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101 Introduction to Sociology

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The Promise of Sociology...

No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history and of their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey.

…those (social analysts) who have been imaginatively aware of the promise of their work have consistently asked three sorts of questions:

**What is the structure of this particular society as a whole?**

**Where does this society stand in human history?**

**What varieties of men and women now prevail in this society and in this period and what varieties are coming to prevail?**


What will you learn in the class?

In this introduction to sociology course we study how sociologists think about and systematically examine a variety of social processes. We explore how we develop a sense of who we are and how we define ourselves. We ask questions about how these identities and larger social forces shape how people interact with each other in social spaces such as homes, schools, public parks, churches, grocery stores, restaurants and the battlefield, to name a few. We examine the histories and social implications of inequality along race, class, gender, age, sexuality, ability, geography and other social factors for those who benefit from existing social arrangements and for those who don’t. We also look at what leads to the maintenance of these social relationships and delve into how social changes are brought about.

Sociologists explore, in spite of the significant “weight” of existing culture, social institutions and social structure, how people continuously play active roles in making, maintaining, and changing society. What social factors, for example, motivated Chinese student protestors to stand in front of the massive oncoming, and unstopping, military tanks during the Tiananmen Square anti-government protests of 1989? How did the media image of one of those protesters shape an international consciousness about the political situation in China? Questions like these are at the center of sociology.

In addition to developing our sociological imaginations by starting our inquiries from the three fundamental questions Mills poses above, we also explore the discipline of sociology itself. We examine:

- How do sociologists develop research questions? How do they relate to each other as a community of knowledge producers?
- How do sociologists draw on and reshape existing social theory in their examinations of social realities?
- How do sociologists use specific methodologies to systematically gather empirical data about social life?
- How do ethical dimensions of sociological research shape the approaches sociologists take in their studies?
- How is sociology shaped by the media? How does sociological research inform the media?
What materials will we use and where can you find them?
In addition to a basic introductory text (Newman) we will read a brief text on social structure of the contemporary U.S. prison system. We will read several reports by national and international agencies including nonprofits, research organizations, and foundations, as well as news reports by journalists about various social issues. We will frequently explore the websites of these organizations. Finally, we will also view and listen to a number of documentaries. These supplemental resources will be listed on our Blackboard site.

Course resources:


Additional readings, websites, and documentary links are posted on our course Blackboard site. All videos are on reserve at the 3rd floor CLC desk.

How is this course structured?
Class time will involve a combination of brief lectures, class discussions, in-class group exercises, documentary screenings/listening sessions, and student presentations. As much as possible, we will practice doing sociology whether that involves searching online to answer further questions about a report we read, discussing the results of an interview project or fieldwork assignment, or preparing poster sessions on a research topic in small groups.

I will lecture on some of the content in Newman but will not discuss all of the material in each chapter. You are, however, responsible for all of the assigned material in the textbook. For most classes I will introduce new material that may be an application of the content of the textbook, but that is an extension of those sociological theories, ideas, and research studies. It is important to have read all material for the day it is assigned and to bring those readings to class.

Over the course of the semester we will cover four modules that reflect broad sociological topics or orientations taken by sociologists in our work. These include:

I. Exploring the Sociological Perspective
II. Becoming Social Selves
III. Examining Intersectionality and Structures of Inequality
IV. Advocating for Social Change Through Social Activism

A detailed schedule will be posted on Blackboard as we work through each module. The schedule will list topics, assigned readings or listening materials, and exams. While we will attempt to follow the schedule as outlined, I reserve the right to make changes to the course plan as I deem necessary. You will be given advance notice of any changes. These modifications will be announced in class, sent to you by email, and posted on Blackboard (dated). I strongly recommend that you check your email and our Blackboard site regularly for any updates to the schedule.

This course relies heavily on media (video, audio and websites) that document the issues we are exploring. If you are not interested in documentary media you might consider taking another section of this class. All of the course material, including this media, is subject to be on the exams.

What are the assignments for this class?
Exams (60%)
Exam I = 15%, Exam II = 20%, Exam III (not cumulative) = 25%
Exams may include multiple choice, short answer, matching and essay questions. During exams you are allowed to use a study sheet you have prepared outside of class. This sheet can be up to 8 1/2 x 11 inches and you can write or type on both sides. I will not collect these sheets.
I will, however, collect graded exams after we review them in class. I strongly encourage you to make an appointment to review your exams with me if you need more time to ask questions about your performance.

**Individual and Group Projects 25%** (detailed guidelines, including style and due dates, forthcoming)
1. Prison-industrial complex poster session
2. Audio documentary analysis paper (choose 2 out of 4 documentaries)
3. Social movements project and presentation

**Participation (10%)**
Your participation will be evaluated based on brief assignments (to bring to class and in-class writing), in-class participation in discussions/group work, and performance on quizzes.

**Media assistance (5%)**
Pairs of students will be assigned days to serve as media assistants throughout the semester. This will entail arriving to class at 8:15 to help me set up the classroom and helping me coordinate and operate the media for that day. You will also stay after class to help rearrange the classroom as needed.

**How will written assignments and group projects be graded?**
Formal assignments will be graded according to the following criteria:
1. strength of application of course concepts and theories (consistent and robust)
2. use of supporting evidence from course materials and additional resources when relevant
3. clarity of writing style
4. technical accuracy (have you followed instructions and copy edited your writing?)

Scores will reflect the following:

* A work shows exceptional mastery of course materials and exemplary analytical and presentation skills.
* B work shows good, thoughtful understanding of course materials and above average analytical work.
* C work shows adequate, though not distinctive, understanding of course materials and average analytical work.
* D work shows poor understanding of course materials and incompetent critical analysis.
* F work shows little or no serious engagement with course materials or analytical tasks.

**How will my attendance count in this class?**
You are responsible to a large degree for how much you learn, through the decisions you make about attending class, the amount of time you invest in completing the reading and assignments, and the extent to which you actively engage in class discussions and activities. Learning is also affected by the choices and actions of others in the class – your fellow students and the instructor. Treating the course as a collective effort will make it more fruitful for everyone.

I expect you to attend class. While I do not formally take attendance every session, there is a large participation component of your grade. From time to time I will ask you to do in-class writing or to bring brief responses to course materials (typed) to class. The latter will not be individually graded, but will be the basis of small group and class discussions. This work cannot be made up even if you have an excused absence.

If you are not in class, you cannot participate. Even more significantly, if you are not in class it will impact your access to what is covered in class that is not in the Newman text. In the event that you do miss class, it is your responsibility to first contact a fellow student to find out what was covered. If you need further clarification, make an appointment to see me. All media (except for media with links on our Blackboard site) is available to check out at the CLC 3rd floor circulation desk.
Consistently missing class, arriving late or leaving early, sleeping in class, or behaving disrespectfully or disruptively (including unauthorized use of your phone or computer) will negatively affect your participation score.

**What does participation mean in this class and how will my participation be evaluated?**
Your participation will be evaluated in terms of the following:

A  You were consistently well prepared for class, actively listened, and contributed thoughtful insights and questions to both group work and class discussions.

B  You were mostly prepared for class and frequently demonstrated thoughtful engagement with the material in both group work and class discussions.

C  You were inconsistently prepared for class but infrequently engaged with the material, group work, and class discussions.

D  You were minimally prepared and showed a lack of interest in the course material, group work, and class discussions.

F  You were consistently not prepared for class and showed no interest in the course material, group work, and class discussions.

**What is the cumulative grading scale for this course?**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93% - 100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90% - 92%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87% - 89%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83% - 86%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>77% - 79%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>73% - 76%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70% - 72%</td>
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<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67% - 70%</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60% - 66%</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Below 60%</td>
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**Here are some additional course policies and Xavier resources to be aware of:**

*Make-up exams and quizzes*
I will only offer make-up exams and quizzes in cases we mutually define as emergencies. Any emergency must be officially documented. In these rare cases, I will determine a make-up exam period and process.

*Communications and Office Hours*
I will respond to student emails once a day during the week. I have limited office hours because it is my experience that Xavier students rarely drop by. If you need to meet with me outside of the hours I have listed, please make an appointment. I am often in my office and encourage you to drop by or schedule an appointment if you have a question or concern.

*Plagiarism*
Plagiarism is the unattributed use of the work of others. If you have additional questions about what constitutes this serious offense of Xavier’s policy on academic integrity, please consult with me and the “Preventing Plagiarism” resource on the library’s website: [http://www.xavier.edu/library/xu-tutor/Preventing-Plagiarism.cfm](http://www.xavier.edu/library/xu-tutor/Preventing-Plagiarism.cfm).

*Technology*
All electronic devices must be turned off and stored by the beginning of class. Computers may not be used in class unless we are doing in-class research.

*Accommodating Students with Disabilities*
Xavier’s Disability Services Office provides assistance to qualified students who feel they need some additional help to perform at their best in the classroom. This includes note taking, exam proctoring, alternate form textbooks, sign language and C-Print, and additional assistance on in-class writing assignments. Contact Disability Services: x3280, jonesc20@xavier.edu, Room 514 CLC.