



The University of Western Ontario
SOCIOLOGY 4405G-001
Seminar in Sociological Theory
Winter 2023

Wednesdays at 16:30pm-19:30pm, SSC-5230

Method of delivery: in-person

Instructor: Professor Howard Ramos

Office Hours: Tuesdays 16h30 to 17h30

Department of Sociology, Office: SSC 5316

Email: howard.ramos@uwo.ca

Zoom link: <https://westernuniversity.zoom.us/j/95717167542>

Course Description: This course will examine issues of public debate, using a field and arenas approach, and will explore the mechanisms that influence public debate and social and political polarization. The course will examine theories as they relate to understandings of issues such as authority, expertise, science, climate change, vaccines, immigration, and the pursuit of justice.

Prerequisite(s): 0.5 courses from Sociology 2263A/B, Sociology 2270A/B, Sociology 2271A/B OR 1.0 Sociology 2240E, and registration in third year or above in a Department of Sociology module or registration in fourth year in any module.

Anti-requisite(s): None.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:

Students will learn to read and process original scholarly works and will learn the skills needed to identify and critique arguments in social science literature. Students will also work through a series of tasks needed to build an academic research agenda and will gain research skills on how to build a comparative analytic paper that identifies key mechanisms and develops sociological arguments.

Course Material:

Selected peer-reviewed academic readings will be available on the class OWL site. Each week students will be expected to read 30 to 60 pages of material.

Communication:

Students are responsible for checking their Western email for information on the course as well as the course OWL site (<http://owl.uwo.ca>) for news and updates.

Method of Evaluation:

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

Cumulative project portfolio: do any four of the following tasks that add to a total of 80%:

All portfolio tasks need to be submitted by the first submission week in order to be graded. No exceptions are made for that deadline. If submitted at that date, an initial grade will be offered, the class will discuss material and students will have the rest of the term to improve the portfolio task until it achieves the highest possible mark for the portfolio task based on work submitted by the last week of class. Only four tasks will be graded per student.

1) Identifying key concepts 20%

In no more than two pages, identify the key concepts that need to be examined in order to understand political debate versus polarization. The bibliography is not included in the page count. Complete first submission by week 3.

2) Finding relevant literature to sufficiently examine the key concepts 20%

In no more than one page, identify key databases to search for information related to the key concepts, also identify keywords and a strategy to determine search constraints and saturations. Additionally provide a bibliography of searches and screen shots to determine what was found. Complete first submission by week 4.

3) Find a suitable venue to submit the paper 20%

In no more than one page build on portfolio assignments one through five and identify three suitable venues to potentially submit the paper to. They can be conferences, but preferable peer-reviewed academic publications. Complete first submission by week 5.

4) Finding relevant cases to apply literature 20%

In no more two pages, identify cases that can be used to explore the key concepts and literature that was found. Also identify at least 10 sources per case to help offer information to discuss the case. Complete first submission by week 6.

5) Develop an analytic frame to process literature 20%

In no more than one page build on portfolio assignments one through three and develop an analytical frame to apply to literature read. In an excel sheet create a coding guide to systematically track the literature you are reading. Complete first submission by week 8.

6) Develop a comparative analytic frame to analyze the cases 20%

In no more than one page build on portfolio assignments one through four and develop an analytical frame to apply to interpret the cases. In an excel sheet create a comparative table to systematically apply the literature to the cases we will analyze. Complete first submission by week 8.

7) Contribute to the final class paper on issues engaged in the class 20%. Complete first submission by week 9.

In no more than three pages write material for the final paper using the analytical frame and literature and case processing frames. Cite all relevant sources and add to the bibliography

8) Editing the work of others who have crafted material for the paper. Complete first submission by week 11.

Offering copyediting, comments and fact checking of material that is the class shared document for the final paper. Helping with journal formatting. Helping with the bibliography.

Weekly information probes 20%

In any given week, find recent news that is relevant to the work we cover in the class or additional academic articles that the class should know about. In a paragraph or less explain why the material is relevant and link it to the assigned readings. In class, take a moment to introduce the material and animate discussion of it. Complete 5 weekly information contributions to pursue the full 20% of the grade for this component. Each contribution is 5% and must be completed in real time.

Contingency plan for an in-person class pivoting to 100% online learning:

In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence during the course that necessitates the course delivery moving away from face-to-face interaction, affected course content will be delivered entirely online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will **not** change. Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

Student Absences:

If you are unable to meet a course requirement due to illness or other serious circumstances, please follow the procedures below.

Assessments worth 10% or more of the overall course grade:

For work totaling 10% or more of the final course grade, students must provide valid medical or supporting documentation to their Home Faculty Academic Counselling Office as soon as possible.

Absences from Final Examinations:

Students must provide valid medical or supporting documentation to their Home Faculty Academic Counselling Office as soon as possible. Academic Counselling will determine eligibility to write a Special Examination (the name given by the University to a makeup Final Exam).

You may also be eligible to write the Special Exam if you are in a “Multiple Exam Situation” (e.g., more than 2 exams in 23-hour period, more than 3 exams in a 47-hour period).

Note: missed work can *only* be excused through one of the mechanisms above. Being asked not to attend an in-person course requirement due to potential COVID-19 symptoms is **not** sufficient on its own. Students should check the Western website to see what directives for Covid are to be followed. Western has been and will continue to follow directives established by the Middlesex-London Health Unit. That directive will state whether students should or should not come to campus/class and any other requirements (e.g., masks are mandatory). Please check on your own and do not email the instructor, the Department Undergraduate Advisor/Coordinator or the Faculty of Social Science Academic Counselling Office.

Important Policies

Academic Consideration for Missed Work: Students must provide valid medical or supporting documentation in

order to receive accommodation for missed work worth 10% or more of the final grade in the course. All required documentation for absences must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's Home Faculty. Individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds or for other reasons.

Western's policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness can be found at

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf. The student medical certificate is available at

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

Religious Accommodation: When a course requirement conflicts with a religious holiday that requires an absence from the University or prohibits certain activities, students should request accommodation for their absence in writing at least two weeks prior to the holiday to the course instructor and the Academic Counselling office of their Faculty of Registration. Please consult University's list of recognized religious holidays (updated annually) at

<https://multiculturalcalendar.com/ecal/index.php?s=c-univwo>.

All students pursuing academic consideration, regardless of type, must contact their instructors no less than 24 hours following the end of the period of absence to clarify how they will be expected to fulfill the academic responsibilities missed during their absence. Students are reminded that they should

consider carefully the implications of postponing tests or midterm exams or delaying submission of work and are encouraged to make appropriate decisions based on their specific circumstances.

Accessibility Options: Students with disabilities or accessibility challenges should work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html), which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Information regarding accommodation of exams is available on the Registrar's website: www.registrar.uwo.ca/academics/examinations/accommodated_exams.html

Scholastic 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: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

A Note on Plagiarism: Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea 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 scholastic offence.

Plagiarism Checking: All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for 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 (<https://www.turnitin.com/>).

Mental Health: Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (www.uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/index.html) for a complete list of options how to obtain help.

Please visit the Social Science Academic Counselling webpage for information on adding/dropping courses, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters: [Academic Counselling - Western University \(uwo.ca\)](#).

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

Week 1: January 12

Adut, Ari. 2012. "A theory of the public sphere." *Sociological Theory* 30(4): 238-262.

Benson, Rodney. 2009. "Shaping the public sphere: Habermas and beyond." *The American Sociologist* 40(3): 175-197.

Habermas, Jürgen. 2022. "Reflections and hypotheses on a further structural transformation of the political public sphere." *Theory, Culture & Society* 39(4): 145-171.

Kellner, D. 2000. "Habermas, the public sphere, and democracy: A critical intervention." In L. E. Hahn (Ed.), *Perspectives on Habermas* (pp. 259-288). Chicago: Open Court.

2. What are arenas?

Week 2: January 19

Hilgartner, Stephen, and Charles L. Bosk. 1988. "The rise and fall of social problems: A public arenas model." *American Journal of Sociology* 94(1): 53-78.

King, Brayden G., and James M. Jasper. 2022. "Strategic interactions and arenas: A sociological perspective on strategy." *Strategic Organization* 20(4) 810-820.

Kluttz, Daniel N., and Neil Fligstein. 2016. "Varieties of sociological field theory." *Handbook of contemporary sociological theory*. Springer. 185-204.

3. What are social fields?

Week 3: January 26

Fligstein, N., & McAdam, D. 2011. "Toward a general theory of strategic action fields." *Sociological Theory*, 29(1): 1-26.

Martin, John Levi. 2003. "What is field theory?." *American Journal of Sociology* 109(1): 1-49.

Steinmetz, G. 2016. "Social fields, subfields and social spaces at the scale of empires: Explaining the colonial state and colonial sociology." *The Sociological Review*, 64(2_suppl): 98-123.

4. What is communicative action?

Week 4: February 2

Atilgan, Hatice. 2020. "Reframing civil disobedience as a communicative action: Toward a critical deliberative theory of civil disobedience." *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 40(1/2): 169-183.

Kim, Jooan, and Eun Joo Kim. 2008. "Theorizing dialogic deliberation: Everyday political talk as communicative action and dialogue." *Communication Theory* 18(1): 51-70.

Picciotto, Robert. 2017. "Evaluation: Discursive practice or communicative action?" *Evaluation* 23(3): 312-322.

5. What are discursive opportunities and forms of engagement?

Week 5: February 9

Koopmans, Ruud, and Susan Olzak. 2004. "Discursive opportunities and the evolution of right-wing violence in Germany." *American journal of Sociology* 110(1): 198-230.

Lindstedt, Nathan. 2018. "Shifting frames: Collective action framing from a dialogic and relational perspective." *Sociology Compass* 12(1): e12548.

Snow, David A. 2008. "Elaborating the discursive contexts of framing: Discursive fields and spaces." *Studies in symbolic interaction*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

6. Taking stock, identifying themes and issues to probe: workshopping ideas and readings

Week 6: February 16

7. Reading break

Week 7: February 18 to 26

8. What are ordering principles and dimensions of justice?

Week 8: March 2

Boltanski, Luc, and Laurent Thévenot. 2000. "The reality of moral expectations: A sociology of situated judgement." *Philosophical Explorations* 3(3): 208-231.

Jensen, Jacob Didia. 2018. "Justice in reality: overcoming moral relativism in Luc Boltanski's pragmatic sociology of critique." *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory* 19(3): 268-285.

Lamont, Michèle. 2012. "Toward a comparative sociology of valuation and evaluation." *Annual review of Sociology*.

9. Who engages the public sphere?

Week 9: March 9

Benhabib, Seyla. 2002. Deliberative democracy and multicultural dilemmas. In *The claims of culture: Equality and diversity in the global era* (pp. 105-146). Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP.

Dahlberg, Lincoln. 2005. "The Habermasian public sphere: Taking difference seriously?" *Theory and Society* 34(2): 111-136.

Fraser, Nancy. 1990. "Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy." *Social Text* 25/26: 56-80.

10. What is the scale of the public sphere?

Week 10: March 16

Calhoun, Craig J. 2002. "Imagining solidarity: Cosmopolitanism, constitutional patriotism, and the public sphere." *Public Culture* 14(1): 147-171.

Smith, Jackie. 2015. "Social Movements and the Multilateral Arena." (pp.607-618) *Oxford Handbook on Social Movements* (eds della Porta, Donatella, Mario Diani, and Jackie Smith). http://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/26766/1/Smith_Oxford_Handbook_FIN.pdf

Schlesinger, Philip. 2020. "After the post-public sphere." *Media, Culture & Society* 42(7-8): 1545-1563.

11. What is the temporality of the public sphere?

Week 11: March 23

Castells, Manuel. 2008. "The New Public Sphere: Global Civil Society, Communication Networks, and Global Governance." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616(1), 78–93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207311877>

Fraser, Nancy. 2018. "The Theory of the Public Sphere: The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1962)." *The Habermas Handbook*. Columbia University Press. 245-255.

Sassen, Saskia. 2000. "Spatialities and Temporalities of the Global: Elements for a Theorization." *Public Culture*, 12(1), 215-232.

12. Public debate or polarization?

Week 12: March 30

Bennett, W. Lance, and Barbara Pfetsch. 2018. "Rethinking political communication in a time of disrupted public spheres." *Journal of communication* 68(2): 243-253.

Downey, Dennis J. 2022. "Polarization and Persuasion: Engaging Sociology in the Moral Universe of a Divided Democracy." *Sociological Perspectives* 65(6): 1029-1051.

Van Dyk, Silke. 2022. "Post-truth, the future of democracy and the public sphere." *Theory, Culture & Society* 39(4): 37-50.

13. Final thoughts and workshopping ideas and themes discussed during the term

Week 13: April 6