performance.* You have demonstrated basic knowledge and understanding of the major concepts taught in the class and some critical thinking. You have completed all or most of the required assignments and they have routinely been free of significant problems.
- D *Deficient performance.* You have only acquired a limited understanding of the class material. You have failed to complete all the required assignments and they have routinely had serious problems.
- F *Failure.* You have failed to learn a sufficient proportion of the basic concepts and ideas taught in the class. You have failed to complete many required assignments and they have routinely had serious problems.

## COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

I will hold you responsible for the information in this syllabus, so I expect you to read it, understand it, and ask questions about anything you don't understand.

*Office Hours:* I hold three official office hours each week. I also encourage you to make an appointment outside of office hours or come by my office anytime to see if I'm available. I am happy to discuss class concepts, college more generally, musings about majors, future planning, or graduate school.

*Feedback:* I love getting feedback on my teaching and how the class is going. I value your input and I am willing to make changes to the class according to your preferences. Please share with me any comments, suggestions, and ideas you may have, and help me make this a great class. If you would like to do so anonymously, you can type and print out a note and drop it in my mailbox on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of Middle Swan.

*Class Demeanor:* While we may find ourselves disagreeing, we must do so with respect, a commitment to hearing what others have to say, and a willingness to think and rethink our own positions. Personal insults have no place in the college classroom.

*Technology in Class:* Please turn off your cell phones when you come to class. Similarly, text messaging will not be tolerated in class. You are welcome to bring your laptop to class and use it to take notes, access readings we're discussing, and the like. You are not welcome to surf the web, check email, or otherwise perform non-class-related activities

during class. Here's my best advice: If you aren't using it to perform a task specifically related to what we are doing in class at that very moment, put it away.

*Special Accommodations/Learning Differences:* Any student eligible for and needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a disability should talk to me sometime in the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain confidential. If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes a learning disability, I encourage you to contact the friendly folks over at the Center for Academic Excellence (x2849).

*Assignments:* A hard copy of all papers/assignments must be handed in at the start of class on the scheduled date. I do not accept assignments via email. Late assignments are docked 1 grade per day. Computer and printing problems are not a good excuse for missing a deadline. Make sure to print your papers early enough to be able to address any problems before class. Keep a paper and electronic copy of everything you hand in until you receive your course grade.

*Academic Integrity:* As is always the case, you are responsible for your own work. If you find yourself questioning whether you have documented or cited your sources properly, it is your responsibility to come see me about these issues prior to submitting an assignment. If you are thinking about submitting work that is not your own due to pressure, frustration, perfectionism, or any other reason, please talk to me. I am here to help you resolve these issues before they become a problem for your academic career. Academic integrity violations, including plagiarism, will be taken very seriously. A description of Occidental's academic ethics policies is available in the Student Handbook and on the following webpage: <http://www.oxy.edu/x8000.xml>

## Readings

Your most basic duty in this class is to read all of the assigned texts. Be sure to read the calendar of class meetings, readings, assignments, papers, and exams. All readings are due on the day they are listed. You must have read them carefully, taken notes, and be prepared to pass a quiz and discuss them intelligently.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

Although I will do my best to keep us on schedule, it is possible that we will make some adjustments during the semester. I will give as much notice - both in class and on the course website - when changes are necessary.

### JANUARY

20 Welcome to the class

22 What is the sociological perspective? Why is it important?

C. Wright Mills, "The Sociological Imagination"

Peter Berger, "An Invitation to Sociology"

27 How would you go about studying something sociologically?

Emile Durkheim, "What is a Social Fact"

National Academy of Sciences, "Science, Evolution, and Creationism"

29 How does someone acquire their individual identity?

Charles Horton Cooley, "The Looking-Glass Self"

Sheldon Stryker and Peter J. Burke, "The Past, Present, and Future of an Identity Theory"

## **FEBRUARY**

- 3 Do I have to give a gift if I don't want to?  
Theodore Caplow, "Rule Enforcement Without Visible Means: Christmas Gift Giving in Middletown"
- 5 In-class movie.  
 Ethnic Notions
- 10 In-class movie.  
 Ethnic Notions
- 12 Who is black?  
Charles Mingus, "Liner Notes" from Let My Children Hear Music  
F. James Davis, "Who is Black? The One-Drop Rule Examined"
- 17 What difference does it make if someone belongs to a particular race?  
Herbert Gans, "Race as Class"  
Malcolm Gladwell, "What I.Q. Doesn't Tell You about Race"
- 19 EXAM 1. Bring pencils. Be on time.
- 24 With hard work and determination people can be anything they want to be, right?  
Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege"  
Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas, "Unmarried with Children"
- 26 Is education really like those teen high school movies?  
Maureen Hallinan, "Tracking: From Theory to Practice"  
Jay Gabler and Jason Kaufman, "Chess, Cheerleading, Chopin: What Gets You into College?"

## **MARCH**

- 3 In-class movie.  
 Stanford Prison Experiment
- 5 Do we do what we're told?  
Philip Zimbardo, "Pathology of Imprisonment"  
Stanley Milgram, "The Perils of Obedience"
- 10 Spring Break. No class.
- 12 Spring Break. No class.
- 17 What organizations shape your life as a student? As an adult?  
David Brooks, "The Organization Kid"  
Frank Elwell, "Bureaucracy"  
Derrick Jensen, "The Disenchanted Kingdom: George Ritzer on the Disappearance of Authentic American Culture"

### **MARCH**

- 19 What is social about deviance?  
David Rosenhan, "Being Sane in Insane Places"
- 24 If I'm deviant, am I a criminal?  
Howard Becker, "Becoming a Marijuana User"  
Karen Sternheimer, "Do Video Games Kill?"
- 26 Exam 2. Bring pencils. Be on time
- 31 How do you decide what is risky? How do we decide what risks to take?  
Barry Glassner, "Why Americans Fear the Wrong Things"  
Kathleen Tierney, "Disaster Beliefs"

### **APRIL**

- 2 What is a disaster? What is a worst case?  
Lee Clarke, "The Myth of Panic"
- 7 How do we put sociological theory into practice? The Urban Inferno & The City of Extremes  
Eric Klinenberg, Prologue and Introduction
- 9 Dying Alone: The Social Production of Isolation  
Eric Klinenberg, Chapter 1
- 14 Race, Place, and Vulnerability: Urban Neighborhoods and the Ecology of Support  
Eric Klinenberg, Chapter 2
- 16 The State of Disaster: City Services in the Empowerment Era  
Eric Klinenberg, Chapter 3
- 21 Governing by Public Relations  
Eric Klinenberg, Chapter 4
- 23 The Spectacular City: News Organizations and the Representation of Catastrophe  
Eric Klinenberg, Chapter 5
- 28 Where do we go from here?  
Eric Klinenberg, Emerging Dangers in the Urban Environment  
Robert Stallings, "Hindsight, Organizational Routines and Media Risk Coverage"
- 30 How do we put it all together?  
Eric Klinenberg, Together in the End  
Malcolm Gladwell, "Connecting the Dots"

### **MAY**

- 4 Final Exam at 8:30 a.m.

Good luck! I'm looking forward to a great semester!