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Introduction to Sociology  
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## INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY AS A CORE COURSE

Because this introductory course fulfills one of the university's core requirements in the social sciences it necessarily contains certain elements common to all university core courses. Among these elements are the following:

1. A concern with the perennial questions about human existence. Virtually by definition, an introduction to sociology deals with fundamental questions about what it means to be a human being living in a society at a given moment in history. In this course we will confront such basic questions as: What is the nature of human nature? What is the place of biology and culture, respectively, in shaping human behavior? Why do human beings commit themselves to a society? Why do persons normally conform to the demands of society? Do we have free will? What is the basis for social order? How does one become a functioning human being in society? Why is there so much human conflict? What are the forces that create group life and sometimes generate intolerance among groups? What is the character of the social self? What is the role of community in sustaining a personal sense of well being? The purpose of our discussion will not be to answer definitively such questions, but to suggest the way a sociological perspective approaches them.

2. An attention to the role of history in human affairs. The view taken in this course is that one's place in history shapes the kind of consciousness it is possible to have. In this regard, I do not see sociology as producing immutable "laws" that transcend history and culture. Rather, the task is to understand how humans' understanding of themselves and their societies shifts over time. In fact, sociology itself was a response to the transformations created by the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century. We will, therefore, consider how such "classical" sociological theorists as Karl Marx, Emile, Durkheim, and Max Weber considered the effects of society's transition from an agrarian to an urban order. In this discussion, as throughout the course, we will consider how the strength of the "social bond" between the individual and the larger society changes over time. Since American society continues to evolve, we will consider, as well, how the current movement of American society from a production-based economy to a service-based economy is once again transforming human relations.

3. An attention to cultural diversity. Two additional and basic premises of this course are that ultimately all knowledge is comparative and that all human values must be considered in cultural context. Wherever possible, cross cultural comparisons and

examples will be used to highlight the organization of our own culture. Of course, since American society is itself an enormously complex, variegated, pluralistic society, our attention throughout the semester will inevitably be drawn to the multiplicity of behavioral and value systems found in the United States. Appreciation of cultural differences of all sorts helps to meet a primary mission of any sociology course. It is to make persons less self righteous about the superiority of their own cultural beliefs. Both class conversation and readings are designed to put students into contact with class and race segments of American society that may be very different from their own group memberships.

4. An attention to the methodology of the field. Sociologists normally consider their discipline as one of the social "sciences." Identification with science means that the discipline's understanding of the world is based on carefully collected data. The writing assignment for the course requires students to collect some data on their own and to analyze it. Given the assignment, a substantial amount of class time will be spent talking about the nature of deductive and inductive inquiry, the requirements of scientific investigation, the nature of participant observation field research in particular, the contents of field notes, and strategies for moving from data to analysis.

5. A strong writing component. Although the term paper is meant primarily as an exercise in observation, data collection, and analysis, the quality of the final product cannot be separated from the quality of writing. Students will be encouraged to discuss their work and to share drafts of their paper with both the professor and the graduate student teaching assistants in the course. As time allows, we will discuss what C.W. Mills called "intellectual craftsmanship." As part of that discussion we will talk about what constitutes powerful social science writing. Here I am committed to two basic ideas about writing: (1) Writers should never confuse the complexity of their thinking with complicated writing. (2) Writing is not putting on paper what you think. It is, rather, part of the process of telling you what you think.

6. Contributing to the development of a personal philosophy of life. The psychologist Carl Jung has said, "There is no coming to consciousness without pain." Studying sociology can be uncomfortable for some people because it forces them to question essential ideas that have guided their lives. Much sociology is dedicated to "debunking" the myths and propaganda that allow some people to order their private lives. One of the first messages of sociology is that "things aren't always what they first seem to be." Often, what we take to be common sense turns out, upon closer investigation, to be neither common nor sensible. My approach in this class places primary emphasis on the basic process of interaction that shape all human relations, from those among anonymous urbanites to our most precious intimacies. Thus, I expect the class to enhance each student's ability to think about core life questions about the quality of relationships, family involvement, child-rearing, the meaning of work, and personal commitment to social change in a more complex and nuanced way.

## **READING**

Derber, THE WILDING OF AMERICA  
Henslin, DOWN TO EARTH SOCIOLOGY  
Karp, SPEAKING OF SADNESS  
McLeod, AIN'T NO MAKIN' IT

## **METHODS OF EVALUATION**

### A. The Mid-term examination

This examination will be taken during one of our normal class periods. It will cover the material on the course outline through section III of the syllabus. You will be responsible for both reading and lecture material to that point in the class. The mid-term exam will count for 30% of the final grade.

### B. A Term Paper

Unlike other of your classes which typically require a library based research paper, the term paper in this class will be based on data you collect over the course of the thirteen weeks we are together. I would like for each student to identify a problem or issue that can be investigated by doing in-depth interviews. The best way to identify a meaningful issue or problem is to start with things that matter in your own lives. In previous classes students have elected to do in-depth interviews with individuals who are the children of divorced parents, are biracial, suffer from eating disorders, are transfer students, are involved in a long distance relationship, are part of a particular subculture, are the members of one or another occupation (lawyer, physician's assistants, probation officers, etc.), suffer from one or another illness, are grieving for someone who died, have recently fallen in love, are members of a sports team, belong to a particular church or religious group, and so on.

I would like each class member to conduct six in-depth interviews over the course of the semester. The paper will be based on the data from those interviews. Typically each interview would last for about an hour. In order to conduct these interviews each student will need to define the issue or problem that interests them, construct an interview guide, choose respondents for the interviews, conduct the interviews, collate the data, and write the paper. We will spend time in class talking about each of these elements of the research process. Aside from introducing some basic theoretical ideas and sociological concepts, we will discuss Karp's book *Speaking of Sadness* as an example of in-depth interviewing.

The paper will count for 35 % of the final grade.

C. The final exam

The final exam will be part take-home and part in-class. By this I mean that shortly before the date of the final exam I will hand out a list of questions for you to think about at home. On the day of the final, I will choose a number of these questions at random for you to write on. The final exam will count for 35% of the final grade.

## **BRIEF OUTLINE**

### **PART ONE: FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIAL ORDER**

#### **I. Introduction to the Course**

1. Course goals and aspirations
2. Course requirements
3. Introduction to the readings

Reading: Henslin, # 1-3

#### **II. The Nature of Social Order**

1. Basic definitions of sociology
2. Sociology and the problem of order
3. Nature and nurture
4. Processes of socialization

Reading: Henslin, # 8-17; Karp, Chs. 1-3

#### **II. Doing Sociology**

1. Sociology and Science
2. Doing Field Research

Reading: Henslin, # 4-6; Karp, Chs. 4-7

#### **III. Interaction, Status, Role**

1. The idea of social organization
2. The meaning of social interaction
3. Some elements of role theory
4. Goffman's dramaturgical model

Reading: Henslin, # 18-22; McLeod, Chs.1-4

### **MID-TERM EXAM**

#### IV. Sociology in Historical Perspective

1. The development of sociology in the 19th century
2. The social themes of the industrial revolution
3. Karl Marx: A Conflict Model of Society
4. Emile Durkheim: A Consensus Model of Society

Reading: McLeod, Chs. 5-8

### PART TWO: SOURCES OF SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION

#### V. Social Stratification

1. The nature of social inequality
2. What is social class?
3. Marx and Weber on class
4. Values and social class
5. Mobility in America

Reading: Henslin, # 29-35; MacLeod, Chs. 9-11

#### VI. Deviance

1. Assumptions in the study of deviance
2. Theories of deviance
3. Does America foster a culture of “wilding?”

Reading: Henslin, # 23-28; Derber (complete)

#### VII. Race and Ethnic Relations

1. Race, ethnicity, minority group: A comment on terms
2. The nature of prejudice
3. Structural factors and prejudice
4. Institutional racism

Reading: Henslin, # 36-42

### PART THREE: SELECTED ISSUES AND TOPICS

As time permits, we will give more specific treatment to such topics as the bureaucratization of society, the social psychology of aging and the life cycle, the nature of urban life, and processes of social change.

FINAL EXAMINATION

