

# **SOC& 101: INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY**

**Spring 2012 (online)**

**Bellevue College**

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## **COURSE INTRODUCTION/OVERVIEW**

Welcome to our class, "Introduction to Sociology." I look forward to working with you this quarter and sharing with you my fascination with sociology! Hopefully, you enter this class with some degree of curiosity about why human beings behave the way we do. If so, you should find sociology intellectually rewarding as well as illuminating and useful in your own life.

This course is designed as a broad introduction to the field of Sociology. Over the course of the quarter, we will review several topics frequently studied by sociologists, with a particular focus on inequality and the distribution of power in society. We will discover how social institutions (such as education and the economy) depend upon and perpetuate inequalities between people. You will also learn how to use the "sociological imagination" to see how large institutions affect all of our lives for better or worse. As José Ortega y Gasset said, "Tell me the landscape in which you live, and I will tell you who you are." Indeed, our social environments profoundly influence not only who we think we are, but also how we behave, what we think, and how we see others. The overarching goal of this course is to examine and understand this process.

Sociology is a field that relies on empirical research and evidence, not personal opinion or casual observation. In many cases, the ideas sociology has to offer are difficult to grasp and accept because they challenge many of the taken-for-granted attitudes and opinions that we all tend to operate by in our everyday lives. (Science and research often contradict opinion. As an example, just think about how science challenged the previously held belief that

the earth was flat and at the center of the universe!) As we all come to the course with strong ideas and beliefs about the world in which we live, the subject matter is personally as well as intellectually challenging. Some of what you will learn in this course may initially seem like "common sense." Sometimes what you will learn might be shocking, surprising, or even make you angry. Hopefully, you will learn from each experience and take these lessons with you on your future endeavors.

*"The chief object of education is not to learn things but to unlearn things."* –  
Gilbert Chesterton

## **LEARNING ATMOSPHERE**

I believe that students learn best when they are actively involved in the teaching and learning process. Thus, this is an *active, interactive* course where you will *learn by doing*. You are expected to observe the world, read, write, discuss, and participate. I think of our class as a "collaborative learning community" where we all teach and learn from each other. Every time you post a comment or ask a question, you are teaching something to the rest of us. In order to do well in this course, you will need to abandon the traditional "passive" student role and instead *take control of your learning and education*. I think you'll enjoy it and learn a lot in the process!

A note about online learning: Unfortunately (or fortunately, depending upon your perspective!), online classes are not for everyone. In general, they demand far more independent initiative and personal discipline than do classes that meet on campus. Additionally, online classes demand stronger reading and writing skills. If you are a student who likes having someone to keep you on your toes, such as reminding you regularly to keep up with your work, then online classes are probably not a good choice for you. That's okay (it's not a failure on your part!)...some students simply thrive more when working on a "strict" daily routine, the kind of routine that on-campus classes provide. Thus, the students who succeed most at online learning tend to be those students who:

- are disciplined enough to check the course website around five-to-seven days per week;
- have enough personal initiative that they will contact their instructor (that is, me!) if they don't understand something;
- have good to excellent written communication skills;
- are good readers (i.e. they can sit down and focus on a reading, highlighting key concepts/ideas, and then study it well);
- are independent; AND
- have a basic understanding of computer culture and technology (navigating a website, uploading/downloading, discussion etiquette)

A note about course content: Since sociologists examine just about every aspect of the social world, we sometimes discuss provocative material. Please be advised that, when we explore controversial topics, they will always be framed within an academic context. Furthermore, I expect you to communicate with others in a professional, academic manner. If you have any questions or concerns about course content, please don't hesitate to let me know.

A note about instructor availability: I have noticed that, sometimes, students who enroll in online classes have unreasonable expectations about their Instructor's availability. Please be aware that I am not online 24-hours a day. In general, I am online for this class a couple of hours per day. You will rarely be able to reach me in the evenings or on the weekends. I am, obviously, an active member of this course, but I do my coursework during the week, during daytime business hours. *Thus, please do not send to me late-night or weekend emails expecting an immediate response.*

## **COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES**

After completing the course, the successful student will be able to:

- Question the obvious;
- Describe the “sociological perspective”;

- Identify the ways in which culture and social institutions (such as education, the economy, the media, and the family) shape our everyday experiences;
- Explain “social constructionism”;
- Distinguish between factual statements and value judgments;
- Put aside personal ethnocentric attitudes, becoming culturally relative;
- Better understand perspectives different from your own;
- Formulate logical conclusions;
- Apply sociological knowledge to real-life situations;
- Look at your own life sociologically; and
- Describe how life experiences and opportunities differ according to race, class, and gender.

## **REQUIRED TEXTS**

“Sociology: Exploring the Architecture of Everyday Life” by David Newman (8th Edition)

Additional readings (for seminar) are posted on the course website in the “Learning Modules”

## **COURSE POLICIES**

The following outlines what you may expect of me as your instructor:

**A sincere desire to help you learn.** Since my ultimate goal is to help you learn, I have invested a significant amount of time into the design of this course site, with the hopes that the materials and assignments will enhance your learning. I think this course is understandable, interesting, and engaging. However, if at any time you are unclear or unsure about any aspects of the course - including reading material - feel free to contact me for assistance/clarification.

**Fairness.** Your grade will be based upon what I detect that you have learned and how I assess your performance. It is your job to clearly communicate to me (in your writing) that you understand the material. I don't negotiate final grades.

**Respect and inclusion.** This class is a "Safe Space" for all students. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, queer-identified, and transgendered students are welcome in this classroom and encouraged to speak out and be an integral part of this class. All are welcome!

The following outlines what I expect of you throughout the quarter:

**A sincere effort to learn the course material.** When participating in discussions and when writing papers, your comments should indicate to me that you have read and understand the course material. Some students wrongly assume that they can simply "wing it" in this class and still receive a high grade.

**Preparation.** You should keep up with the readings each week, particularly before contributing to seminar and our course discussion board.

**Promptness.** You should comply with all due dates, as **I do not accept late work. All assignments are due by 10am on the listed due date..NO EXCEPTIONS (that includes computer problems).** You will learn that I am quite a stickler on due dates, so please learn to comply with all deadlines. I highly recommend that you plan to turn in your work early (with plenty of time to spare before the 10am deadline - you can even turn in your work days early!).

I accept assignments ONLY in the following formats: pdf and Word. Do NOT send to me attachments in other formats. Submitting your work to me in other formats will result in a **ZERO** grade.

You can submit your work to me in one of three ways:

- (1) by uploading your work to Vista (on the Assignments pages)
- (2) by emailing your work to me through Blackboard Vista, or
- (3) by emailing your work to me at my Bellevue College address.

If #1 doesn't work for you, then try #2 or #3. It is your job to get your work in on time.

I highly, HIGHLY recommend that you create a “back up plan” for what you will do if you have computer problems. **Please note that you are responsible for getting your work in on time REGARDLESS of the state of your computer/browser or your Internet Service Provider (ISP).** All late work will receive a zero grade. Due dates are indicated on the “Calendar” link on the lefthand side of the course website, so it is extremely important for you to stay on top of the Calendar.

**Contribution.** Learning about each other's experiences and perspectives is an integral part of the learning process in this course. I believe that you will learn a lot about yourself and your fellow classmates. To work effectively in this course, therefore, you are expected to be an active participant in our learning environment. This is why you are required to contribute to class discussions and to read almost all of your classmates' posts. Please be advised that your grade will suffer if you do not participate and contribute to the intellectual life of our class.

**Respect, courtesy, and tolerance.** Since learning about diverse experiences is central to this course, it is of the utmost importance that you respect your classmates' experiences, differences, and opinions. Disrespectful attitudes will not be tolerated.

**Honesty.** This means no cheating and no plagiarism. If you cheat/plagiarize, you fail. No excuses will be taken into account. Your work must be your own, except when asked to work with other students. Furthermore, you are required to acknowledge in your papers if you have borrowed any ideas, terms, or phrases, even if you have borrowed from a classmate OR from the Newman book. Please do not copy and paste material from wikipedia or any other website into your assignments, as this is a severe form of cheating (that is very easy to catch, by the way). ***In this class, your assignments should be grounded in the textbook (rather than web resources, which are often wrong). This means that you should NOT do internet research in this class – all you need is in the course textbook and supplementary readings.*** If you have

any hesitation, or if you are in doubt about one of these issues, feel free to ask me.

## **GRADING**

Final course grades are based on the following point breakdown:

Quizzes (2 @ 200pts each) 400 points

Discussion participation (10 @ 20pts each) 200 points

Short Essays (6 @ 30pts each) 180 points

"Virtual" Seminar (6 @ 20pts each) 120 points

Fieldwork Paper 100 points

### **TOTAL 1000 points**

When it is time for me to assign a letter grade to your overall course work, I use the following letter-grade equivalents:

A = 930-1,000 points

A- = 900-929 points

B+ = 870-899 points

B = 830-869 points

B- = 800-829 points

C+ = 770-799 points

C = 730-769 points

C- = 700-729 points

D+ = 670-699 points

D = 600-669 points

F = 0-599 points

The following is a description of the course grade components:

(1) **Quizzes**: Two quizzes are given over the course of the quarter, one in the middle of the quarter and one at the end. Quizzes may consist of multiple choice, true/false, short answer, and/or essay questions. These quizzes are “open book,” so you are permitted to refer to the textbook for help. However, these quizzes are intended to be independent work, **so you are not permitted to work on the quizzes with your classmates**. I am holding you to the Honor Code on this, so if one of your classmates contacts you for help or assistance on a quiz, please politely decline them and then let me know that your classmate is contacting others. I generally post quizzes a few days before they are due; that will allow you to work on them when it is most convenient for you. However, once you begin working on a quiz, there will be a one-hour time limit to finish it. Please note that **I do not give make-up quizzes**, so if you miss one, you will receive a zero grade. Please review the Calendar link on the left side of the site to see due dates. Plan ahead! **(NOTE: Checking the calendar link frequently is one of the keys to success in this class – EVERYTHING that is due is posted for you there!)**

(2) **Fieldwork Paper**: You are required to complete one fieldwork assignment of your choice. Fieldwork assignments require you to observe some aspect of the social world and write a paper linking your observations to the course material. Descriptions of the Fieldwork Papers can be found under the “Assignments” link from the course homepage. Please note that the due dates vary depending upon the assignment you choose, so pick one that works with your schedule. Please note that **I will not accept late work**, so plan ahead. Specific information about paper format, including citation style, follows the Fieldwork Paper descriptions on the “Assignments” link.

(3) **Short Essays**: You will complete six short essays throughout the quarter that require you to reflect on the course material and/or observe the social world. You should do your best to address every essay question thoughtfully, clearly, and completely, as you can



earn up to 30 points for each essay. These essays will be graded not only on their completeness (Did you adequately address all the components of the assignment?), but also on their thoughtfulness (Does your essay show that you understand and thought hard about the course material/readings?). PLEASE DO NOT ATTEMPT THESE ESSAYS WITHOUT FIRST READING THE TEXTBOOK - I will definitely be able to tell if you are "shooting from the hip" rather than relying on what you've read to help you with the assignment. Also, PLEASE DO NOT DO "INTERNET RESEARCH" FOR THESE ESSAYS – you should rely **solely** on the textbook and seminar readings (if you rely on other sources, your grade will suffer as I need to ensure that you understand the Newman book, which is far more reliable than much of the Internet). Essays vary in length - some may be a page long, others may be 2-3 pages. Please note that **I will not accept late essays**, so work that is not handed in on time will receive a zero grade. Remember, the due time for EVERYTHING in this class is **10am**.

(4) "**Virtual Seminar**": We will have six "virtual" seminars over the course of the quarter. Seminar involves discussing a specific reading and completing a brief assignment in small groups in order to reach deeper levels of learning. After the third day of the quarter, I will assign students randomly to groups. This will be your quarter-long Seminar Group (although I reserve the right to re-assign groups, particularly if a group has become dysfunctional). For each seminar, you will work in this group, having discussions with your group members and completing a brief group assignment. Details about the structure of seminar tasks and assignments are described in the "Learning Modules" link of this course website (on the lefthand toolbar). I HIGHLY recommend that seminar groups begin working on seminar well before the assignment is due, so that you can accommodate all of your group members' busy life schedules. (Remember that many students enrolled in this class work full-time, are raising families, are traveling, and so on.) Each seminar, students can earn up to 20 points for the quality of their work. *Please be advised that not all seminar group members automatically receive the same grade – students who participate less will receive lowered grades. This is how I grade seminar: I review your group's written assignment and assign it a grade (for example,*

20 out of 20). Then, I visit your group's Seminar Discussion threads, to see who contributed and participated in a meaningful way. Those students will receive the highest grade in the group (in this example, they'd receive 20s). Students who participate a little might receive 10s, and those who don't participate at all would receive zeros.

(5) **Discussion Participation:** Each week, you will participate in large class discussions on the "Discussions" link (on the lefthand side of the course website). It is your responsibility, as a member of our class, to respond thoughtfully not only to my prompt(s), but also to your classmates' comments. You are required to participate thoroughly in each week's discussion(s), as your grade will be based on the quality of your contributions and your level of involvement. In order to receive high grades on your discussion, you will need to:

(1) begin posting your comments early in the week (if you wait until the night before the discussion is "due," then your classmates will not benefit from your insights!),

(2) make AT LEAST 3-5 \*quality\* posts throughout the week (i.e. contribute something intellectually meaningful), and

(3) aim to read almost all of your classmates' posts throughout the week (you will likely learn a lot from them!) Since the Blackboard system keeps track of everything you do while logged into our course website, I am able to discern how much you are participating in discussion, including how many of your classmates' posts you are reading. I use this information when assigning your discussion grades for the week. Remember, post AND READ - your discussion grade is equally weighted (10 points for posting and 10 points for reading).

I recommend that you **check the discussion board almost daily, including the morning the discussion closes.** By checking the discussion board frequently, you will be able to look for opportunities where you can add more to the conversation (thus improving your grade!). This will also improve your learning. The following are guidelines that you should follow in order to contribute to successful class discussions:

Your responses to my discussion questions should be in sentence/paragraph format, and you should avoid what I call "text message" grammar (that means no "u" instead of "you"). While format is always important (since it eases communication), the focus in this class is primarily on content. Therefore, your comments should be meaningful and expand your classmates' understanding of the topic. The goal for our discussions is to deepen our understanding of the course themes.

On each discussion thread, you can earn up to twenty points for your contributions. To get a high discussion grade, you must read a significant number of your classmates' posts (that's worth half of the points), and your answers must reflect real thought and deepen the conversation (that's the other half of the points). Therefore keep the following in mind:

- Say something that will *contribute* to a *meaningful* discussion--this requires *time and thought*! Thoroughly reflect on and think about the point you are making.
- Fully explain and elaborate your points, using examples, evidence and logic to explain. Rely on evidence whenever possible, as this course is a social science course, and you are learning the social science perspective. Speak with precision regarding your meaning, rather than being vague or general.
- Respond to the topic, not the author. This does not mean you should ignore the person who wrote the original post, but it means you need to focus on the ideas in the post and how to further the conversation on the topic, not tell the author what you think of his or her post.
- Place your reaction in the context of the discussion. Make sure that you clearly connect your response to the week's (or previous weeks') themes.
- Minimize prejudices, biases, unfounded beliefs, and too much reliance on emotional reactions, which can sidetrack good sound judgment and opinions rooted in your learning and in the sociological perspective. It is easy for bias, belief and emotion to dominate a discussion because we have existing emotions around the topic at hand, or because we fall prey to

"reductionism" (seeing individuals as causes of their predicaments, which have social roots and solutions).

- Feel free to be personal and interpersonal on the threads, in addition to substantive discussion. This aspect of discussion helps the group bond as a community. Remember, too, that you will apply many of the topics to your own social worlds. Be careful, however, not to go WAY off on a personal tangent-- stay focused on the topic. If you want to carry on a more personal discussion, use the "other" forum on the discussion site. The assignment forums are reserved for analyzing the assignment of the week.

Examples of good discussion posts include: clarifying or expanding the relevant concept if important points are missing, vague or incorrect; looking at the issue from another angle or perspective; adding pertinent information; asking a question that forces your classmates to think more in depth on the topic.

I'm looking forward to an engaging and interesting discussion board!

**Students with Disabilities.** All students are responsible for all requirements of the class, but the way they meet these requirements may vary. If you need specific academic accommodations due to a disability, please speak with me and with the Disability Resource Center (564-2498). You will need to obtain the appropriate documentation from DRC in room B233. The disability accommodation documentation must be given to me before it is needed rather than afterward, so that we can make appropriate arrangements.