SOCIOLOGY 4405g/9192b: Seminar in Sociological Thought: Bourdieu
Dr Scott Schaffer
Winter 2021

Course Meetings: Weds 130pm to 430pm ET

Short Course Description: This course will provide an in-depth examination of the works of Pierre Bourdieu, with particular attention to the key concepts he develops and their potential deployment for understanding society and the state in our time.

Prerequisites: For SOC 4405g: Sociology 3404f/g; for SOC 9192b: SOC 9002a/b recommended.

COURSE MEETING DETAILS

During the scheduled lecture time (Weds 130pm to 430pm ET), we will have a synchronous workshop, consisting of discussions, Q&A sessions, and occasionally lectures by me where needed. These sessions will provide you with the opportunity to dig deeper into the “big ideas,” ask questions about the readings, and gain insights into how Bourdieu’s work helps us in doing sociological analysis. There may also be asynchronous (recorded) mini-lectures that you ought to view before class — I don’t know yet, though...

You should expect to spend somewhere between nine and twelve hours per week on this course, including class meetings and reviewing recorded sessions.

REQUIRED TEXTS

There are four required texts for this course:

— Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*
— Bourdieu, *Classification Struggles*
— Bourdieu, *Habitus and Field*
— Bourdieu, *On the State*

There will also be a number of readings made available through the OWL site.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

The bulk of your tasks for this course will be the weekly work, which consists of three components: collaborative course readings through the Perusall platform, in which you’ll discuss and pose questions on the readings prior to our class session; weekly memos, which will reflect your insights into the works we’re reading in the course; and engagement in our weekly workshops (which does not mean simply talking off the top of your head). Graduate students in SOC 9192b will be assigned additional readings; these will be optional for undergraduates.

A term-long paper is required for this course. For students enrolled in SOC 4405g, this paper is to be a minimum of 15 pages in length. For graduate students in SOC 9192b, this paper is to be article-length and written in such a way that it could be submitted to a refereed journal at the same time it comes in for this course.
Weekly memos  20% of course mark
Weekly workshop engagement  20% of course mark
Collaborative course readings  20% of course mark
Course paper  40% of course mark
Discretionary engagement adjustment  Up to +/- 3% of course mark

A SHORT PRELUDE ON THE APPROACH

To my mind, sociology isn’t a field of study where you can easily memorize facts and regurgitate them. Rather, sociology represents a particular way of thinking about the world — a set of habits of mind — that will enable you to analyze a situation in the world and understand the sociologically relevant elements of that situation.

Taking a course in social theory like this one is a key component of developing those habits of mind. By understanding the ways in which key thinkers in the history of sociology have gone about working to understand the changes around them — the questions they asked, the frameworks they developed to understand them, and the ethical questions they raised about those societal changes — you will improve your ability to understand the vast number of societal changes happening around us today.

That means, of course, that this isn’t a simple cram and recall course. It’s not about “what did this thinker say?”, so much as it is about “how did this thinker come up with this way of thinking?”. It will take work to figure these things out as they’re not given in the texts we’ll read as if they were in an undergraduate textbook. But if you take the time to read and think carefully about these works, I can assure you that you’ll find great value in the course.

It will be tough. But don’t worry: it’s my job to teach you how to think in these ways, and I take that incredibly seriously, and still we’ll manage to have fun with it.