



The University of Western Ontario
SOCIOLOGY 9002
Sociological Perspectives
Fall 2024
Wednesday 16:30-19:30, SSC-5235
Method of delivery: in-person
Instructor: Professor Howard Ramos
Office Hours: Tuesdays 15h00 to 16h00
Department of Sociology, Office: SSC 5422
Email: howard.ramos@uwo.ca

Enrollment Restrictions: Enrollment in this course is restricted to graduate students in Sociology.

Course Description: This course will focus on contemporary sociological perspectives. That is: theory. It will assess how perspectives are used in contemporary sociology and will look at social theories that address pressing problems facing 21st Century societies. The seminar will wrestle with how thinkers understand social actors, group dynamics, social structures and contexts. It will also focus on understanding containers of social power and the mechanisms that shape its contestation. The seminar will analyze these issues by engaging debates on diversity, decolonization, polarization, artificial intelligence, and the environment.

Learning Outcomes:

The main goal of the seminar will be to map arguments made by theorists, understand the social and historical context that theories were developed in, identify genres of argumentation and thought, and to explore critiques of classic works. It will also focus on thinking through how concepts differ from mechanisms and outcomes and how one navigates between them to build cogent arguments and frames to be used analytically. The seminar will also see how social theory offers insights for today's societies. The approach of the seminar is dialogic, which means that it will stress informed and critical discussion and debate to unpack concepts and material. Weekly seminars will also involve discussions of portfolios and student's research and will build a collaborative environment to work on portfolio assignments and papers.

Course Material:

Selected peer-reviewed academic readings will be available on the class Brightspace site. Each week students will be expected to read 60 to 90 pages of material weekly.

Communication:

Students are responsible for checking their Western email for information on the course as well as the course Brightspace site (<https://westernu.brightspace.com/>) for news and updates.

Method of Evaluation:

The evaluation methods described in the course outline are essential requirements for the course.

Project portfolio (PP) 70%

All portfolio tasks need to be submitted on the submission week in order to be graded. No exceptions are made for those deadlines. Additional detailed information will be provided on each portfolio assignment. Complete any combination of assignments that add to 70%.

- 1) Identifying key concepts, mechanisms, and outcomes that can be engaged through research questions and offer insights on problems 20%

In no more than two pages, identify a problem and concepts, mechanisms, and outcomes that engage it through social theory. Explain how your engagement of them will contribute to social theory or debates covered in the class. Identify how they may offer insights on a social problem. The bibliography is not included in the page count. Submit week 3.

- 2) Mapping your argument 30%

Based on PP1 sketch a framework that will shape your discussion of concepts, mechanisms, and outcomes and which will offer insights on a contemporary social problem. The map can be done in Power Point in one slide or any other software that can provide a sketch of ideas on one page. It can take the form of a theoretical poster. An appendix of no more than three pages can include a description of the map. The bibliography for the description is not included in the page count of the appendix. Submit week 6.

- 3) Process literature 40%

In no more than three pages build on PP2 through PP3 and develop an analytical frame to apply to literature identified to understand a theoretical issue covered by the class. In an appendix you can include an excel sheet, or organization of material in other information management software, that could act as an analytic or coding guide to systematically track the literature you are reading and group it into categories that speak to concepts, mechanisms, and outcomes as well as how each offers insight on a social problem. Submit week 9.

- 4) Find a suitable venue to submit an academic paper on the issues you have identified 20%

In no more than two pages build on PP1 through PP3 to identify three suitable venues to potentially submit the paper to. They can be conferences, but preferably peer-reviewed academic publications. Make an argument for why you should submit to the venues and what your contribution would be them. Submit week 11.

5) Write a final class paper on issues engaged in the class 30%.

Combine elements of all previous project portfolio assignments to write an original sociological paper that uses social theory to either develop concepts or mechanisms, speaks to outcomes, or applies it to a case. Yet another option is to trace the etymology of the theory. The paper should incorporate feedback provided on other PP assignments and should critically examine issues identified in previous assignments. Essays should highlight your own observations and situate them in a dominant literature. One is expected to cite all relevant sources and include a full bibliography of works cited. The assignment should be double-spaced and the suggested page length is 20 to 30 pages. The bibliography is not included in the page count. All final assignments will be evaluated through Turnitin. Submit week 12.

Weekly reading probes 30%

Each week students are expected to map the arguments of the assigned readings. In doing so, they should identify key concepts, assumptions behind them, key people and the mechanisms that help understand society. Each week students should also identify the etymology of schools of thought or be able to position the assigned reading against other sociological perspectives. They should identify at least one additional outside peer-reviewed article that will help others understand the assigned material.

Download the additional reading(s) and share it/them with the class through the class shared drive. Additionally, in a paragraph or less explain why the material is relevant to the class and to the given week and link it to the assigned readings. In class, take a moment to introduce the material and animate discussion of it. This should be done in five minutes or less and will animate class discussion for that week. Students should be ready to continue discussing the probe throughout the class for the week it is submitted. Complete 3 weekly reading probes to pursue the full 30% of the grade for this component. There will be a sign up sheet to determine which week a probe will be presented. Each contribution is worth 10% and must be completed in real time and material should be submitted no less than one day (24 hours) before class. No late assignments will be accepted.

Important Policies

Policies for Assignment Deadlines: no late assignments are accepted and will receive a grade of zero.

Statement on Academic Offences: scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism-detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Completion of Course Requirements: course requirements must be completed by the end of the term in which the course is offered (Fall-December 31; Winter-April 30, Summer-August 31). Only in exceptional circumstances may a student take additional time to complete the course requirements. In such a case, the student must first meet with the Graduate Chair to request permission to carry the incomplete. Medical documentation, where required, will be kept on file in the Sociology graduate program office. More details regarding incompletes are outlined in the Graduate Handbook:

http://www.sociology.uwo.ca/graduate_handbook/course_information.html

Standards of Professional Behaviour: it is the responsibility of all members of the Department of Sociology to adhere to and promote standards of professional behaviour that support an effective learning environment. These include:

- **respect for others** both in and out of the classroom through words and actions (be professional, fair, and respectful in interactions with people on-line and in-person; understand and respect differences among classmates and colleagues; avoid disrupting the learning environment; respect others' expectations of confidentiality and privacy)
- **active engagement in learning** and commitment to quality (being prepared for classes; participating and listening actively to other; using technology and social media appropriately, striving to do your best)
- **personal integrity** (following through on commitments; doing own work)

Students should also be aware of the **UWO Student Code of Conduct** found at <https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/board/code.pdf>

Accessible Education Western (AEW): Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program.

Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are strongly encouraged to register with Accessible Education Western (AEW), a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AEW and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.

Health/Wellness Services: students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Statement on Gender-Based and Sexual Violence:

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html

To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Course Schedule and Readings:

1. Why engage social theory

Week 1: September 11

Fuck Nuance

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0735275117709046>

2. What is social theory

Week 2: September 18

The meaning of 'theory'

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2008.00324.x>

Less Theory. More Description.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0735275117709776>

3. Linking theories to concepts... to variables

Week 3: September 25

How Can Theories Represent Social Phenomena?

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/07352751221087719>

What is your estimand? Defining the target quantity connects statistical evidence to theory

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00031224211004187>

4. Mechanism and outcomes

Week 4: October 2

Causal Mechanisms in the Social Sciences

<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.soc.012809.102632>

Mechanisms in Political Processes

<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.polisci.4.1.21>

Mechanisms in sociology—a critical intervention

<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/sociology/articles/10.3389/fsoc.2024.1384979/full>

5. The role of critique

Week 5: October 9

What is Critical About Sociology

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epdf/10.1177/0092055X0803600402?src=getfr>

Should Social Science be Critical?

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epdf/10.1177/0048393105275279?src=getfr>

Uncritical Sociology

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/cars.12455>

6. Reading Break

Week 6: October 12-20

7. Shifting identities

Week 7: October 30

The Dolezal affair: race, gender, and the micropolitics of identity

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01419870.2015.1084430>

Inequality without Groups: Contemporary Theories of Categories, Intersectional Typicality, and the Disaggregation of Difference

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/07352751221076863>

8. Public sphere

Week 8: November 6

Reflections and Hypotheses on a Further Structural Transformation of the Political Public Sphere

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/02632764221112341>

Social cohesion in platformized public spheres: Toward a conceptual framework

<https://academic.oup.com/ct/article-abstract/33/2-3/122/7205471>

9. Sites of power

Week 9: November 13

The Sociology of Empires, Colonies, and Postcolonialism

<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-soc-071913-043131>

Communism or Neo-Feudalism?

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/07393148.2020.1718974?needAccess=true>

11. Environment and the climate crisis

Week 10: November 20

Sociology and the Climate Crisis

<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-soc-121919-054750>

Marx in the Anthropocene: Value, Metabolic Rift, and the Non-Cartesian Dualism

<https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/zksp-2017-0013/html>

12. Artificial Intelligence

Week 11: November 27

Toward a Sociology of Artificial Intelligence

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2378023121999581>

Transhumanist values

<https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=d5328fc2d8604d08bfa2b218279620ce790c175e>

13. Wrapping up or just beginning

Week 12: December 4