



## **SOCI 270: Sociological Theory**

**Units: 4.0**

**Fall 2020—Monday and Wednesday 2:00-3:20**

**Location: WPH 101**

**Instructor: Dan Lainer-Vos**

**Office: HSH 307**

**Office Hours:** Monday and Wednesday 11:00-12:00 or by appointment

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**Teaching Assistant: Oded Marom**

**Office:** Physical or virtual address

**Office Hours:**

**Contact Info:** Email, phone number (office, cell), Skype, etc.

### **Course Description**

Social theories are analytical frameworks that sociologists use to study and interpret social phenomena. Social theories provide answers to key sociological questions: What is this thing that we call “society”? What is it made of? Who holds power in society? How power is exercised? What are the ‘rules of the game’ that govern our society? How is our society different than that of our parents or grandparents? While confusing and abstract, these questions are not all that odd. In the course of everyday life, we ask ourselves similar questions all the time, and we come up with answers too: What are the key groups in college? Who are the most popular persons in the class? What makes them popular? How do they influence others? What makes my group different from that other group? What are the ‘rules of the game’ of my family, my class, my city? We typically phrase our questions differently from professional theorists, but our questions are similar and in this sense, we all are, already, social theorists.

While we all engage in social theorizing, there are important differences between everyday theorizing and professional social theorizing. Professional social theorists are different in the sense that they formalize their ideas and explanations. They write their theories down, attempt to make them more coherent, and subject them to empirical tests and criticism (by themselves and others). As a result, good social theories resonate not only with the experiences of their authors but with the experiences of many and offer us all valuable insights into the working of society. More than that, influential social theories shape the sociological imagination of other members of society. Even if we do not acknowledge that our everyday theorizing is deeply shaped by early theories.

In order to improve our understanding of society, this class provides an introduction to social theory and to sociological theorizing. We will grapple with the writings of Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and W.D. Du Bois and engage in some theorizing ourselves.

### **Learning Objectives**

1. Students will write and refine their social theories
2. Students will interpret select sociological texts
3. Students will describe and explain key sociological concepts and social processes
4. Students will compare and contrast sociological theories
5. Students will apply sociological theories to explain current events and social problems
6. Students will use different theoretical perspectives to develop policy proposals

**Prerequisite:** SOCI 200 Introduction to Sociology

### **Course Notes**

Due to COVID 19 pandemic, the class will be taught online via Zoom. To help you stay focused in Zoom sessions, we will alternate between open discussion, breakout room work, and short recorded lecture segments. Keeping focus in an online environment is challenging so please avoid using other applications or websites while in class. To facilitate interaction, please keep your camera on and your microphone muted during our discussion and turn the microphone on when you speak.

This course follows the “flipped classroom” model. In “traditional” instruction, students attend a lecture and apply the new knowledge alone when they complete homework. In a flipped course, students are introduced to new content in asynchronous activities (reading and taking short notes, for instance) before the class meeting, and apply the new knowledge during the live session. Completing the readings ahead of class is therefore critical. Otherwise, you will be completely lost during class meetings.

Weekly readings, with the exception of readings in required books, and related pre-class assignments are available in the content folder. The main assignments will be placed in the assignment folder. Lecture slides will be posted in the content folder as well. Please note that outlines are not a summary of the lecture! They are designed to help you understand the structure of the class and follow the argument. So make sure to take notes during lectures and discussions.

This class relies heavily on Blackboard for the administration of various assignments. You may not be familiar with some of these assignments (peer-review modules, for instance). If you experience difficulty posting or reading feedback to an assignment, please contact Dornsife IT Support at 213-740-5555 and choose option 2, [Text chat, and Blackboard 9 Support Portal](#), or send an email to [blackboard@usc.edu](mailto:blackboard@usc.edu).

### Communication and technology policies:

We want you to feel comfortable asking questions and continue and discuss course materials beyond the class. When you write us an email, indicate the course number and your full name in the subject line. Simple questions will be answered by email, but for more complex discussions students may be instructed to visit office hours. Emails regarding attendance should be addressed to your TA. We will respond to emails within 24 hours Monday-Friday, and on the Monday following a weekend or holiday break.

You are required to bring an internet-enabled device with browser capabilities, such as a cell phone or a laptop to class. During class time, you will use this device only to participate in activities guided by the instructor. The use of devices for other purposes is not permitted during class time unless you have special permission from the instructor. Students who require a laptop to complete in-class work can check one out through the [Laptop Loaner Program](#).

*Zoom etiquette:* To avoid a long wait in the waiting room and the distraction of letting people join individually, make an effort to log in a few minutes *before* the official starting time. When you join a meeting, make sure to mute your speaker and turn on the webcam. Proper attire is required and please, don't eat or engage in other distracting behavior while on zoom.

### Course Requirements and Grading Breakdown

Your grade for the class will be based on the following factors:

Assessment Tools (assignments)	Learning objectives	% of Grade
Reading and weekly pre-class work	Interpret texts; describe and explain key concepts	10
In-class work including quizzes and group work	Interpret texts; describe and explain key concepts	10
Three mini midterm essays	Apply theories to current events	15X3
Final essay	Apply theories to current events; compare and contrast theories	25
Theorizing practice	Write and refine social theory	10
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>100</b>

Readings and pre-class work (10%): The readings for each week must be completed prior to the first lecture of the week. On occasion, I will email you short current newspaper articles that pertain to our discussion and you should read those as well. Weekly readings will be accompanied by mini-assignment that must be completed prior to the first lecture of the week. Knowing that you are busy, I allow up to **three** missed or late pre-class work assignments. If you fail to submit more than three pre-class assignments, your grade will be negatively affected.

In-class work (10%): You are required to come to class regularly, having completed the readings and ready to participate. As a record of participation and attendance, you will be asked to complete some in-class work products individually or in teams. These may include short quizzes, one-minute essays, concept maps, etc. For teamwork, all members will receive the same grade for the grade product. In-class work may be assigned at any point during the class; students who miss the assignment due to arriving late or leaving early will not have an opportunity to make up the work. Knowing that you are busy, I allow up to **five** unexcused absences. If you miss more than five assignments, your grade will be negatively affected.

Three mini-midterm essays (3X15%): At the conclusion of each part of the class, you will write a short mini-midterm essay. Each mini-midterm will ask you to address a theoretical question and apply sociological theory to current day events or social problems and critically evaluate the merits and shortcomings of different theories. Analyzing current social problems using different theoretical lenses will give you a concrete sense of why theory matters.

Theorizing exercise (10%): In addition to learning existing theories, during the semester we will experiment with some active theorizing ourselves. We will develop theories in steps, using pre-class work to gradually flesh out ideas and add coherency and consistency to the theories we develop. The final product of these steps, the completed theory, will be evaluated separately for originality, logic, and coherence.

Final essay (25%): The final essay will ask you to bring together the mini-midterms you explored previously, revise your interpretations, and critically compare different theories.

Office hours: The materials and concepts covered in this course are abstract and difficult to grasp. At times, you will probably feel lost and that is normal and expected. When that happens, you should take advantage of our office hours to flesh out matters and make sure that you are on the right track. If you cannot attend the scheduled office hours, please email us and we will find a time that will work for you.

**Grading scale:**

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

A	94-100
A-	90-94
B+	87-90
B	84-87
B-	80-84
C+	77-80

C	74-77
C-	70-74
D+	67-70
D	64-67
D-	60-64
F	0-60

**Assignment Submission Policy**

Coursework should be submitted via blackboard on time but I realize that you are busy and, when possible, I will try to be flexible. Late submissions will incur a 10% penalty 48 hours after the due date and an additional 5% penalty each day afterward.

**Grading Timeline**

We will make an effort to provide feedback within a week from the due date of assignments.

**Readings**

There are four required books for the course:

- 1) Tucker, Robert C. 1972. *The Marx-Engles Reader*. New York: Norton.
- 2) Durkheim, Emile. 1984 [1893]. *The Division of Labor in Society*. New York: The Free Press.
- 3) Weber, Max. 1992. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Routledge.
- 4) Weber, Max. 1958. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Cambridge: Oxford University Press.

All books are available in the bookstore but you can probably get cheaper copies online. When you shop online, you'll see multiple versions. All of them are fine as long as they use the same translators. Readings that are not part of these books are marked in the syllabus with an asterisk and are available on blackboard.

**Course Schedule and Readings: A Weekly Breakdown**

Date	Topics and activities	Readings and preparation	Assignment schedule
<b>Part I: Emancipatory Theory: Karl Marx, Friedrich Engles, and Marxist Feminism</b>			
Week 1: August 17, 19	<b>What is Theory? Who Needs Theory? and The Materialist Conception of History.</b> Activity: Mode of Production exercise	1) "Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy", The Marx-Engles Reader, pp. 3-6. 2) "Contribution to the critique of Hegel's <i>Philosophy of Right: Introduction</i> ", The Marx-Engles Reader, pp. 53-65.	*Pre-class: Identify an observation or a phenomenon of interest? Name it.

		3) "The German Ideology," The Marx-Engels Reader, pp.147-163, from the paragraph beginning with "The premises from which we begin..."	
Week 2: August 24, 26	<b>The Theory of Alienation</b> Activity: alienation in the gig economy.	1) Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, "Estranged labour," The Marx-Engels Reader, pp.70-81. 2) "The Meaning of Human Requirements," The Marx-Engels Reader pp.93-105. 3) "Alienation and Social Classes", The Marx-Engels Reader, pp.133-135.	Pre-class: Exploring the gig economy mode of production
Week 3: August 31, September 2	<b>The Theory of Exploitation</b> Activity: calculating exploitation rates	1) "Wage Labour and Capital," The Marx-Engels Reader, pp.203-217. 2) The German Ideology, The Marx-Engels Reader, pp.176-186. 3) Capital Vol. 1, "The labour-process and the process of producing surplus-value," pp. 344-367.	Pre-class: Write an email to Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple, or to Dara Khosrowshahi, the CEO of Uber, explaining why they exploit their workers.
Week 4: September 7 (labor day, no class), 9	<b>Contradictions and Revolutions: From Feudalism to Capitalism and then what?</b> Activity: Playing monopoly	1) Capital Vol.1, "The so-called Primitive Accumulation," Marx-Engels Reader, pp.431-438. 2) The Communist Manifesto, The Marx-Engels Reader, pp.473-483 3) Capital Vol.3, "Classes", The Marx-Engels Reader, pp.441-442.	Pre-class: Interpreting passages from the manifesto; or, discuss what can bring about change?
Week 5: September 14, 16	<b>Marxism and Feminism</b> Activity: TBA	1) Heidi Hartmann, 1981 "The unhappy marriage of Marxism and Feminism," Pp. 1-42 in <i>Women and the Revolution: a Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and</i>	Pre-class: Develop concepts for thinking about the observation

		<i>Feminism</i> , edited by Lydia Sargent. Boston: South End Press.	
<b>Part II: Positivist Theory: Emile Durkheim and Erving Goffman</b>			
Week 6: September 21, 23	<b>The study of Social Facts and the Division of Labor in Society</b> Activity: Sorting things into categories (social, psychological, economic)	<p>1) "What is a Social Fact", pp. 35-38, 50-59 in <i>The Rules of Sociological Method</i>.*</p> <p>2) "The problem," pp. 1-2 (until the end of the first paragraph)</p> <p>3) The function of the division of labor, pp. 24 (from "We have not merely")-29</p> <p>4) "Mechanical solidarity, or solidarity by similarities," pp. 38 (from "The totality")-41 (until "their original nature"); 60-64.</p> <p>5) "Solidarity arising from the division of labor, or organic solidarity," pp. 68-71; 83 (from "The first kind")-86.</p> <p>6) "The causes," pp. 200-205.</p> <p>7) The anomic division of labor, 301-308; 311-328.</p> <p>All in <i>The Division of Labor in Society</i></p>	<b><u>Submit the first midterm</u></b>
Week 7: September 30, October 2* [due to observance of Yom Kippur, the class will meet on Friday instead of Monday. A recording will be available.	<b>Religion and Collective Representations</b> Activity: sorting sacred and profane objects	<p>1) "Definition of Religion," pp 21-43,*</p> <p>2) "Origins of these beliefs," pp. 207-241.*</p> <p>3) "Conclusions," pp. 418-448</p> <p>All in <i>The Elementary Forms of Religious Life</i>.*</p>	*Pre-class: Thinking with analogies and metaphors on an observation

<p>Week 8: October 5, 7</p>	<p><b>The Self as a Sacred Object</b>  Activity: fieldwork interpretation of niceties</p>	<p>1) "Individualism and the intellectuals" pp. 43-57 in Emile Durkheim on Morality and Society.*  2) Erving Goffman, "Supportive Interchange," pp. 62-94 in <i>Relations in Public</i>.*</p>	
<p><b>Part III: Critical Theory: Max Weber and Eva Illouz</b></p>			
<p>Week 9: October 12, 14</p>	<p><b>The Interpretation of Social Action and the rise of capitalism</b>  Activity: decoding the Beekman family portraits</p>	<p>1) "The definition of sociology and of social action" pp. 4-26 (selection) in <i>Economy and Society</i> Vol. 1.*  2) "The problem, pp. pp.3-7;  3) "The spirit of capitalism," pp. 13-28 (until "the spirit of capitalism"); 35 (from "Now, how could")-38  4) "Asceticism and the spirit of capitalism", pp. 115 (from "This worldly")-125,  All in <i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i>.</p>	<p><b>Submit the second midterm</b></p>
<p>Week 10: October 19, 21</p>	<p><b>Domination and Bureaucracy</b>  Activity: what type of domination is this?  Gameshow; concept map of domination</p>	<p>1) "The types of legitimate domination," pp. 212-216, in <i>Economy and Society</i>.*  2) "Legal authority with a bureaucratic administrative staff", 217-221 (until "these fields"), in <i>Economy and Society</i>.*  3) "Traditional authority", 226-231, in <i>Economy and Society</i>.*  4) "Charismatic authority", pp. 241-245, in <i>Economy and Society</i>.*  5) "The routinization of charisma", pp. 246-249 (until a number of typical forms); 251 (from "For charisma to be transformed)-254, in <i>Economy and Society</i>.</p>	<p>*Pre-class: identify 2-3 possible explanations for your observation.</p>



		6) "Bureaucracy," pp. 196-204 (until "such certificate"), 214 (from "The decisive reason")-216 (until "special virtue"), 224 (from "In spite")-226 (until "in fact and in form"; 228-230 (until "rationalized structure"), in <i>From Max Weber</i> .*	
Week 11: October 26, 28	<b>Rationalization of Love</b>	1) Illouz, Eva. 2010. "Love and its discontents: irony, reason, romance," <i>The Hedgehog Review</i> , 12(1): 17-32.*	*Pre-class: Peer review of theorizing
<b>Part V: Theory from the Margins: W.E.B. Du Bois and Anna Julia Cooper</b>			
Week 12: November 2, 4	<b>Critique of Racialized Modernity: Slavery, Class Struggle, Capitalism</b> Activity: TBA Recommended listening: <a href="#">NYT 1619 Podcast</a>	1) Du Bois. 1935. <i>Black Reconstruction in America</i> , 1860-1880. (pp. 3-54) The Racial Division of Labor 2) Du Bois. 1935. <i>Black Reconstruction in America</i> , 1860-1880. (pp. 55-70, 121-6, 670-5, 694-708) Rethinking Class Struggle	<b>Submit the third midterm</b>
Week 13: November 9, 11	<b>Critique of Racialized Modernity: Double Consciousness</b> Activity: TBA	1) Du Bois. 1903. "Double Consciousness and the Veil," Pp. 1-9 in <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> . New York: Bantam Books. 2) Cooper, Anna Julia. 2013[1892]. "The colored woman's office." Pp. 135-139 in <i>Social Theory: The Multicultural, Global, and Classic Readings</i> , edited by Charles Lemert. Philadelphia: Westview Press.	Pre-class work: TBA
November 17			<b>Submit developed theory</b>
November 23			<b>Submit final paper</b>

## Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

### Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, [policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct](https://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

### Support Systems:

*Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on-call*  
[studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](https://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling)

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on-call*  
[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on-call*  
[studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault](https://studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault)

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) - (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298*  
[equity.usc.edu](https://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](https://titleix.usc.edu)

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

*Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298*  
[usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care\\_report](https://usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report)

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776*  
[dsp.usc.edu](https://dsp.usc.edu)

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test-taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

*USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710*  
[campussupport.usc.edu](https://campussupport.usc.edu)

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

*Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101*  
[diversity.usc.edu](https://diversity.usc.edu)

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost’s Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

*USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on-call*

[dps.usc.edu](https://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](https://emergency.usc.edu)

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

*USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](https://dps.usc.edu)

Non-emergency assistance or information.