



The University of Western Ontario

Department of Sociology

SOCIOLOGY 3404F - 001

Modern Sociological Theory

Fall 2026

Delivery Method - In-Person

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This is a DRAFT copy only. Please see the course site for the final version.

“There’s nothing so practical as a good theory.” — Kurt Lewin

Course Description:

This course will survey major trends in modern sociological theory.

Pre-requisite(s): 0.5 courses from Sociology 2263A/B, Sociology 2270A/B, Sociology 2271A/B OR 1.0 Sociology 2240E.

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may 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.

Anti-requisite(s): Sociology 4404F/G.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:

The object of this course is to introduce and examine some of the foundational ideas in sociological theory. Typically, courses in sociological theory focus primarily or exclusively on the writings of a small handful of thinkers who have come to form the sociological canon. In part this course does not deviate from tradition—we will still be reading some selections from famous modern theorists. It is worth noting, however, that a lot of “sociological theory” courses should really be called “sociological theorist” courses. They are about the ideas of particular thinkers and are organized accordingly around bodies of theoretical work rather than around the ideas as such, their logics and interconnections. Though we will end up reading a good amount of what’s sometimes called primary literature, we focus more closely on the specific problems, questions, and theories they’ve inspired. In addition to becoming acquainted with the work of specific thinkers, we will see how persistent theoretical issues in sociology have been explained and reformulated. This means that readings are selected on the basis of clarity of exposition rather than place in the canon. My hope is that this approach will balance the investigation into the bodies of thought of particular thinkers with the examination of particular ideas and aspects of social theory.

This course takes the Lewin quote above pretty seriously and aims to survey a wide range of *substantive* theories in sociology (and adjacent social sciences) that I believe to be interesting and challenging—we look at theories of inequality, theories of the state, theories of history, theories of

collective action, theories of morality & social norms, and theories of belief & ideology. We also introduce what might be called *theoretical perspectives* in sociology; these offer different ways of looking at the social world and go about social inquiry from unique perspectives. Here we will survey rational choice theory and functionalist theories.

Course Material:

Required book: Michael Hechter and Christine Horne, eds. *Theories of Social Order: A Reader*, 2nd ed. Stanford University Press, 2009 (called TSO below).

Approximate cost: budget about C\$50-80 depending on format and used-book availability. Any edition used must be the second edition. Western Bookstore course-materials page:

bookstore.uwo.ca/course-materials-textbooks

All additional articles and excerpts will be posted on OWL Brightspace, which you will be required to print out. Students should not rely on AI-generated summaries as substitutes for the assigned texts.

Communication:

Students are responsible for reviewing the course OWL Brightspace site on a regular basis for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students enrolled in the course.

Email is the best way to contact me. You are also welcome to speak with me before or after class or to arrange an office-hour appointment.

A Note on Reading Difficult Social Theory - and Reading in the Age of AI:

Some of the assigned texts will be difficult. The point is not to race through them. Before reading closely, first map the text: skim the introduction and conclusion, scan section headings, and identify the central question and main concepts. Fifteen minutes spent orienting yourself can make the close reading much more productive.

Read generously before reading critically. First try to understand an argument on its own terms. Second, ask whether its conclusions follow from its assumptions (an internal criticism). Only then move to criticism of the assumptions, categories, or broader framework (an external criticism).

AI makes it very easy to obtain a plausible-looking summary without actually reading, but it won't help the brain and it won't help for the quizzes and exams. That is precisely why direct reading matters in this course. Quizzes and exams are designed to reward first-hand engagement with the texts.

More on AI:

All assignments must be completed independently, without AI. There hopefully won't be much room for it in this course, but still it should be said: Students may not use generative-AI systems or AI-powered summarizing, outlining, brainstorming, paraphrasing, rewriting, translation, or answer-generation tools for any assessed work or as a substitute for completing the assigned readings. Unauthorized use of AI may constitute a scholastic offence.

Laptops, phones, and other electronic devices

This is a device-free class. During class, cell phones, laptops, tablets, smartwatches, earbuds, and other electronic or connected devices must be turned off and put away. Phones should be in bags.

I don't allow laptops because they make classes bad—people go online, tune out etc. We're only human, it's too tempting. But we end up learning much less well. And they're distracting to others.

Research now suggest that taking notes by hand is better in terms of retaining and comprehending information, which is a good thing, we want to keep our brains.

To make this all easier, I'll give you a PDF of the slides so you can write fewer notes. I'll post them to Brightspace.

Course Schedule and Readings:

The reading list and weekly schedule are available on the course OWL Brightspace site. All readings are to be completed before class.

Method of Evaluation:

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

Evaluation Breakdown:

Attendance	10%
Pop quizzes	25%
Midterm exam	30%
Final exam	35%

Reading and pop quizzes

All listed readings are mandatory and should be completed before class. There will be five unannounced reading quizzes scattered through the term. The quizzes are meant to assess whether you have done the assigned reading, not whether you have mastered every subtlety of it—I do not want to trick you, I just want you to read. They should be easy if you've done the reading but hard if you haven't. They will take roughly 10 minutes at the beginning of class and will normally be open book. So: **printed readings and the textbooks are permitted**; electronic devices are not, nor will I allow printouts that look like AI summaries or extensive notes—just bring the readings.

The best three of five quizzes will count toward the final grade. Because not all quiz scores are required in calculating the final grade, academic consideration will not be granted for up to two missed quizzes, and no make-up quizzes will be offered. If more than two quizzes are missed, additional missed quizzes will receive a grade of zero.

Again, all this means **you'll need to bring physical copies of the reading material to class**. This will either be the book or printed out versions of the PDFs for that week.

Attendance

Attendance will be recorded and will count for 10% of your final grade. Approved absences will be handled in accordance with Western's Academic Consideration policy.

Midterm exam - October 28

The midterm will be written in person during regular class time. It is a **closed-book, no-device** examination covering material through October 21. It will include short- and long-answer essay questions.

The midterm has been designated as the one assessment in this course for which supporting documentation is required when requesting academic consideration for an absence. Approved absences will be handled in accordance with University and Department policy.

Final exam - Registrar-scheduled December exam period

The final examination will be a three-hour, in-person, closed-book, no-device exam scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during the December 11-22 examination period. The final is not cumulative and will emphasize material covered after the midterm. It will include short- and long-answer essay questions. Together, the essay components of the midterm and final are designed to meet the minimum 2,500-word writing requirement for an F-designated senior essay course. Final-exam absences require supporting documentation and will be handled in accordance with University and Department policy.

Course Policies:

Class materials and discussions may not be recorded or distributed except as permitted through an approved accommodation. Assessment dates and other course information will be maintained on OWL Brightspace; students are responsible for checking the course site regularly.

The Department of Sociology document "Academic Policies" (Effective September 1, 2026) must be read together with this outline and will be posted on OWL Brightspace. It contains the current University and Department rules concerning scholastic offences, plagiarism, academic consideration through the Student Absence Portal, examinations, accessibility, grade guidelines, and student support services.



Department of Sociology
Effective September 1, 2026.

Academic Policies

Scholastic Offences: Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the [Scholastic Offences](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_offences.pdf) Policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_offences.pdf.

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.

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 Western University and Turnitin.com

Students are expected to retain all research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines, and other materials used in preparing assignments. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of any assignment, your instructor may ask you to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against you.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

Prior to any examination, students must turn their cellphones off and store them in their bags/coat at the front of the room. The use (or possession) of cellphones or other communications technologies during examinations is strictly prohibited. Those caught using a cell phone or other communication technologies, or even the physical possession of these technologies during an examination, will result in a zero on the examination in question. Similarly, the use (or possession) of these technologies during examination breaks (bathroom breaks during an exam) will also result in a zero. Intent does not matter. Forgetting to put away your cellphone or other communication technologies, whether during the examination or on examination breaks (bathroom breaks), are not justifications. It will result in a zero on the examination in question. In sum, your cellphones should never be seen or heard during an examination and should always be stored in your bags/coats at the front of the room.

Copyright: Students may not record or distribute any class activity, including conversations during office hours, without written permission from the instructor, except as necessary as part of approved accommodations for students with disabilities. Any approved recordings may only be used for the student's own private use.

Code of Student Conduct: Every student is expected to comply with the provisions of the Code of Student Conduct. Sanctions for non-compliance range from a warning or reprimand to expulsion from the University. It is the responsibility of every student to read the Code and familiarize themselves with its contents. The Code is available at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/code_of_conduct.pdf.

Student Responsibility: Students in a degree program must select courses in accordance with the published requirements. Students are responsible for ensuring that their selection of courses is appropriate and accurately recorded. Students must ensure course prerequisites have been completed successfully or special permission from the Dean is obtained. Students who fail to do so will be removed from the course without adjustments to fees. The decision may not be appealed.

Student Responsibility for Course Selection:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/general/academic_counselling.pdf

Registration and Progression:

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/registration_progression_grad/registration_progression.pdf

Graduation Requirements:

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/registration_progression_grad/graduation.pdf

Absence from Course Commitments: Students must familiarize themselves with the [Policy on Academic Consideration](#) – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf.

Students missing regularly scheduled course work for medical, compassionate or extenuating circumstances can request academic consideration by completing a request using the Student Absence Portal (SAP) https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academic_considerations/index.html. Students are permitted one academic consideration request per course per term without supporting documentation. **Note that supporting documentation is always required for academic consideration requests for examinations scheduled by the office of the registrar (e.g. December and April exams)** and for practical laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled during the last week of the term. Students should also note that the instructor may designate one assessment per course per term that requires supporting documentation. This designated assessment is described in the course outline. Supporting documentation for academic considerations for absences due to illness must include the completed Western Student Medical Certificate (SMC) https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/pdfs/student-medical_certificate.pdf or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation by a health care practitioner. Students must request academic consideration as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

Procedure on makeup assessments for Social Science students and for courses offered by the Faculty of Social Science (Effective September 1, 2026):

If academic consideration is granted, students should consult the course outline for information regarding how the missed assessment will be addressed and follow any instructions provided by the instructor. At the instructor's discretion, the weight of a missed test/quiz or mid-term may be transferred to another assessment in the course, including the final exam, rather than requiring a makeup assessment. Reweighting is not available for missed final exams.

Students are entitled to **one makeup assessment opportunity** for a missed test/quiz, mid-term, or final exam supported by approved academic consideration. **No additional makeup opportunities will be provided.** Makeup assessments represent the final opportunity to complete a missed course assessment. The course instructor or teaching assistant(s) may not be available to respond to questions during the makeup test/exam. Students should be aware that the make-up test/exam will not necessarily be in the same format, be of the same duration, or cover the same material as the original test/exam.

What happens if I miss a makeup assessment as a Social Science student or in a course offered by the Faculty of Social Science?

Students who miss a makeup assessment are not eligible for an additional makeup opportunity. Depending on their circumstances, they may:

1. Remain enrolled in the course and accept a grade of zero on the missed makeup assessment. Students should consult the course outline and calculate whether they can still achieve a passing grade in the course.
2. Withdraw from the course through [Student Center](#) before the [published drop deadline](#). A course dropped before the deadline will result in a withdrawal (WDN) without academic penalty. Part-time students should consult the Registrar's Office [refund schedule](#) to determine whether a tuition refund is available. Students enrolled full-time in 4.0-5.0 courses are generally not eligible for tuition refunds when a course is dropped.
3. If the published drop deadline has passed and the missed makeup assessment is supported by appropriate documentation, students may submit their documentation through the [Student Absence Portal](#) to request a **WDN (withdrawal without academic penalty)**. Approval is not automatic and remains subject to Faculty review. Requests for a second makeup assessment will not be considered.

Students are encouraged to carefully consider their ability to complete a makeup assessment as scheduled, as no further opportunities to complete the missed work will be available.

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 Academic Advising Office.

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 Brightspace 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.

Guidelines for Grades/Marks: The Department of Sociology has grade distribution guidelines that all instructors are expected to follow. Generally, and with few exceptions, this means that the number of A's in a course cannot exceed the number of B's, and class means are expected to fall within a prescribed percentage range. This means that your final grade depends on your ranking relative to your peers. Courses with grades falling outside this range may be adjusted, up or down. These guidelines do not prohibit a student achieving 95% or higher in all their courses, but it does mean that an entire course cannot be made up of students receiving 95%. This policy combats grade inflation, contributing to higher standards, and ensuring uniformity across all courses of the same level. Motivated and hard-working students receive grades well above the course averages. The use of grade guidelines, including any adjustments of grades, either up or down for this purpose, cannot be used as the basis of an appeal.

Sociology 1000-Level

A's not to exceed B's

Means in the range of 68-72%

Sociology 2000-Level

A's not to exceed B's

Means in the range of 70-75%

Sociology 3000-Level

Means in the range of 73-80%

Sociology 4000-Level

Means in the range of 78-82%

Support Services:

- **Office of the Registrar Services** <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>
- **Faculty Academic Advising** - Please visit your Home Faculty Academic advising webpage for information regarding adding/dropping courses, important dates, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters
https://registrar.uwo.ca/faculty_academic_counselling.html .
- **USC services** – information available regarding student health/dental plan, LTC bus pass, food support services, Peer support Centre etc <http://westernusc.ca/services/> .
- **Mental health** – Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to [Mental Health@Western](#) <https://www.uwo.ca/health/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

- **Health & Wellness Services** – Registered part-time and full-time students can book a physical health appointment at <https://www.uwo.ca/health/shs/index.html>.
- **Accessible Education** provides support and services to students with disabilities at Western, in all programs and faculties. 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.
- **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 experience GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts on the Wellness and Wellbeing website <https://www.uwo.ca/health/gbsv/index.html>. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.
- **Western Libraries** – Visit the many library locations on campus. Western Libraries provide access to material in physical and digital formats <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/catalogue/index.html>. Research support is also available <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/research/index.html>.
- **Writing Support Centre** – Online writing resources, writing support and writing modules are available to undergraduate students <https://writing.uwo.ca/undergrads/>.
- **Bookstore:** Search for Textbook/course material availability and cost <https://bookstore.uwo.ca/course-materials-textbooks/course-materials-and-textbooks>.