

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, CHAPEL HILL  
Spring, 2006

American Society:  
An Introduction to Sociology  
(SOCI 10)

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Section 2 MWF 2:00–2:50 Bingham 103

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Office hours: Monday, 10:00–11:30; Thursday, 1:30–3:00

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## COURSE OVERVIEW

This course is designed to give you a dynamic introduction to the field of sociology, with special attention paid to issues, ideas, and facets of American culture and society. If you and I do our jobs correctly, you'll walk away with an appreciation of the ideas and methods of sociological inquiry and a sense of where the field is today.

This course has four broad goals:

1. **To introduce sociology and its ideas**

You should have a sense of the kinds of issues with which sociology grapples, the tools it brings, and the ideas upon which it is built.

2. **To survey several fields of contemporary sociology**

Where is sociology going today? What do sociologists do?

3. **To encourage critical approaches to social claims**

Claims about the nature of society are made daily in the press, popular and business books, and elsewhere. After this class, you should be able to evaluate these claims critically and think about how they might be tested sociologically.

4. **To write well**

Social science is, fundamentally, a written art. Writing well is integral to good sociology. Your writing will be evaluated for clarity of thought, language, structure, and grammar.

## READINGS AND RESOURCES

### *Required Books*

**Dalton Conley, Kate W. Strully, and Neil G. Bennett.** *The Starting Gate: Birth Weight and Life Chances* (University of California Press, 2003).

**William Haltom and Michael McCann.** *Distorting the Law: Politics, Media, and the Litigation Crisis* (University of Chicago Press, 2004).

**Eric Klinenberg.** *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago* (University of Chicago Press, 2002).

**Annette Lareau.** *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (University of California Press, 2003).

**Pepper Schwartz.** *Love Between Equals: How Peer Marriage Really Works* (Touchstone, 1995).

### *Supplementary Readings*

All other readings are available either on the web or on the course website. These are marked with the [www] symbol. Those available on the web are linked from the course website. The course website is available through <http://blackboard.unc.edu> and is also linked from <http://www.unc.edu/~aperrin>.

### *Other Resources*

Have a dictionary close at hand to look up words you don't know. You can find an adequate one at <http://www.dictionary.com> if you prefer using an online version.

The UNC Writing Center (<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb>) can help you with writing clearly and correctly.

There is an astonishing amount of information available on the World Wide Web. A significant proportion of that information—though by no means all—is true and relevant. By all means, use the Web to supplement your reading and knowledge, but use it critically and make sure you know the source of the information.

## FORMAL REQUIREMENTS

The requirements of this course are as follows:

**Reading** You must complete all the course readings. *You are responsible for understanding the readings*—make use of your fellow students, your dictionary, the Internet, your TA, and me to make sure you understand the readings. Course time is to be used for substantive discussion and further exploration of the implications of course readings, *not* for grasping the basic contents.

**Participation** You must attend, and participate in, all class discussions and small group exercises. You are also responsible for the information contained in course lectures.

**Reading Comments** You must turn in two 2-page reflective discussions of readings of your choice. These are due *at the beginning of* the class during which the readings are discussed.

**Vocabulary Exercises** You must turn in two short (one page or less) exercises in which you explore a word in one of the class readings whose meaning you did not previously know. You should note the word, its definition, and its meaning in the context of the reading.

**Exams** There will be two examinations. You must take the examinations at the date, time, and place assigned.

**Book Review** You must write a review of a sociological book published within the past ten years. You can assume a book is appropriate if it has been reviewed in *Contemporary Sociology* or *The American Journal of Sociology*; however, your review must be substantively different from these reviews. Other books may also be appropriate. In the book review, you must describe and evaluate the book's research question, research design, and argument. You must tell me by **February 24** what book you intend to review. The book review is due **by 5:00 pm on Friday, March 10**. **NOTE:** Two small groups will be selected to form the sides of the in-class debate on February 10. Members of these groups will be excused from writing the book review, and the grade for their group's performance in the debate will substitute for that for the book review.

**Final Paper** The final paper is your opportunity to synthesize what you have learned during the class with outside interests and experiences. Your final paper must develop a sociological argument using appropriate sources. It is an academic paper and, as such, must be written in an appropriate style. The paper is due **at 5:00 pm on Wednesday, April 26**. Select an assignment from these four options:

1. Find some issue, situation, or paradox of interest to you and compare how at least two of sociology's grand theorists (Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Simmel, Goffman) would understand it. For this project you will have to do further reading of the theorists you choose, and offer an evaluation of the situation and the theorists' approaches to it.
2. Find some issue, situation, or paradox of interest to you and review and evaluate sociological research and writing on it. For this project you must provide a broad introduction to the field of interest and a sense of the similarities, differences, and relationships among sociological approaches. *This is not simply an annotated bibliography.*
3. Find some issue, situation, or paradox of interest to you and design a sociological study to investigate it. You must provide a theoretical background, literature review, methodological specification, and expected results. (This option is probably of greatest interest to those interested in the craft of social scientific research.)
4. You may choose to do a different assignment, appropriate for a final paper in a sociology course. *You **must** check with me before embarking on this option.*

### Grading

Your course grade will be calculated as follows:

Participation	5%
Small-Group Presentations	5%
Small-Group Ethnographies	5%
Reading Response Exercises	10%
Vocabulary Exercises	5%
Midterm Exam	15%
Final Exam	20%
Book Review	10%
Final Paper	25%

## COURSE POLICIES

**YOU ARE AN ADULT.** As a student in this class, you are provided with a set of resources for learning the class's contents, and you are expected to fulfill a series of requirements designed to evaluate the depth and breadth of your knowledge of those contents. Your grade, therefore, is a reflection of your success in utilizing the resources you have at your disposal. There will be no in-class quizzes or writing assignments, and there will be no extra credit or make-up assignments.

**YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE INFORMATION IN THE READINGS AND GIVEN DURING LECTURES.** If you do not understand something I say in a lecture, ask me during the lecture, during a later class, or privately via e-mail or office hours.

**ON DAYS WHEN DISCUSSIONS ARE SCHEDULED,** participation is mandatory. Some discussions will be full-class; others will be in small groups. Your participation will be useless—and graded as such—if you have not done the reading.

**ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE ON THE DATES LISTED.** Make sure you give yourself sufficient time to finish assignments by their due dates. You will lose roughly one letter grade per day between the due date and the date the paper is received. You may make the calculation yourself as to whether your work will improve

sufficiently in the extra time to make up for the grade reduction. In exceptional cases, I may grant an extension; you *must* discuss this with me in advance.

YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS COURSE IS COVERED BY THE UNC HONOR CODE (see <http://www.unc.edu/depts/honor/studinfo.html>). I take academic dishonesty—including, but not limited to, plagiarism—very seriously. There will be no excuses or second chances; if you have plagiarized the *ideas* or *words* of someone else without giving credit, you will be referred to the Student Attorney General. If you have questions as to what constitutes academic dishonesty, check <http://www.unc.edu/depts/honor/plagiarism.html> or consult your TA or me.

ADEQUATE COMPLETION OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE CLASS WILL EARN YOU A B-. Work whose quality clearly exceeds these requirements will earn a B, B+, A-, or A.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

**January 11** Lecture: Introduction to “Introduction to Sociology”

**January 13** Sociological Introductions (Small Groups)

**January 16** No class - MLK, Jr., Holiday

**January 18** Lecture: “What is a Group?”

Reading: Selections from Simmel, “The Importance of Numbers for Social Life” WWW

**January 20** Lecture: Critical Principles of Sociology

**January 23** Lecture: How to Read, Write, and Think Sociologically

*Start reading Schwartz!*

**January 25** Lecture: Sociology in the Real World

Reading:

- Abigail Cope Saguy, “Puritanism and Promiscuity?: Sexual Attitudes in France and the United States.” *Comparative Social Research* 18 (1999): 227–247. WWW

**January 27** Small-Group Discussions

Reading: Bearman, P. S., & Brückner H. (2001). Promising the Future: Abstinence Pledges and the Transition to First Intercourse. *American Journal of Sociology*, 106(4), 859-912.

**January 30** Lecture: Love, Romance, and Family

**Reading:** Schwartz, chapters 1, 2, 3, and 6

**Recommended:** Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage: A History, from Obedience to Intimacy, or How Love Conquered Marriage* (Viking, 2005)

**February 1** Small-Group Task

Reading: Donn and Sherman, “Attitudes and Practices Regarding the Formation of Romantic Relationships on the Internet.” *CyberPsychology & Behavior* Apr 2002, Vol. 5, No. 2: 107-123 WWW  
<http://www.liebertonline.com/doi/abs/10.1089%2F109493102753770499>

**February 3** Lecture: Foundations of Social Thought

Reading:

- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* WWW <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/index.htm>
- Max Weber, *Class, Status, Party*, from Gerth and Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* WWW

**February 6** Small groups: Marx quote interpretation  
*Begin reading Lareau!*

**February 8** Video: *Roger & Me* (selections)

**February 10** Class debate: Marx vs. Weber on Lareau and Michael Moore

**February 13** Lecture: Social Class as Lived Experience  
Reading: Lareau, chapters 1–5

**February 15** Lecture: Cultural and Cross-Cultural Sociology  
Reading:

- Horace Miner, “Body Ritual Among the Nacirema.” *The American Anthropologist* 58:3 (June, 1956). [www http://www.msu.edu/~jdowell/miner.html](http://www.msu.edu/~jdowell/miner.html)
- **Recommended:** Tobin, Wu, and Davidson. *Preschool in Three Cultures : Japan, China and the United States*. Yale University Press, 1991.

**February 17** Small group task  
Reading: Lareau, chapters 8–12

**February 20** Lecture: Society, the Body, and Health  
Reading: “Social Conditions as Fundamental Causes of Diseases” by B. Link and J. Phelan. 1995. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. Special Issues. pg 80-94. [www http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0022-1465%281995%2935%3C80%3ASCAFCO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-S](http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0022-1465%281995%2935%3C80%3ASCAFCO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-S)

**February 22** Lecture: What does Genetics Mean for Sociology?  
Reading: Guo, “Twin Studies: What Can they Tell Us about Nature and Nurture?” *Contexts* 4:3 (Summer, 2005): 43–47. [www http://caliber.ucpress.net/doi/pdfplus/10.1525/ctx.2005.4.3.43](http://caliber.ucpress.net/doi/pdfplus/10.1525/ctx.2005.4.3.43)  
Recommended: Perrin and Lee, “The Undertheorized Environment: Sociological Theory and the Ontology of Behavioral Genetics.” [www](#)

**February 24** Small group task: bodies and society  
**Book Review Topic Due**

**February 27** Guest Lecture: Eliana Perrin, M.D., M.P.H.: The Training and Organization of Medical Care  
Reading: Gawande. “The Learning Curve: Like everyone else, surgeons need practice. That’s where you come in.” *The New Yorker* January 28, 2002: 52 [www](#)

**March 1** Lecture: Health Care and Social Outcomes  
Reading: Conley et al., chapters 1 and 2

**March 3** Video: *The Deadly Deception*

**March 6** Small group task: Integrating levels with health information  
Reading:

- Conley et al., chapters 3 and 4

**March 8** Lecture: Debunking and Experience in Medical Sociology  
Reading:

- Elizabeth M. Armstrong. “Diagnosing Moral Disorder: The Discovery and Evolution of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.” *Social Science and Medicine* 47:12 (1998): 2024–2042. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536\(98\)00308-6](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536(98)00308-6)
- Åsbring and Närvänen, “Women’s Experiences of Stigma in Relation to Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia.” *Qualitative Health Research*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 148-160 (2002). [www http://qhr.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/12/2/148](http://qhr.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/12/2/148)

**March 10** Discussion: Writing the Final Paper  
**Book Review Due, 5:00 pm**

**March 11–19** Spring Break

**March 20** Lecture/Discussion: Review and Explanation

**March 22** Midterm Examination

**March 24** Lecture: What is Culture? How does it Work?

Reading: Bethany Bryson, “‘Anything But Heavy Metal’: Symbolic Exclusion and Musical Dislikes.” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 61, No. 5. (Oct., 1996), pp. 884-899. <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0003-1224%28199610%2961%3A5%3C884%3A%22BHMSE%3E2.0.CO%3B2-0>

**March 27** Video: *Cannibal Tours*

**March 29** Small-group Ethnographic Exercise

**March 31** Small-Group Exercise: Art Choices

Reading: David Halle, “Bringing Materialism Back In: Art in the Houses of the Working and Middle Classes,” pp. 241-259 in Scott McNall, Rhonda Levine and Rick Fantasia eds., *Bringing Class Back In*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1991. [www](#)

**April 3** Video: Excerpts on Katrina

*Begin reading Klinenberg!*

**April 5** Lecture: Mistake, Misconduct, and Disaster

Reading: Klinenberg, Prologue, Introduction, Chapter 2

Recommended:

- Perrin, Wagner-Pacifici, Hirschfeld, and Wilker, “Contest Time: Time, Territory, and Representation in the Postmodern Electoral Crisis.” [www](#)
- Wagner-Pacifici. *Discourse and Destruction: The MOVE Crisis in Philadelphia*. University of Chicago Press, 1994
- Vaughan. *The Challenger Launch Decision*. University of Chicago Press, 1997
- Erikson. *Everything in its Path*. Simon & Schuster, 1978.

**April 7** Small-group discussions

Reading: Klinenberg, chapters 4 and 5, Epilogue

**April 10** Small-group discussions

**April 12** No class (Passover)

**April 14** No class (Good Friday)

**April 17** Video: John Stossel, *Are We Scaring Ourselves to Death?*

**April 19** Lecture: Social Science and Evidence in the Public Sphere

Reading: Haltom & McCann, chapters 1-3

**April 21** Small groups

Reading: Haltom & McCann, chapters 5 and 6

**April 24** Lecture: Thinking about Risk

Reading: Conley et al., chapter 5

**April 26** Review and discussion

**Final papers due, 5:00 pm**

**April 28** Course wrap-up and evaluation

**May 9** Final examination - 12:00 NOON

## RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

*These are only a few suggestions—contact me for more in your areas of interest.*

- Textbooks
  - I have not assigned a traditional textbook for this class. If you'd like to look at one for reference, I recommend Giddens' Introduction to Sociology, or Coser et al.'s Introduction to Sociology.*
  
- Social Theory
  - Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory*.
  - Coser, *Masters of Sociological Thought*.
  - Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals*
  
- Individual and Society
  - Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*. University of California Press.
  - Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.
  - Whyte, *The Organization Man*. Simon and Schuster.
  
- Sociology of Work
  - Nippert-Eng, *Home and Work*. University of Chicago Press.
  - Newman, *No Shame in My Game*. Vintage.
  
- Inequalities
  - Bowen and Bok. *The Shape of the River*. Princeton University Press.
  - Skrentny. *The Ironies of Affirmative Action*. University of Chicago Press.
  - Ferguson, *Bad Boys*. University of Michigan Press.
  - Fischer et al., *Inequality by Design*.
  - Conley, *Being Black, Living in the Red*.
  
- Politics and Democracy
  - Eliasoph, *Avoiding Politics*
  - Perrin, *Citizen Speak*