

Sociology 181: Honors Introduction: The Sociological Imagination
Spring 2012
9:30-10:45 Tuesday & Thursday
6112 Sewell Social Science Building
Prof. Pamela Oliver
8143 Social Science 262-6829

Seldom aware of the intricate connection between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history, ordinary people do not usually know what this connection means for the kinds of people they are becoming and for the kinds of history-making in which they might take part. They do not possess the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of individuals and society, of biography and history, of self and world.

From C. Wright Mills. *The Sociological Imagination*.

Office hours & Contacting Me:

Email: ***Oliver@ssc.wisc.edu*** I am easy to reach by email and will check email every evening, if not more often. This is an excellent way to get a quick question answered or to tell me about a problem. This is also an excellent way to ask for more detailed help finding sources for a paper topic, as it lets me do a little research and then get back to you.

Office hours: after class 11-12:15 Tuesday & Thursdays or ask for an appointment for other times. (I am not available Tuesdays & Thursdays 4-5:15, Tuesdays 12:30-2, or most Wednesdays 12:15-3:45)

In an important way, education teaches you how much you don't know. When you are ignorant, you think you know everything. Education opens doors into a whole world of questions about things you did not even know you didn't know. I hope you end this term full of questions and excited to learn more.

Broadly, sociologists study how society is organized. Pretty much anything involving more than one person is fair game for sociologists. We make big comparisons between whole societies or whole historical eras, and we make small comparisons between different individuals in the same situation. We study intimate relationships, friendship groups, families, education, politics, economic arrangements, organizations, violence, love, illness, agriculture, and much more. Instead of doing a little bit of everything, I've organized this course to focus a lot on a few topics and themes that I personally spend a great deal of time working on and thinking about, but even so, we move from topic to topic without tying everything together into one grand scheme. I have left flexibility in the syllabus so that if your own sociological imagination draws you into interest in other topics, we will have time to explore them.

I view sociology as something people do as they try to develop theories about how social life works and test their theories against evidence. To this end, I hope to give you a taste of some sociological research of your own. I have also invited several other sociology professors to come to class to talk about their work to help broaden your sense of the possibilities of sociology.

Books & Other Readings

You will generally have 1-3 "things" to read for most classes, some of them relatively short non-technical reviews of interesting topics, some of them denser professional research articles. Most of our readings will be articles and chapters made available through Learn@UW.

Details on reading assignments will be posted on Learn@UW as the term evolves. If needing a computer to access course readings is a problem for you, please talk to me or send me email so we can work out a solution.

Assignments & Grading

1. Participation 15%
 - a. Attending class and participating actively. Note: Active participation includes listening to others, not just talking, and involves connecting ideas to readings and to what others said.
 - b. Daily written reactions to each class. I will explain the procedure. You will write your responses on a piece of paper which I will collect, read and return to you; when the sheet is full, I'll keep it. This is **UNGRADED WRITING**. There is no grading for writing style, organization, etc. I will evaluate this writing as "participation," that is, as a component of assessing how involved you are in the ideas of the course.
2. Pre-class writing. 15% There will be a short writing assignment attached to each reading assignment. In general, this will be asking you to say what you see as the main points in your own words and note any questions you have or things that you think are worth discussing. This will be due at the beginning of class. Full credit will be given if your writing makes it clear that you have done the reading; this generally requires writing at least 200 words and mentioning specific things from the reading. Partial or no credit if what you write is vague enough that it is not clear whether you actually read the assignment, or only read part of it.
3. Short graded writing/research assignments. 15% total. There will be at least three of these in the first 10 weeks of the course. If there are more than three, the best three grades will count. Examples:
 - a. Assignment assessing your understanding of basic methods concepts
 - b. Essay on theoretical explanations for educational inequality.
 - c. Segregation/exclusion activity. You'll use Census information to examine how your home town (or another area you know) compares to other places in socio-economic factors.
 - d. Economic & political inequality activity.
4. Major paper. 40% This will be a complex research assignment designed to force you out of what for most students is the usual writing mode in which you do "research" to support your own prejudices or opinions. Instead, you will be asked to investigate both sides of some controversial issue or debate, and give an analysis of the character of the debate. The core of this paper can be either a policy debate OR an academic/scholarly debate. I will give you grade-relevant feedback for each of the required steps along the way. If you don't do one of the steps, you get an F on that step which you have to keep in your grade average; if

your work on an interim step is too minimalist to represent serious work, you may also receive a lower grade that will impact your final grade. If your work represents serious effort on a step, you'll be able to improve with your final paper grade. I'll explain this in class more. I will be encouraging you to work in groups of 2-3 people doing related projects to get some synergy from your work.

- a. Research bibliography. Following instructions in class, you identify various kinds of sources and give examples from them of the concepts we'll be using in the analysis. 10% (graded on extent of research and correct use of concepts). Due March 8
 - b. Outline or first rough draft. This integrates your research evidence into an analysis plan and identifies what your key arguments are. Counts 10% but I don't give it a grade unless I'm warning you for insufficient effort or you need more feedback on adequacy of research. My feedback will be suggestions for shaping the paper. Due March 29
 - c. First polished draft. This should be proofread and polished, what you would normally submit as a final paper on a deadline. I give grading feedback as if it were a final draft. If it is already an A, I will tell you, but will still give you comments designed to help you learn to turn "good enough" into really good. Due April 26.
 - d. Final polished draft. Due Finals week.
5. Oral presentations. 15%
- a. Short 5-minute summary of what you learned researching sociology professors 5% Due Feb 14
 - b. 15 minute presentation of your major research project 10% Due April 17-26 (different reports on different days)

Topics and Plan

NOTE: Reading and assignment details will be in learn@UW. I am editing and updating from a previous semester. Please send email or call if you something seems wrong or peculiar in the assignments, as it may be a mistake. Also let me know if I seem to have forgotten to update.

January 24-26 Introduction, overview. The general idea of sociology and the sociological imagination. Getting to know each other. Assign "professor reports".

Jan 31-Feb 2 We will apply our sociological imagination close to home. We will talk about class & race differences in education and about the role of the educational system in the larger society. We will examine differences in child-rearing, articles about school differences, and discussions of education as a system. I will be asking you to consider how you fit into these stories, given your own experiences and background.

Feb 7-9 Overview of sociology. Getting an idea of the field. Some basic concepts; the idea of social theory and theoretical explanations.

Feb 14-16 Short oral reports on professor interviews. Talking about possible paper ideas. Basic methodological concepts.

Topics after this will be adjusted somewhat as we go along in light of student interest and current events. Here is my tentative plan.

Feb 21 - March 8 Social Movements. We will two weeks on politics and social movements, looking at theories and research about how people go about acting together to promote or resist social change and talking over some of the events of last year in the Middle East and the US. I will argue that social/political movements and social science are always in interaction, and will give you tools for seeing these currents in social policy debates and social science debates. We will also introduce the concepts of identity and framing as tools for understanding language and ideas in political movements. These intellectual tools will be relevant for your papers.

March 13-29 We'll have three weeks with a lot of material on segregation, discrimination, criminal justice, and economic inequality – a set of related topics.

March 13-15 Deviance and crime

March 20-22 Segregation & exclusion (March 22 in computer lab for special exercise)

March 27-29 Economic inequality & discrimination

April 3-5 Spring Break

April 10-12 TBA. Possibly social psychology or total institutions. Or demography.

April 17-26 Oral reports

May 1-May 10 TBA, wrapping up

Topics I would like to at least do a little on are gender, social networks, religion, family and demography.