

## **SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY, Sociology 420**

### **COURSE SUMMARY/ABSTRACT:**

Studying sociological theory gives us a chance to ask the really big questions, which reflect the philosophical, theological, historical and economic roots of the discipline of sociology. We'll examine some of the following questions this semester:

How is society possible? How does one study society? What is the nature of modern (and post-modern) society? Where have we been and where are we going? What is the role of order and conflict in society? How rational are human beings? How do contemporary sociologists (feminist theorists, the "new structuralists," neo-functionalists, neo-Marxists, post-modernists) use the theoretical ideas expressed by the 19<sup>th</sup> century classicists of sociology? What is the role of theory in the social sciences today? What is the nature of sociological inquiry?

We'll begin by examining the sociology of knowledge (how do we know what we know?) and a little bit about the history of sociology. We cannot hope to understand theoretical ideas unless we understand the context in which they emerge. Through the Farganis reader, we'll examine original source material, beginning with the classical 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers and moving to contemporary theorists in the second half of the course. As we examine contemporary theories and thinkers, we'll also be looking at Hurst on how useful the ideas of Marx, Weber, Durkheim and Simmel continue to be in contemporary sociology. Anyone who would like a standard textbook for background reading can find two examples on reserve at the library: Wallace and Wolf's *Contemporary Sociology Theory*, and Turner et. al.'s *The Emergence of Sociological Theory*.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this class I hope you will,

- (1) Understand how and why the discipline of sociology emerged when it did;
- (2) Be able to identify key thinkers and their ideas in each of the major traditions within sociology;
- (3) Be able to bridge classical and more contemporary work on social issues in theory;
- (4) Know how to use theory – that is, be able to talk about abstract ideas and apply them in your own work in this and other classes;
- (5) Communicate what you know through a series of short assignments which will be shared with the class on-line, and evaluated during the semester. These assignments focus on applying of theory within and outside of sociology.
- (6) Lead the discussion for a portion of one class period on the theory of your choice.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

This course will require both individual and group commitment to create a lively, interesting, and challenging experience. By the second or third week of the semester I will ask you to place yourselves in work/discussion groups of 3 to 4 persons to exchange ideas, study

together, help edit work, etc. The ideas discussed in this class are challenging. It is helpful to have group support to better understand their complexities.

### **Individual responsibilities--**

To earn a passing grade for the course,

- 1) Your **attendance** and **participation** is required. Participation can be gauged by your presence, your questions (in or out of your group), your verbal responses to ideas in your own and in other's written work, and being present to complete free writing assignments, etc. I will not accept portfolio entries (see below) from you if you are not in class for the entire period the day the assignment is collected. 25 points; possibly more.
- 2) Your **individual written work** for the semester, which will consist of a series of essays turned in to me through the course of the semester and again at the end of the course. All outside writing should be typed, double-spaced and proofed for errors in spelling and grammar. 100 points total. Four assignments of 25 points each will comprise the body of written work for this class.
- 3) Two exams, a midterm and a final, for 50 points each. Exams will mix objective with essay items, but will primarily rely on short and more extensive essay items (100 points total).
- 4) One in-class presentation/discussion of one of the readings in Farganis. You will be responsible for providing discussion questions, and an abstract (summary of main ideas) of the material to be distributed to the class. 25 points.
- 5) All reading assigned for the week should be completed by Monday (except for the first week of classes and unless otherwise announced!)

### **More on the individual short papers—**

**100** points, or more than one third, of your course grade will be based on a series of projects and short essays. Each of the essays will focus on some application of theory – that is, how sociological theory is used: by sociologists, by editorial writers/political commentators, by directors (film), and in the images of photography. Each assignment will be explained in class at least three weeks before the due date. I will be asking you to be prepared to discuss/present your work in class on the day it is due. You must be present to hand in your work.

The first short assignment is the most direct: I will distribute a recent empirical study published in the *American Sociological Review*, the main journal in our discipline. I will ask you to read the article, think about it, and then answer a series of questions with a small group of classmates which addresses how the two authors use theory. For the second assignment, you will locate your own empirical article and address the same questions

All short assignments must be typed, double-spaced, and proofed for errors in grammar and spelling. The minimum length per portfolio is 4 pages (1,000 words). I encourage you to exchange work and ideas in the discussion/work groups developed in class.

**Grading Scale: Grades will be assigned with + and – designations in this class. An A+ is 97% of more of points in the class. An A- is 90-93% of the points possible in the class.**

A (90%)	250-225
B (80%)	224-200

C (70%)	199-175
D (60%)	174-150
F (59%)	149 and below

Remember that an “A” represents exceptional work, a “B” represents very good work, a “C” represents acceptable/average work, a “D” is inadequate to passing work, and an “F” is a failing grade.

### **COURSE POLICY: (UNIVERSITY)**

CSUCI Policy on Academic Dishonesty: In accordance with the CSU Channel Islands policy on academic dishonesty, students in this course who submit the work of others as their own (plagiarize), cheat on tests and examinations, help other students cheat or plagiarize, or commit other acts of academic dishonesty will receive appropriate academic penalties, up to and including failing the course.

Disabilities Statement: Students who have disabilities or special needs and require accommodations in order to have equal access to classrooms must register with the designated staff member in Student Affairs so that I might better accommodate those needs. Students are required to provide documentation of a disability when accommodations are requested.

**MY POLICIES: CLASS POLICY ON CELL-PHONES, BEEPERS, AND OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN CLASS: DON'T BRING THEM OR TURN THEM OFF! I EXPECT STUDENTS WHO ATTEND TO BE ATTENTIVE – THIS MEANS NOT READING THE NEWSPAPER, CARRYING ON A CONVERSATION, DOING WORK FOR OTHER CLASSES, EATING, DRINKING, POPPING GUM, PACKING UP BEFORE CLASS IS FINISHED, ETC. YOU ARE EXPECTED TO BE IN CLASS ON TIME, AND CLASS WILL ALWAYS END ON TIME. IF YOU HAVE A CONFLICTING APPOINTMENT AND NEED TO LEAVE, PLEASE DO ME THE COURTESY OF LETTING ME KNOW IN ADVANCE. IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO KEEP PACE WITH THE CLASS IF YOU ARE GOING TO BE AWAY FOR A UNIVERSITY-SPONSORED EVENT. IN-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS CANNOT BE MADE UP. EXAMS CANNOT BE RESCHEDULED EXCEPT IN CASE OF SERIOUS ILLNESS OR EMERGENCY. ALL MAKE-UP EXAMS WILL BE ADMINISTERED DURING THE FINAL EXAM PERIOD. FINALLY, COMING AND GOING ONCE THE CLASS HAS BEGUN IS DISRUPTIVE TO EVERYONE. DON'T DO IT.**

Sociological Theory

Readings and Topics Syllabus++

Week of:

1) January 23

Topic:

First Class Period (Q. & A., Syllabus)

What is theory? What is its role in Sociology?

Begin: History of Social Thought

Read: Introduction: Farganis

- 2) January 30           History of Social Thought  
Read: Chapter 1, Hurst
- 3) February 6           Karl Marx: The Preacher  
Read: Chapter 1, Farganis (Marx: Alienation, Class Struggle, Class Consciousness)
- 4) February 13         Emile Durkheim: The Scientist  
Read: Chapter 2, Farganis (Durkheim: Anomie and Social Integration); Chapter 2, Hurst
- 5) February 20         Discussion: How do contemporary sociologists use theory? (First short  
paper due Monday, February 20)  
Begin Max Weber: The Pessimist  
Read: Chapter 3, Farganis (Weber: The Iron Cage)
- 6) February 27         Continue Weber: The Pessimist  
Read: Chapter 3, Hurst
- 7) March 6             Georg Simmel: The Outsider  
Read: Chapter 4, Farganis (Simmel: Dialectic of Individual and Society)
- 8) March 13           George Herbert Mead: The Philosopher  
Read: Chapter 5, Farganis (Mead: The Emergent Self)  
**MIDTERM EXAM Wednesday, March 15**  
**Second short paper due.**
- Spring break....spring break....spring break....spring break!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
- 9) March 27           Return Exams: Show Film  
Discuss presentations on contemporary theory  
Read: Chapter 6 and 7, Farganis (W.E.B. DuBois: The Public Intellectual) and  
Functionalism
- 10) April 3            Post-War Sociology -- Functionalism  
**Third short paper due.**  
Read: Chapter 8, Farganis, Hurst, C. 4
- 11) April 10           Post-War Sociology -- Conflict Theory  
Read: Chapter 9, Farganis; Hurst, C. 5
- 12) April 17           Exchange Theory/Rational Choice  
Read: Chapter 10, Farganis; Hurst, to end
- 13) April 24           Phenomenology and Ethnomethods  
Read: Chapter 11, Farganis

14) May 1                      Symbolic Interaction  
    Read: Chapter 12, Farganis

15) May 8                      Feminist Theory  
                                    **Final Paper Due**  
    No New Reading

**Faculty Consultation days are Thursday and Friday, May 12 & 13. Final exam is Wednesday, May 17, 10:30-12:30 in this classroom**

++ All reading should be completed before the class period. Dates on this syllabus are **tentative** and **subject to change**. You are responsible for being aware of due dates for assignments.