

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

(formerly called SOC 110)

**Spring 2010 (online)**

**Bellevue College**

**Instructor:** Denise L. Johnson

**Email:** denise.johnson@bellevuecollege.edu (when emailing me, please put "SOC 101" in the subject line)

## **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 scientific 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 teach something to the rest of us. I challenge you to abandon the traditional passive student role and to get involved with teaching and learning – I think you’ll enjoy it and learn a lot in the process!

A note about course content: Since sociologists examine just about every aspect of the social world, we sometimes talk about provocative material. Please be advised that, when we explore controversial topics, they will always be framed within an academic context. If you have any questions or concerns about course content or climate, 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 are posted on the course website

## COURSE POLICIES

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 and assignments 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.** 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 highly, HIGHLY recommend that you also create a "back up plan" for what you will do if you lose your primary computer access. **Please note that you are responsible for getting your work in on time REGARDLESS of the state of your computer 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. 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. 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). 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 (4 @ 100pts each)

400 points

Discussion participation (weekly - 20 discussion threads @ 10pts each)

200 points

Written Assignments (6 @ 20pts each) 120 points

Virtual Seminar (9 @ 20pts each) 180 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:** Four quizzes are given over the course of the quarter. 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 by the end of the day on the THURSDAY before they are due; that will give you a few days to work on them. 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! 4 Quizzes @ 100 points each = 400 total points

(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. 1 Fieldwork Paper @ 100 points = 100 points

(3) **Written Assignments:** You will complete six written assignments 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 assignment thoughtfully, clearly, and completely, as you can earn up to 20 points for each assignment. These assignments 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 assignment show that you understand and thought hard about the topic, or did you give the topic just a little superficial attention?). PLEASE DO NOT ATTEMPT THESE ASSIGNMENTS WITHOUT HAVING FIRST READ 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. Written assignments vary in length - some may be a paragraph long, others may be 1-2 pages. Please note that **I will not accept late assignments**, so work that is not handed in on time will receive a zero grade. Written Assignments will be posted by Monday morning (10am) of the week it is due under the “Assignments” link from the course homepage. 6 Written Assignments @ 20 points each = 120 points

(4) **Virtual Seminar:** We will have nine 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. In the middle of the first week of the quarter, I will assign students randomly to groups. This will be your quarter-long Seminar Group. Each week, 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 on the "Assignment" pages of this course website. I HIGHLY recommend that seminar groups begin working on seminar early in each week, 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 week, students can earn up to 20 points for the quality of their seminar work. Please be advised that not all seminar group members automatically receive the same grade - if one or two people barely participate in the seminar discussion, then their grade will be lowered. Further, I reserve the right to rearrange groups if they are not performing to an acceptable level. 9 seminars @ 20 points each = 180 points

(5) **Discussion Participation:** Each week, I will post one or two discussion questions to the “Discussions” link (on the left hand side of the course website). It is your responsibility, as a member of our class, to respond thoughtfully not only to my question, but also to your classmates' comments. You are required to participate thoroughly in each week's discussion, 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, and (3) aim to read almost all of your classmates' posts throughout the week (you will likely learn a lot from them!) **You should check the discussion board almost daily.** 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 are to deepen our understanding of the course themes.

On each discussion thread, you can earn up to ten points for your contributions. To get a high discussion grade, you must read a significant number of your classmates' posts, and your answers must reflect real thought and deepen the conversation. 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.
- Copy and paste the section of another person's posting that you are responding to into your message box as needed. By doing this, you will ensure that the flow of the discussion is followed by all.
- 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.