



The University of Western Ontario
Department of Sociology

SOCIOLOGY 4405F - 001

Seminar in Sociological Theory: Theories of Capitalism and Socialism Fall 2026

Delivery Method - In-Person

Instructor: David Calnitsky
Email: dcalnits@uwo.ca

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

“The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways.
The point, however, is to change it.”
– Karl Marx

Course Description:

This course will consist of an in-depth analysis of selected schools of thought in modern sociological theory. That's the required boilerplate from the Academic Calendar. In this case, it will be theories of capitalism and socialism.

If you wish to understand the modern world you will have to understand capitalism. If you wish to understand the most powerful criticisms of it, you will have to understand contemporary socialist theory. This class will run through the meaning of capitalism, its origins, arguments in favor, and arguments against. It then covers theories of social change, reform and revolution, social democracy, and socialism.

Pre-requisite(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.

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): none.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:

With respect to the quote at the top, that is the point, it's true—but not in this course. This quote, indirectly, hints at a deep tension in critical social theory. If we want to change the world we need to understand it. But the *desire* to change something can infect our understanding of it. This is a pervasive dynamic among critics of capitalism, and the first step is to admit there is a problem. This means acknowledging the presence of wishful thinking, without letting it induce paralysis.

On the other hand, if there are pitfalls in being upfront in your desire to change the world there are also virtues. The normative goal of social change helps to avoid common trappings of academia, in particular, the laser focus on irrelevant, uninteresting questions. Plus, in having a set of value commitments, stated clearly, you avoid the false pretense that values don't enter in the backdoor in social science, which they often do if you're paying attention.

Nonetheless, wanting to change the world does not always pair well with a clear understanding of it. And yet that's exactly what is needed if you care about social change. This is all to say that critics of capitalism don't have it easy. In this class, we're going to try to give the big theoretical questions about capitalism and socialism as clear a look as we can manage.

This seminar examines capitalism and socialism as rival ways of organizing economic and political life. We will ask what capitalism is, how it arose, what its defenders see as its central virtues, what its critics regard as its characteristic injustices and constraints, how capitalist states operate, why collective action is difficult, whether reform or revolution is preferable, and what plausible socialist alternatives might look like. The aim is analytical, not religious. Students are expected to understand the strongest arguments on competing sides and to evaluate them carefully.

Course Material:

Three short books are *required*. Approximate total cost: C\$90-110

- Chibber, V. *Confronting Capitalism*. Verso, 2022. ISBN 9781839762703.
<https://a.co/d/01RvwrG6>
- Wright, E. O. *How to Be an Anticapitalist in the Twenty-First Century*. Verso. 2021. ISBN 9781788739559. <https://a.co/d/01SExVhI>
- Cowen, T. *Stubborn Attachments*. Stripe Press, 2018. ISBN 9781732265134.
<https://a.co/d/00LTWOst>

Check availability at the bookstore: https://bookstore.uwo.ca/textbook-search?campus=UWO&term=W2026A&courses%5B0%5D=001_UW/SOC4405F

Two books are recommended:

- G. A. Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*. Princeton University Press, 2009. ISBN 9780691143613. <https://a.co/d/04qKWDvk>
- Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*. University of Chicago Press. ISBN 9780226734798. <https://a.co/d/05ZZlpHU>

All additional articles and excerpts will be posted on OWL Brightspace. 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 Social Theory - and Reading in the Age of AI:

Some of the assigned texts will be difficult, but most are very readable. 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, even if you disagree. 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 class participation or exams. That is precisely why direct reading matters in this course. Participation 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. The main way to get no points for a memo is to use AI, which we'll talk about.

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 suggests that taking notes by hand is better in terms of retaining and comprehending information, which is a good thing.

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 and you can print and bring them to class.

Likewise, 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.

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. Non-book readings will be posted on Brightspace.

Method of Evaluation:

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

Evaluation Breakdown:

Memos and seminar participation 30%

Midterm exam 35%

Final exam 35%

Memos and seminar participation

This is a seminar, so participation is a major part of the course. The participation grade will reflect preparation, attendance, quality and frequency of contributions, willingness to ask and answer questions, and direct engagement with assigned texts.

The 30% grade will be based primarily on your presentation and discussion of the ideas raised in your memos, with the quality and regular completion of the written memos also taken into account. Wait, what are memos?

Each week (with readings) everyone will prepare short written memos, no longer than 150 words, engaging some theme or problem in the reading. These should not be summaries or exegeses of the texts, nor mini-essays with extended commentaries on the readings. The point is

to pose *focused questions that you find interesting, ones that will serve as the basis for the seminar discussion*. As you do the readings each week, think about an issue that you really want discussed and clarified, and then formulate your comments to set up that discussion. While you'll describe what you see as the issues in play in the question, you do not need to stake out a position—although you can if you want. It is entirely appropriate for questions to focus on ideas, arguments, or passages, which you do not understand. You should come to class prepared to talk about—but not to read—your memo.

You cannot use AI to write your memo at any step—again, not for summaries of the text, not for brainstorming, not for writing, not for editing—I want you to use your brain and your brain will thank you.

Memos must be posted in our Google doc by **Monday at 3pm**. Of course, you can post before that, but I will need time to read them all before class. Late memos will receive no marks. Here's the memo folder: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/XXXXXXXXX>

Midterm exam - November 4

The midterm will be written in person during regular class time. It is a **closed-book, no-device** exam covering all class material thus far. It will be a series of analytical essay questions rooted in my lecture and the readings. 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 exam period in December

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. It will emphasize the second half of the course, it is not cumulative, although later material will necessarily draw on some concepts introduced earlier. It will include short- and long-answer essay questions.

Together, the memos and 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 always require supporting documentation.

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>.