

Framingham State University
Department of Sociology and Criminology
SOC 301: *Sociological Theory*
Winter 2023

Professor:	Dr. Ben Brucato
Office Location:	Online only
Office Hours:	Thursdays at 8pm (with appointment) Fridays at 9am (with appointment)
E-mail:	bbrucato@framingham.edu
Standard Class Meetings:	Asynchronous online
Course dates:	December 22 - January 16

COURSE CATALOG DESCRIPTION:

An examination of influential explanations regarding the workings of modern society. The course considers enduring concerns such as what drives “progress,” what creates social order or crisis, why social divisions exist, and how social forces and individual attitudes and actions influence one another

COURSE SUMMARY

This accelerated, online course provides an overview of classical and contemporary sociological theory through engagement with primary texts of some of the theorists who have most strongly influenced sociology in the United States.

Our primary mode of learning in this course is through reading and analyzing texts. Most of this will be done collectively, as nearly all reading assignments will be read collaboratively using the Perusall platform, and nearly all lectures will dive into the texts, unpack them, and use them as a springboard to address related theories and theorists.

A main goal of this course is to develop students’ abilities to read theory. Learning theory is like learning methods, in that it can only be learned by *doing it*. Engaging with and using theory necessarily involves reading theory like a theorist, in the same way that engaging with and using methods involves applying methods like a researcher.

Through engaging with primary texts, students encounter the form and content of social theory. Undergraduate students typically find the content of theory, in general, to be intellectually challenging,

and for classical theory to be especially difficult because the language is dated or even archaic. Said differently: for many students the writing style of classical theorists is peculiar, though perhaps much less so than, for instance, reading Shakespeare.

Just as sociology students only casually familiar with advanced mathematics may struggle at first in learning social statistics and quantitative methods, students who are not practiced in reading theory are certain to face challenges.

Unlearning can be even more difficult. You will encounter vocabulary, concepts, themes, and ways of conveying these that you are unfamiliar with, in the same way that you may not know before taking a social statistics class what a confidence interval is. At the same time, commonplace words are often used in technical, specific, and sometimes abnormal ways in theoretical works. I often tell my students that students who speak English as a second (or third) language are at an advantage, because they are less likely to presume the meanings of words that are used in specific ways by a theorist, and who are then forced to find meanings through their particular use.

Kyla Wazana Tompkins, Associate Professor of English and Gender and Women's Studies at Pomona College writes:

theory is both descriptive of the world we live in and speculative as well, in that it seeks new worlds and new language to understand what seems to be "natural" and "normal." If the ideas that theory wants to express were easy to say, they would not need to be said. The work of undoing what you know, or what you think you know, is hard. You're going to have to work hard. We aren't here to learn what we already know.

While we should learn to understand and appreciate works of theory in their own right, we should all work together to bring the works of classical theory out of the past and away from abstraction to find what is most relevant to understanding the social worlds we live in today.

This course is not (and cannot be) exhaustive. There are areas of theory that are underemphasized and overlooked. I have made an attempt to be thorough, while at times minimizing aspects of the sociological theory canon that have had diminishing returns. Our reading list tends to be—with notable exceptions—Eurocentric, androcentric, and heteronormative. Because the discipline has been dominated by white men and has been centered chiefly on the concerns and interests of white men, the reading list is also dominated by white men. We should always keep in mind how the identities and privileges of theorists shape and limit their work. Nonetheless, social theory since the latter half of the twentieth century has been profoundly shaped by postcolonial theory, which developed in the Global South, by peasant movements, and by women and sexual minorities. Some of the work that introduced these influences is included in the reading list and other such works will be introduced through lectures.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Develop your ability to deeply and critically engage primary texts written by social theorists.
2. Contextualize the works of theorists in their contemporaneous moments.
3. Relate theoretical texts to our contemporary social situations.
4. Apply theories to explain specific sociological phenomena.
5. Collaborate in facilitating meaningful discussions about social theories and the ways they explain our worlds.

COURSE STRUCTURE

This course relies extensively on collaborative learning. Course readings will use the Perusall platform for collaborative reading, allowing students to collectively annotate the text, ask and answer questions, and include comments to help “unpack” the main claims of the authors.

In all higher learning, students are responsible to their peers for enhancing the learning environment. Because of the structure of this course, that responsibility is clearer and so too are failures to meet that responsibility. Adequate preparation and participation must be consistent and thorough.

COURSE POLICIES

Communication norms: Students will have opportunities to discuss with their classmates, to answer questions, and to participate in discussions. Each student is expected to adhere to the following norms:

1. **Take appropriate space:** Contribute to discussions and interactive lectures by asking thoughtful questions and answering questions posed by the instructor or other students, while not speaking so frequently that other students are unable to participate.
2. **Stay on-topic:** This course is driven by texts, and discussions should remain centered around assigned readings and themes raised in them, the information presented during class meetings, and prepared discussion questions.
3. **Intellectual merit:** Contributions to discussion and writing for assignments will be considered in terms of intellectual merit. There are many ways to confront social issues, and in this class, we will confront them *intellectually* and *sociologically*.
4. **Charity:** We will discuss early in the term the “principle of charity.” Students should make a concerted effort to be charitable with the texts they engage, with their instructor, and with other students.
5. **Non-oppressive language:** Students should make their best attempts to use non-oppressive language.

Contacting your instructor: **Please review the syllabus for answers to your question before emailing me.** I may ignore emails with questions that are clearly answered with reference to the syllabus. I will make all reasonable attempts to answer emails within two business days, and to be quicker when major deadlines are approaching.

Late work: Assignments are available with significant time to complete before they are due. It is your responsibility to manage your own time. Without *both* exceptional circumstances and prior arrangements, late assignments are not accepted. Please contact your instructor as soon as possible to explain and document any exceptional situation that merits an extension.

Notes, slides, video and audio recording: Material provided for this course by your instructor is solely for use by students enrolled in this course. Students may only use notes, slides, and recordings for their own personal use. Students may not share notes, slides, or recordings without instructor permission. Giving or selling recordings to an outside vendor or entity without instructor permission is a violation of the instructor's copyright protection and may violate rules of the university.

Institution-wide policies (e.g., about plagiarism) are not reiterated here, but students are expected to follow all Framingham State University policies in this class.

The instructor reserves the right to amend course policies, and updates will be discussed in class and posted on Canvas.

COURSE CONTENT NOTIFICATION

At times during this semester, we will be reading about, watching, and discussing things that may be disturbing to some students.

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

Your instructor is personally and professionally committed to making the class and the university community more accessible. When their needs are known in advance, your instructor will make appropriate accommodations for students with learning or other impairments, even if they are not registered with Disability Services; however, students are advised to work with Disability/Access Services (e-mail: disabilityservices@framingham.edu) and the Center for Academic Success and Achievement (e-mail: academicsupport@framingham.edu). If you already have defined accommodations through Disability/Access Services, please ensure they send a notification as soon as possible.

COURSE ASSESSMENTS

Participation (60% of total) Education research and your instructor's experience shows that class participation strongly correlates with overall learning and course performance.

- **Collaborative Reading (30%)** Each student has an obligation to members of the class to contribute to collaborative reading on Perusall. This is a large component of your grade, so it is imperative that you access and annotate every assigned reading.
- **Discussion Board Posts (30%)** There are four in-depth discussion board assignments. At the end of weeks one through four, you will have discussion board assignments, where you will post in English about what you learned and discussed on Perusall. These posts will be for you to succinctly summarize some of your annotations and conversations. You are also required in these posts to note some open questions that you have. Prompts will be provided to help direct your writing and to help clarify my expectations. You will read posts from other students and comment on them. These comments are required and graded. Use your comments to help other students clear up confusion, to add to things they said by elaborating on a topic, or to summarize a point that they made that helped you learn more about a topic.

Exam (30% of total) There is one written exam that will have a combination of (8-10) short answer questions (answerable in 3-5 sentences) and (4-6) essay prompts (answerable in several paragraphs). The exam will take several hours to complete.

Reflection and Self-Assessment (10%) At the end of the term, students will reflect on what they have learned and assess their own progress in the course. You will have 1ve days to complete the assignment. Questions will be provided to help direct your writing. Your responses should be 1 ½ to 2 pages long, single-spaced, with 1" margins, and in Times New Roman 12 pt font.

Grades will be assigned as follows:

93-100%	= A	80-82.9%	=B-	67-69.9%	=D+
90-92.9%	= A-	77-79.9%	=C+	63-66.9%	=D
87-89.9	=B+	73-76.9%	=C	59.1-62.9%	=D-
83-86.9	=B	70-72.9%	=C-	0-59%	=F

COURSE READINGS

- Readings subject to change. Refer to the class Canvas page for the most up-to-date assignments and specific due dates.
- There are no books to buy. All readings should be accessed through Perusall.

Unit 1: Marx & Weber

Introduction: Dominant Figures in the Development of Sociology

Karl Marx: selections from *The German Ideology*, *Economic Manuscripts of 1844*; *Capital*, Vol. 1; and *The Communist Manifesto* (with Friedrich Engels)

Max Weber, selections from *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*; "Politics as a Vocation," and "Class, Status, Party"

Discussion post #1

Unit 2: Durkheim, Freud, Simmel, Du Bois

Emile Durkheim, selections from *The Rules of Sociological Method*, and *The Division of Labor and Social Solidarity*

Sigmund Freud, several short selections

Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," and "The Stranger"

W.E.B. Du Bois, selections from *The Souls of Black Folk*, and *Black Reconstruction*

Discussion post #2

Unit 3: Theorizing Early Twentieth-Century Political-Economic Developments

V.I. Lenin, selections from *The State and Revolution*

Aime Cesaire, selections from *Discourse on Colonialism*

Frantz Fanon, selections from *Black Skin, White Masks*, and *The Wretched of the Earth*

Immanuel Wallerstein, two selections on the Modern World-System

Discussion post #3

Unit 4: Symbolic Interactionism, Social Constructivism, and Post-Structuralism

Erving Goffman, selections from *Stigma* and *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*

Berger and Luckman, selections from *The Social Construction of Reality*

Zygmunt Baumann, selections from *Liquid Modernity*

Michel Foucault, interview on "Truth and Power," and selections from *Discipline and Punish* and *Society Must Be Defended*

Discussion post #4