

# SOCIOLOGY 2271b: Survey of Contemporary Theory

Winter 2022

Dr Scott Schaffer

Live Course Meetings: Weds 130pm to 330pm ET, SH 3345/  
Teams

Office Hours: Fri 1pm to 2pm via OWL

Email: [scott.schaffer@uwo.ca](mailto:scott.schaffer@uwo.ca)

Skype: prof\_schaffer

## **FORMALITIES**

**Short Course Description:** Continuities in Sociological thinking will be stressed by building upon the insights of the discipline's founding thinkers, while simultaneously exposing students to the rich variety that characterizes contemporary theorizing. Among other approaches, structural functionalism, symbolic interactionism, Marxism, critical theory, feminist theory, and post-modernism will be discussed. 2 hours lecture, 1 hour tutorial, 0.5 course.

**Antirequisites:** Sociology 2240E, or the former Sociology 230.

**Prerequisites:** Sociology 2270a/b.

**Note:** Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enrol in it, you will be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

## **COURSE MEETING DETAILS**

There are a number of elements to this course, some of which can be done at your leisure, and some of which ought to be done at the scheduled lecture and tutorial times:

— There are weekly readings and collaborative discussions on the Perusall platform that need to be completed *asynchronously* prior to the start of lecture. Any additional resources for a particular week, such as podcasts or videos, should also be completed before lecture begins.

— Our scheduled lecture meetings on Wednesdays from 130pm to 330pm will be delivered *synchronously* — in other words, live. I will be holding lectures using a “hyflex” model: you are welcome to join me in the weeks (listed below) where I will be giving in-person lectures; you can also watch and participate synchronously online if you do not wish to come to the classroom; and for students who are not able to view them live, the recordings will be

posted on the OWL site. This also means that some weeks, I will not be physically present in class — synchronous meetings will still occur.

— Tutorials (which are the really important part where you get the hands-on help in learning how to deal with sociological theory) will be delivered *synchronously* at the time you signed up for. These will also be recorded and posted on the OWL site for students who are unable to attend or access the tutorial sessions live.

You should expect to spend somewhere between eight and ten hours per week on this course.

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course is designed to provide you with an in-depth study of theories of society and social life in the twentieth century. Social theory may appear to be the most abstract part of your studies in sociology; however, social theory plays a number of roles in our everyday life: theory has helped in the development of our political system, our society, and our culture; theory helps us to understand some of the strange things people do in social settings; and theory attempts to show us how some of the wrongs done to others in the social world can be rectified. Sociological theory is also the foundation of the entire field of sociology; the best way to understand what goes on in sociology as a whole (and your other classes in particular) is through understanding social theory. But more importantly, social theory is a way of seeing and thinking about the world and approaching whatever data set you deal with – and this is the primary skill you will develop throughout the year.

There are a number of tasks you will be asked to engage in this term. First, the obvious – you must read all of the assigned readings before “coming to class.” Many of the readings are difficult, and the lectures are intended to illuminate the issues discussed in them. You should not – and this is your second task – presume that the ideas put forth in lecture are “the answers to the questions.” One of the toughest parts of studying social theory is the realization that there are no “right” or “wrong” answers, only better or worse ones, and it is your job to come up with those answers and to defend them. Third, you will be asked to engage the readings in a variety of ways – papers, written discussion questions, online group discussions, and in class. Fourth, much of this course will be dedicated to thinking abstractly about some of the key sociological concepts with which we work every day. Part of the task before you is to work through the different ways in which these concepts are thought of, analyzed, seen in relation to others, and defined, and know that they all represent legitimate and coherent views of society. Fifth, you are not only expected to know *what* the various theorists we’ll be reading have to say; rather, you need to think about *how* they see the world and how *you* would utilize what they have to say to analyze sociological phenomena. Finally, you are expected to open yourself up to the materials in this course. They are, as are most university courses, intended to bend your mind, and your task this year is not to regurgitate what I tell you about these theorists, but to figure out what *you* believe and what *you* can do with what these theorists have to offer you.

Your continual preparation during the year will be crucial to your success. Do not rely on the class discussions to substitute for the readings (and vice versa) – they can’t. Do not just “read” (i.e., turn pages and highlight randomly); *read carefully, critically, and deeply*, and think about why the author is saying what they’re saying. Ultimately, what you have to say about

these texts will be up to you, making this your journey to a better understanding of the world in which you exist.

## **COURSE TEXTS**

There is one textbook available for purchase:

Kivisto, *Social Theory: Roots and Branches*, 6th edition, **ebook version**. (Abbreviated ST)

This needs to be purchased through the Perusall platform, linked to OWL, or through the University Bookstore. If you have not yet purchased access to this text, do so for the shortest time period possible. Other readings will be available via OWL and Perusall, but do not need to be purchased.

Links to sociological dictionaries and to sociology student writers' manuals will be posted on OWL. I can suggest print versions if you wish to pursue this route.

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

### **Midterm Examinations**

40% of course mark

There will be two midterm examinations for this course in February (20%) and March (20%). They will be timed examinations consisting of essay exam questions, which will take place via OWL. The possible questions for these examinations will be provided to you two weeks in advance of the exam period in order to give you time to prepare for them and to consult with me and your teaching assistants.

### **Final Examination**

30% of course mark

We will have a timed final examination via OWL during the Winter term examination period. This cumulative examination will be an essay examination, and questions will be provided to you two weeks in advance of the exam date in order to give you time to prepare for them and to consult with me and your teaching assistants.

### **Collaborative Course Reading**

15% of course mark

As a way of encouraging you to do the weekly readings and think more about them than simply turning the pages, you (along with a group of randomly assigned classmates) will take part in what is known as “collaborative course reading” — participating in online discussions about the readings through the Perusall platform (available via OWL). During each week's readings, you will identify points of interest, make claims about the readings, and pose questions about things that confuse you. These contributions will be evaluated on the basis of their pertinence to the readings, the level of thought that went into the contribution, the ways in which your contribution responds to those of others in your group, and the detailed thought process in your contribution.

The goal here is to ensure that you are able to complete and understand the readings on their face before lecture so that we can do more interesting work in class, and my desire is that you will earn full marks for this part of the course. A rubric will be distributed and discussed in the first class session. One-third of the CCR marks will be delivered with each exam.

### Tutorials

15% of course mark

Once a week you will meet (online) in a smaller group tutorial setting to discuss the readings, themes, and issues that this course will engage. Your tutorial leader will provide you with assistance in figuring out what's going on in class, and in doing so will engage you in a variety of ways. The teaching assistants for this course will be discussing their assignments and evaluation criteria with you in the first tutorial session. You will receive one-third of your tutorial marks with each exam.

### Lecture Attendance and Course Engagement

-3 to +3% of course mark

Lecture attendance is expected in this course, and attendance will be taken in each session. I can assure you that your success in this course depends greatly on your attendance and engagement in class. At the end of the year, **at my discretion**, I may adjust your calculated course mark based upon your attendance in class as well as other elements of participation in the course in order to ensure that your final mark reflects your overall performance in the course. Please note that failing to attend lectures regularly and to engage in the course in other ways may result in a *reduction* of the calculated mark.

I take "course engagement" as anything that indicates your commitment to doing the best work you are capable of doing – ranging from attentively listening to the contributions of your peers, to thoughtfully contributing to the in-class discussion, to posing questions to me during office hours or via email. This also includes continuing course-related discussions on OWL, which will be beneficial for your participation grade *and* for the work you do elsewhere in the course. *Merely showing up for class does not constitute "course participation," and merely talking off the top of your head does not equal "discussion."*

## **GRADING POLICIES**

I do my best to ensure that the evaluation of your work is as impartial as possible and reflects the quality of what you submit at the due date and time as measured against the evaluation guidelines.

If you are unable to write one of the midterm exams, the weight of that exam will be shifted to the following exam (so if you miss the March exam, your final exam would be worth  $30\% + 20\% = 50\%$  of your course mark). **This shift will be automatic**, and no accommodation need be sought nor any absence self-reported. If you miss the final examination, you **must** seek a Special Examination accommodation.

The Department of Sociology mandates a particular course mark distribution. As much as possible, the mark you earn in this course will be the mark you will receive. **For 2200-**

level courses, the course mean should be between 69% and 73%, and there are to be more Bs than As.

Evaluation guidelines for written work, as well as other policies pertaining to the course, are listed in the Course FAQ handout, which is available on OWL. You should read them thoroughly, both at the start of the term and prior to submitting assignments as they will provide you with a comprehensive checklist for your work.

In the interests of ensuring that your concerns/anxieties/obsessions with the marks you receive do not get in the way of your learning in this course, I offer the following basic guideline: **For any student who puts forth their best effort on every component of this course (i.e., is fully engaged in the course), the lowest mark you will earn in SOC 2270a is a 60.** In other words, if you are engaged in this course, I won't fail you. If you're not, you risk failing yourself.

If you have issues with the evaluation of your assignment, you may submit to the person who evaluated your work a one-page statement of how it is that you think your work as submitted was wrongly evaluated *no sooner than 24 hours after we return the work to you, and no later than two weeks after it is returned to you.* We will then meet to discuss the issue. Please note that I reserve the right to elevate your mark, maintain the mark as applied, or to lower the mark depending on that re-evaluation.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

Below is the preliminary schedule of readings and lectures for the course. Generally speaking, we will endeavour to hold to this schedule, so you should plan your time accordingly.

My expectation is that you will do your best to get through all of it — and in general, if you read a bit each day, five days a week, you will get through it all with a minimum of suffering. (Note that the standard expectation for a second-year course is that you will spend 2-3 hours outside of class for every hour of class time; thus, 6-9 hours per week is to be expected.)

As you are reading, be sure that you do not attempt to simply turn pages or skim to get through the texts as quickly as possible. “The answers” are “not there”; they require careful reading, careful thinking, note-taking, idea-jotting, mind-mapping, doodles, and any other number of possible ways for you to sort out your ideas about them. They are here to provoke you, to get inside your head and rattle around until they mesh together with some other thing to create A New Idea. Let that happen.

Lecture outlines will be distributed with the async lectures each week. They provide signposts for where we are in our discussions. You should use them for your note-taking, both when watching the async lectures and in our discussions in the sync session and your tutorial.

Now that you've gotten to this point in reading the course outline, send me a picture of a dragon to signify that you have read and agreed to the terms in this course outline. And not some cutesy dragon, either. Something with some fierceness might be good.

Readings are available on the Perusall platform, and additional selections are available for download from OWL (noted by an asterisk). They are all required except as noted.

## Section 1. Recombination and tradition in modern social thought.

Week 1: W Jan 12. Symbolic interactionism and phenomenology. *ST #29-32, 34.*  
*Collaborative Course Readings (CCR) begin on Perusall*

Herbert Blumer, "Society as Symbolic Interaction"  
C. Wright Mills, "Situated Actions and Vocabularies of Motive"  
Erving Goffman, "Performances"  
Alfred Schutz, "The Stranger: An Essay in Social Psychology"  
Randall Collins, "Interactional Ritual Theory"

Week 2: W Jan 19. Critical Theory and the Frankfurt School. *ST #45-48 + sel.*

Walter Benjamin, "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"  
Theodor Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda"  
Herbert Marcuse, "One-Dimensional Man"  
Jürgen Habermas, "Three Normative Models of Democracy"  
\* Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "The Culture Industry"

Week 3: W Jan 26. French theory: Structuralism and poststructuralism. *ST #67-70.*

Pierre Bourdieu, "Structures and Habitus"  
Jean Baudrillard, "Advertising"  
Alain Touraine, "The Subject and Social Movements"  
Michel Foucault, "Panopticism"

Week 4: W Feb 2. Modernity. Finally, modernity. *ST #61, 63-66*

Anthony Giddens, "The Reflexivity of Modernity"  
Zygmunt Bauman, "On Living in a Liquid Modern World"  
Jean-François Lyotard, "The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge"  
S. N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities"  
Peter Wagner, "Modernity as a Project of Emancipation and the Possibility of Politics"

Week 5: W Feb 9. Integration, review, and catch-up week. **No readings.**

**Fri Feb 11, 1205am to Sun Feb 13, 1155pm ET (UTC -5):  
First midterm examination available**

## **Section 2. Modernity's underbelly. Sociology, colonization, hegemony, and knowledge.**

Week 6: W Feb 16. The injustices of knowing and canon formation. OWL readings.

- \* Miranda Fricker, selections from *Epistemic Injustice*
- \* Julian Go, "Decolonizing Sociology: Epistemic Inequality and Sociological Thought"

### **W Feb 23 – No class: Reading Week.**

Week 7: W Mar 2: Colonization and Racialization. ST #49 + OWL readings.

- \* Anténor Firmin, selections from *On the Equality of the Human Races*
- \* Frantz Fanon, selections from *Black Skin, White Masks*
- \* W.E.B. DuBois, "The Concept of Race"
- Michael Omi and Howard Winant, "The Theoretical Status of the Concept of Race"

Week 8: W Mar 9. Reclaiming Humanity: Rethinking the colonized. OWL readings.

- \* José Vasconcelos, selections from *The Cosmic Race*
- \* Aimé Césaire, selections from *Discourse on Colonialism*
- \* Achille Mbembe, "The Society of Enmity"

Week 9: W Mar 16. Integration, review, and catch-up week. **No readings.**

**F Mar 11 1201am EST (UTC -5) to Sun Mar 13 1155pm EDT (UTC -4):  
Second midterm examination available.**

## **Section 3. Systems and their ruins. Inequalities, injustices, individuals.**

Week 10: W Mar 23. Sexual formations: Gender and sociality. ST #41-43 + OWL.

CHOOSE any three of the following:

- \* Marianne Weber, "Authority and Autonomy in Marriage"
- \* Simone de Beauvoir, "From *The Second Sex*"
- \* Xinyan Jiang, "Confucianism, women, and social contexts"
- Judith Butler, "Subversive Bodily Acts"
- Patricia Hill Collins, "Toward an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology"
- Raewyn Connell, "Femininity and Masculinity"

Week 11: W Mar 30. Systems and deformations of individuals. OWL readings.

\* Laura Ann Stoler, “‘The Rot Remains’: From Ruins to Ruination”

**PLUS choose any *two* of the following:**

- \* Betty Friedan, selections from *The Feminine Mystique*
- \* Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Universalism and Belonging in the Logic of Capital”
- \* Uma Narayan, “Contesting Cultures: ‘Westernization,’ Respect for Cultures, and Third-World Feminism”
- \* Sayak Valencia, selections from *Gore Capitalism*
- \* Vivek Chibber, “Development from Below” and “Subaltern Mythologies”

Week 12: W Apr 6. Globality, coloniality, inequality. OWL readings.

**CHOOSE any *two* of the following:**

- \* Ramon Grosfoguel, “Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality”
- \* Gloria Anzáldua, selections from *Borderlands/La Frontera*
- \* Karla Villapudua, selections from *Tijuanacidio*
- \* Maria Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism”

## **Final Examination Date (TBD): Cumulative Final Examination**

### **COURSE POLICIES**

It is crucial that you read, understand, and agree to these policies. Your continued enrolment in the course constitutes acceptance of these policies and expectations of you during the term. Note that additional information on these policies and other things that might come up during the year can be found in the Course FAQ on OWL.

**Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:** UWO promotes the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest, and responsible manner. All students should act with personal integrity, respect for other students, and help maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts. Violations of academic integrity will be treated very seriously.

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a **major** academic offence (see the Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar), and I take it very seriously.

All required papers *will* 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 UWO and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Students who submit work found to be substantially plagiarised (i.e., work in which plagiarism can be demonstrated in substance) will be subject to the procedures outlined in the Scholastic Discipline for Undergraduate Students section of the Western Academic Calendar. This referral will be done without exception.

**Accessibility.** Please contact me if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 519/661.2111 x82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation.

**Attendance and Accommodation for Medical Illness.** Your attendance in class sessions is expected and constitutes part of your mark. All synchronous (live) sessions will be recorded and posted on OWL, and it is your responsibility to catch up with that material.

**Communications:** Email is my preferred method of contact. Any professor should tell you this: **Write your emails to me as you would want any letter of recommendation I might write on your behalf written for you.** They should be professionally prepared, spell- and grammar-checked, and not written in “text message” format. They should account for the highest degree the person has (hence, I am “Dr Schaffer” or “Professor Schaffer,” or even “Schaffer,” not “Mr Schaffer”), and they should be respectful of the recipient. Be sure to always sign them; if your email address is “HotKitty642@aol.com” and you don’t sign it, I will presume it is spam and treat it accordingly.

**Mental Health.** Students who are in emotional or mental distress should refer to Mental Health @ Western ([http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental\\_health](http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health)) for a complete list of options for how to obtain help.

**Other Important Issues: *My Pedagogical Prime Directive is No BS.*** This course outline details what I require of my students, and should you meet those requirements, you can expect an intellectually fulfilling class session and course. If you fail to meet those requirements, I reserve the right to excuse you from the class session, either individually or collectively, as I firmly believe that you cannot adequately benefit from what goes on in my classroom without having put in the necessary preparation before class and the necessary engagement in class. I also have nearly twenty years’ evidence for this belief, should you need it. I hope that you will not.

I will actively work to respond to issues that come up in class, either during the term or on a daily basis. To that end, I reserve the right to change, adapt, or amend this course outline, the reading schedule, and other policy issues at any time in order to make possible the improvement of the course; *however, I will only do so with the consent of and input from the class as a whole.* Finally, any issues that you feel are impacting on your ability to do well in the course, whether they are issues inside or outside the classroom, should be brought to me *directly and firstly* as soon as possible. If the issue is not adequately resolved through the discussion with

me, you need to follow the Sociology department's protocols for addressing a grievance. I take what goes on in this course very seriously and personally; I hope you will as well.

## **COURSE EXPECTATIONS & LEARNING OUTCOMES**

As with any university course, you are expected to be fully engaged in this course and able to be responsible for your own learning. In order to do that, you should be prepared to meet the following expectations:

- ❖ Consistent attendance in class sessions, with you having read the materials prior to class, being prepared to discuss the materials, to pose any questions that you have, and to engage yourself and others in the learning process;
- ❖ Attendance in my office hours whenever you have a question or need help in understanding the materials or issues under discussion;
- ❖ Thoughtful reflection on the course materials and issues prior to coming to class, thoughtful discussion of these materials and issues during class sessions, and further reflection and engagement with them after class;
- ❖ The diligent pursuit of all assignments, with you committed to doing your best work on each one and dedicated to improving the quality of that “best work” throughout the term;
- ❖ And, overall, your commitment to giving us your best work in every class session and throughout the term.

If you engage with and meet these expectations, you can expect that by the end of this term, you will be able to do the following (among other things that you'll be surprised you've learned how to do and discovered about yourself):

- ❖ Understand some of the key theoretical texts in sociology and how they underpin the discipline of sociology;
- ❖ Develop clear, well-thought, and increasingly sophisticated responses to questions posed;
- ❖ Display facility in and fluency with core sociological and theoretical concepts and utilise them in the development of oral and written arguments;
- ❖ Demonstrate an understanding of the ways in which theory is constructed, operates as a basis for sociological analysis, is refined, and relates to the research process;
- ❖ And understand and discuss the continuing relevance of contemporary sociological theory for sociological research and living in Canadian society today.