



# USC

## **SOCI 270: Sociological Theory (61511)**

**Units: 4.0**

**Spring 2021—Monday and Wednesday 2:00-3:20**

**Location: THH 115**

**Instructor: Dan Lainer-Vos (he/him/his)**

**Contact Info: [dvos@usc.edu](mailto:dvos@usc.edu)**

**Office Hours: HSH215** Monday and Wednesday  
11:00-12:00 or by appointment. You can also attend via  
**Zoom: #651 307 3592**

**Teaching Assistant: Yael Findler (TBA)**

**Zoom Office Hours: #TBA** Passcode: TBA

Office Hours: TBA or by appointment (with advance email notification)

**Contact Info:**

### **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 from that of our parents or grandparents? 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.E.B. Du Bois.

While the writings of Marx, Durkheim, Weber and Du Bois are interesting in their own right, the key test to social theories, especially theories that were written a long time ago, is their ability to shed light on current events and help us better understand the present. Therefore, in addition to grappling with these century-old theories in their own terms, we will apply these classical theories to current day phenomena like the rise of online dating, the gig economy, new media, professional and college sports, patenting, etc.

### **Learning Objectives**

1. Students will interpret select sociological texts
2. Students will describe and explain key sociological concepts and social processes
3. Students will compare and contrast sociological theories
4. Students will apply sociological theories to explain current events and social problems
5. Students will use theoretical knowledge to formulate specific policy recommendations

**Prerequisite:** SOCI 200 Introduction to Sociology

## Course Notes

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](#).

### 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 and attendance	Interpret texts; describe and explain key concepts; participate	5

Three mini midterm essays	Apply theories to current events; formulate policy recommendations	20X3
Final essay	Apply theories to current events; compare and contrast theories	25
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>100</b>

You must complete all course assignments (as described below). Failure to complete one of them will result in an F in the class.

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 (5%): You are required to come to class regularly, having completed the readings and ready to participate. We will use Qwickly attendance to record attendance. At the beginning of class, please sign in through Qwickly (signing in will be possible during the first 10 minutes of the class). If you have difficulty signing in, please be patient and wait until the end of the class to address the problem directly with me.

In addition, during class, 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 (3X20%): 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.

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. You are responsible for viewing our comments on your assignments and notifying the instructor within two weeks if you think a score is missing or inaccurate. If you fail to notify the instructor of any discrepancy, missing score, or contest a score within this timeframe, later challenges will not be considered.

### **Readings**

There are two required and one recommended books for the course:

- 1) Tucker, Robert C. 1972. *The Marx-Engles Reader*. New York: Norton.
- 2) Weber, Max. 1992. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Routledge.

Recommended book: Giddens, Anthony. 1971. *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge 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 Engels, and Marxist Feminism</b>			
Week 1: August 23, 25	<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-Engels Reader, pp. 3-6. 2) "Contribution to the critique of Hegel's <i>Philosophy of Right</i> : Introduction", The Marx-Engels Reader, pp. 53-65. 3) "The German Ideology," The Marx-Engels Reader, pp.147-163, from the paragraph beginning with "The premises from which we begin..."	*Pre-class: Identify an observation or a phenomenon of interest? Name it.
Week 2: August 30, September 1	<b>The Theory of Alienation</b> Activity: case studies of alienation.	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: The gig economy mode of production quiz
Week 3: September 6 (labor Day, no class) September 8 (Rosh HaShana, no class), September 10 make up class	<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: Uber alienation quiz
Week 4: September 13, 15	<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: Write an email to Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple explaining why they exploit their workers.
Week 5: September 20, 22	<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 Feminism</i> , edited by Lydia Sargent. Boston: South End Press.	Pre-class: <a href="#">Play California Budget surplus game</a>
<b>Part II: Theory from the Margins: W.E.B. Du Bois and</b>			

Week 6: September 27, 29	<b>Critique of Racialized Modernity: Double Consciousness</b> Activity: TBA	1) Du Bois. 1903. "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," Pp. 7-14 in <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> . New York: Bantam Books. 2) Du Bois. 1920. "The Souls of White Folk," Pp. 44-58 in <i>Darkwater: Voices From Within the Veil</i> .	
Week 7: October 4, 6	<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 8: October 11, 13	<b>Race today</b>	1) Wilson. 1978. "The Declining Significance of Race." <i>Society</i> 56-62. 2) Coates, Ta-Nehishi. 2014. " <a href="#">The Case for Reparations</a> ." <i>The Atlantic Magazine</i>	
<b>Part III: Positivist Theory: Emile Durkheim and Erving Goffman</b>			
Week 9: October 18, 20	<b>The study of Social Facts and the Division of Labor in Society</b> Activity: Sorting things into categories (social, psychological, economic)	1) "What is a Social Fact", pp. 35-38, 50-59 in <i>The Rules of Sociological Method</i> . 2) Selection from "The Division of Labor in Society", pp. 14-37 in <i>Social Theory Re-wired</i> . Edited by Wesley Longhofer and Daniel Winchester. Routledge: New York.	<b>Submit the first midterm</b>
Week 10: October 25 27	<b>Religion and Collective Representations</b> Activity: sorting sacred and profane objects	1) "Definition of Religion," pp 21-43,* 2) "Origins of these beliefs," pp. 207-241.* 3) "Conclusions," pp. 418-448 All in <i>The Elementary Forms of Religious Life</i> .*	*Pre-class: Thinking with analogies and metaphors on an observation
Week 11: November 1, 3	<b>The Self as a Sacred Object</b> Activity: fieldwork interpretation of niceties	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> .*	
<b>Part III: Critical Theory: Max Weber and Eva Illouz</b>			

Week 12: November 8, 10	<b>The Interpretation of Social Action and the rise of capitalism</b> Activity: decoding the Beekman family portraits	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> .	<b>Submit the second midterm</b>
Week 13: November 15, 17	<b>Weber's theory of Domination</b> Activity: what type of domination is this? Gameshow; concept map of domination	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> . 6) "Legal rule with bureaucratic administrative staff" in <i>Economy and Society</i> .	*Pre-class:
Week 13: November 22, 24 (Thanking, no class)	<b>Bureaucracy and the iron cage</b>	1) "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 14: November 29, December 1	<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:
December 10			<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](http://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](http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

### **Support Systems:**

*Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on-call*

[studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://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.