

SOCIOLOGY 3404G: Modern Sociological Theory

Winter 2025

Dr Jeremy R. Smith

Email: jsmit747@uwo.ca

FORMALITIES

Short Course Description: This course will survey major trends in modern sociological theory. Prerequisite(s): 0.5 course from SOC 2263a/b, 2270a/b, 2271a/b, or 1.0 of SOC 2240e. Antirequisite(s): SOC 4404f/g.

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 DESCRIPTION

Two of the most important things you'll learn during your time at UWO and in the Sociology department are — as simple as it sounds — *questioning* and *answering*. The formation of particular kinds of questions that are grounded in a sociological viewpoint; figuring out how to solve the problem of observing and investigating this “society” thing that we can't see but know to exist; and figuring out how to explain those observations to others — these are the essential components of a sociological education. And this course will teach them to you.

Having already taken the second-year theory course(s), you've been introduced to the notion of thinking sociologically — what kinds of topics, viewpoints, paradigms, and concepts are most germane to thinking how we think. Here, we're going to step that up a bit and dig more into the formation of sociological questions and the development of sociological explanations. Where do we look to for insights? What do we observe in order to think sociologically (and how do we know that what we're saying is actually an explanation)? These are the kinds of issues we'll face during this term.

In order to be ready for this work, your continual preparation during the term will be crucial to your success. We have designed the course so that, if you do all of what we're asking of you, you will be fully ready to engage with the ideas and the materials we are taking on. 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 and critically*, and think about why the author is saying what they're saying and what can be done with the readings. 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.

THE STRUCTURE OF OUR TIMES TOGETHER

This course will meet in person, public health directives notwithstanding.

Part of our sessions will take the form of a traditional lecture. Lectures here are not simply a transmission of facts or information from Smith's brain to your own, but rather a modelling of a particular way of thinking about a sociological problem or challenge. Do not try to capture every word in Smith's lecture; there is no point in that. Instead, pay attention to the *mode of thinking* — that doesn't come through a transcript of the lecture. (If a transcript will help you, you are welcome to record the lecture so that you can go back and fill in blanks.) This will be no PowerPoint Karaoke session, and lectures won't replace readings or vice versa.

Another part of our sessions will be dedicated to discussion and recitation under the guidance of your TA. (You may recall this as something our department used to offer as a tutorial.) Dr Smith will take a back seat during these times, and your TA will manage the discussion in ways they believe will deepen your understanding of the readings and issues. This isn't a lecture session — it's a discussion. And while it may seem intimidating to pose questions or risk "incorrect" responses to my questions in front of 100 of your closest friends, I assure you of the following things:

- 1) Any question you have is also held by at least 20 people in the room, and probably more;
- 2) "Incorrect" responses are never wrong, *but rather the starting point for helping you and everyone else build better understandings and answers;*
- 3) I work very hard to keep my classroom a safe space for the ethical and respectful exchange of ideas and do not permit unethical or disrespectful conduct or treatment of your peers and colleagues; and
- 4) My job is to make it so that in December, you understand things you had no way of understanding in September, and I take that very seriously.

The final element of our time together will be built on the workshop model, by which I mean we will go through the mechanics of grappling with the readings and the ideas we're playing with and the directions in which the course is heading. Your engagement in all three parts of this is critical to your success. Please note that the ordering of these elements of lecture times is not set, and will be announced weekly in the lecture outline when it is distributed via Owl.

Office hours: Lastly, Dr Smith and the TA will be holding office hours on a regular basis. Here, they are available for additional questions and assistance about the course readings and issues, as well as other things sociological, university-related, or worldly. Sociology doesn't stop at the classroom door.

You should expect to spend somewhere between six and ten hours per week on this course, including class meetings.

COURSE TEXTS

This course does not have a textbook that you are required to purchase. There are a number of required readings that will be made available through the UWO library website and Perusall platform, which is where you will do part of your weekly work. These readings are provided free of charge. While I am a fan of printed readings for a variety of cognitive and nostalgic reasons, keeping them in digital formats is fine — but you must bring them to every class session.

Reference works will be provided on the full course outline and made available through the UWO library.

COMMUNICATION

Be sure to check the course outline, the course FAQs, and other sections of the course Teams channel for the answer to any questions. We usually think of most everything.

You are responsible for the checking the course Owl Brightspace site on a regular basis for news and updates. This will be the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the course.

For questions or messages that are very brief — in other words, you believe it will take no longer than three minutes to respond to — you can message Dr Smith or the TAs via the MS Teams channel (address is on page 1). For questions that will take longer to respond to but are not conversation-length discussions, please use email. For conversation-length discussions, please arrange an appointment or come by office hours.

ASSIGNMENTS

I believe in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding for their own sake, and not for the number of marks that things are worth. And despite all my efforts to disabuse you of the notion that grades are all that matter, you'll still be freaked about them.

In order to encourage you to pursue the understanding and not the marks — and because I know we will be asking you to do things you don't necessarily think you're ready to do — let me take some pressure off you: If you do all the assigned work, including at least 80% of the weekly writing/peer-review work, you will pass this course with no less than a 60. Also, note that I mark across the entire term and not simply on the basis of a few events, so I reserve the absolute right to adjust course marks to ensure that they reflect your performance across the entire course.

Weekly work: Readings/Discussions via Perusall

10% 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 (linked to 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 vice versa, and the detailed thought process in your contribution.

Note that this is not meant to be an onerous assignment. I want you to read the materials I have found engaging, engage with them through your annotations, and hopefully discuss them with classmates in your group. Doing more than the assigned number of annotations or responding to a thousand annotations, won't help improve your mark — and each week's readings are only worth 1% of your course mark anyway. Don't overdo it.

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.

Weekly work: Entry and/or exit tickets

10% of course mark

Each week, you will be asked to submit some kind of written work at either the start or the end of class. This is not necessarily something that always needs to be prepared ahead of time. Dr Smith will let you know what will be expected on any particular day.

Weekly work: In-class discussion and recitation

10% of course mark

A certain portion of each week's class session — usually the middle hour — will be devoted to broader discussion led by the TA for this course. It will look something like what tutorials used to be in this department. Engagement in these sessions will be assessed as part of your weekly work.

Midterm Examination

15% of course mark

We will have a timed in-person midterm examination on Tues February 25. This examination will be a written 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 assistant.

Paper assignment

30% of course mark

There will be a paper assignment for this course totalling at least 2500 words in length. The assignment will be distributed at the end of the midterm examination on Tues February 25, and elements of it will be due weekly after that time. This is in order to provide you with feedback as you are building the paper.

Final Oral Examination

25% of course mark

There will be a final oral examination in this course, conducted in small groups and timed. Questions for the examination will be provided two weeks prior so that you can prepare and consult with me and your TA.

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, **entirely 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. Requests for this discretionary adjustment will result in *not* getting the discretionary adjustment.

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.”*

COURSE AND MARKING POLICIES

To reduce the size of this beast, you will find the course and marking policies in the folder on Owl. Ensure that you read them thoroughly and carefully.

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.

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. And don't attempt to memorize every little thing that you think is “factual.” “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. And know that you can always come back to these readings in the preparation for your assignments.

Note: The readings for each week are split into two components, both of which are required. There are Short theory readings, which are brief excerpts of different theoretical writings from across the history of sociological thought. These we will be working through the glean the main ideas and to explore how they indicate particular forms of sociological explanation. The other type are Long readings, which are full articles or chapters. We will be workshoping these to learn how it is that sociological theorizing and analysis is done and how these theoretical perspectives are developed. Unless noted as “recommended” with a (rec), **all of them are required reading and work, all of them are fair game for the exams in this course, and all of them will be useful for the course paper.**

All the articles are available through Perusall, where your annotation/discussion work will be done.

Week 1: Tues Jan 7 Introduction: The forms of social and sociological theory.

Req'd: Herbert Blumer, “What Is Wrong with Social Theory?”
 Norman G Lederman and Judith S Lederman, “What Is A Theoretical Framework? A Practical Answer”

Rec'd: Gabriel Abend, “The Meanings of Theory”

**Week 2: Tues Jan 14. Theorizing, sociological analysis, and sociological explanations.
Weekly work on Perusall begins**

Req'd: Jan A Fuhse, "How Can Theories Represent Social Phenomena?"
Herbert Blumer, "Sociological Analysis and the 'Variable'"
George C Homans, "Explanation in the Social Sciences"

Rec'd: Miller and Zalta, "Social Institutions"
Eviatar Zerubavel, "Lumping and Splitting: Notes on Social Classification"

Week 3: Tues Jan 21. Choice Explanations and methodological individualism. (Meaningful Behaviour)

Short: Karl Marx, "The Production of Consciousness"
Émile Durkheim, "The Origin of Beliefs"
John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty"
John Dewey, "Democracy and Education"

Long: Jon Elster, "Rationality and the Emotions"
George Herbert Mead, "Play, the Game, and the Generalized Other" and "The Self, the I, and the Me"

Week 4: Tues Jan 28. Adjustment Explanations. (Meaningful Behaviour)

Short: Thomas C Schelling, "Micromotives and Macrobehavior"
Max Weber, "The Types of Social Action"
Harriet Martineau, "Woman"
Sigmund Freud, "Civilization and the Individual"
Antonio Gramsci, "Intellectuals and Hegemony"

Long: Georg Simmel, "The Sociology of Sociability"
Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, selections from *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture*, Book I
Max Weber, selections from *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

**Week 5: Tues Feb 4. Situation Logic Explanations. (Opportunity Structures)
Midterm Examination Prep Sheet distributed and discussed**

Short: Erving Goffman, "The Presentation of Self"
Louis Althusser, "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses"
Max Weber, "The Types of Legitimate Domination"

Long: Robert Axelrod, "The Evolution of Cooperation"
Erving Goffman, "The Arrangement Between the Sexes"
Ernst Fehr and Herbert Gintis, "Human Motivation and Social Cooperation"

Week 6: Tues Feb 11. Context Explanations. (Opportunity Structures)

Short: Edwin M Lemert, "Social Pathology/Societal Reaction Theory"
Talcott Parsons, "The Unit Act of Action Systems"
Carl Zimmer, "From Ants to People, an Instinct to Swarm"

Long: Richard A Cloward and Lloyd E Ohlin, "Illegitimate Means and Delinquent Subcultures"
Robert Merton, "Manifest and Latent Functions" and "Social Structure and Anomie"

READING WEEK: Tues Feb 18. No class. Read, rest, get some vitamin D, etc.

Week 7: Tues Feb 25. MIDTERM EXAMINATION IN CLASS.
Paper assignment distributed at the end of exam

Week 8: Tues March 4. Joint Action Explanations. (Communities)

Short: James S Coleman, "The Emergence of Norms"
Christine Horne, "Group Cohesion and Metanorms"
Ernest Gellner, "Trust, Cohesion, and the Social Order"
Simone de Beauvoir, "Woman as Other"
Nancy Chodorow, "Gender Personality and the Reproduction of Mothering"

Long: Herbert Gans, "Positive Functions of the Undeserving Poor: Uses of the Underclass in America"
Howard Becker, "History, Culture, and Subjective Experience: An Exploration of the Social Bases of Drug-Induced Experience"

Week 9 Tues March 11. Social Integration Explanations. (Communities)

Short: Michael Hechter, "Principles of Group Solidarity"
Aimé Césaire, "Between Colonizer and Colonized"
Betty Friedan, "The Problem That Has No Name"
Pierre Bourdieu, "Structures, Habitus, Practices"
Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Epistemology of the Closet"

Long: Émile Durkheim, "Egoistic Suicide" and "Anomic Suicide"
Émile Durkheim, "Mechanical and Organic Solidarity," "Anomie and the Modern Division of Labour," and "The Cultural Logic of Collective Representations"
Mark Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties"

Week 10: Tues March 18. Linkage Explanations. (Social Systems)

Short: Herbert Marcuse, "Repressive Desublimation of One-Dimensional Man"
Ulrich Beck, "World Risk Society"
Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth"
C. Wright Mills, "The Sociological Imagination"
Dorothy Smith, "Knowing a Society from Within: A Woman's Standpoint"

Long: Karl Marx, "Estranged Labour," "Camera Obscura," "Capital and the Values of Commodities,"
"Capital and the Fetishism of Commodities," and "Labour-Power and Capital"
Friedrich Engels, "The Patriarchal Family" and "Results" (from *The Condition of the Working Class in England*)

Week 11: Tues March 25 Functional Explanations. (Social Systems)
Final Examination Prep Sheet Distributed and Discussed

Short: Talcott Parsons, "Action Systems and Social Systems" and "Sex Roles in the American Kinship System"
Gurminder K Bhambra, "Modernity: History of the Concept"
Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations: Disneyland"
Theda Skocpol, "The Janus-Faced State"

Long: Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E Moore, "Some Principles of Stratification"
Frantz Fanon, "Decolonizing, National Culture, and the Negro Intellectual"
Michel Foucault, "Biopolitics and the Carceral Society"
Achille Mbembe, "Necropower and the Late Modern Colonial Occupation"

Week 12: T April 1. Wrap-up: Doing theoretical analysis.

No readings. In-class Peer Review and Editing Session and closing discussion. You are required to bring THREE printed copies of your paper for peer review and editing.

F April 4, 1155pm. Paper Assignment DUE — submit to Turnitin through Owl

Final Examination Date (TBD): Grouped Oral Final Examination

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, and 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):

- ❖ Demonstrate an understanding of the various forms of sociological explanations and how those forms construct possibilities for social theorizing;
- ❖ Show an ability to formulate sociological questions, deploy sociological concepts in analyses of society, and assess whether or not analysts have actually observed what they intended to;
- ❖ 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; and,

- Be able to discuss the ways in which theoretically-oriented sociological analyses are able to highlight directions for future social action.