Overview

This course is intended to give you an overview of the field of sociology. Sociology is a very broad field, covering the entire range of human activities. More exactly, sociology is the science of the ways in which people interact with each other, ranging from small-scale face-to-face interactions you might have with your friends to such large-scale interactions as those that make up the global economy. Given the wide scope of the field, we cannot adequately cover all the major areas of social life that sociologist study within the time of one semester. Instead, we will focus on a subset of those major areas. Some the areas--culture, social structure, social psychology, inequality--are ones essential to understanding the world from a sociological perspective. Others--politics, social movements, the mass media, the economy, and globalization--reflect my own areas of specialization and interest--they are what I know best and can thus teach best. One could spend an entire semester--or, indeed, an entire lifetime--studying any one of these topics. We will only have the opportunity to begin to scratch the surface.

Why study sociology? At its best, sociology is not merely intellectually interesting but illuminates many of the issues we face in our day-to-day lives and many of the major social problems we are now grappling with as a country and a world. In our society, when trying to understand people’s actions or social issues, we typically look at the psychology of the individuals involved. Sociology offers another, equally important perspective, sometimes known as the “sociological imagination.” When we look at things through the sociological imagination, we consider how the networks of social relationships we are embedded within shape our actions and our chances to do well in life. This can include looking at our peers, our families, schools, the political system, the economy and the hierarchies of race, class and gender. While few if any of you will become professional sociologists, people from all walks of life can draw on the sociological imagination to help them better understand the issues we face as a country and a global community, to reflect on their own lives, and to understand the lives of those from different social backgrounds. Over the course of the semester, you will have an opportunity to develop this sociological imagination and apply it to a number of social issues--and to your own life. We will look at how the wider social world can shape people’s actions, even how they understand themselves. We will also look at the ways in which people can work to change society, including ways we might address some of these social issues.
You may find that some sociological ideas challenge fundamental beliefs you have about the world, in some cases so fundamental you are not even aware of them. This can sometimes be an uncomfortable experience. To benefit from this course, you need to be open-minded and willing to work with that discomfort. Among the beliefs that sociology may challenge are your political beliefs, particularly if you are conservative, but probably also if you are liberal. The way sociologists look at social problems leads them to see their solutions in ways that are consistent with left-of-center politics, though not necessarily with conventional left-of-center analyses. I don’t necessarily expect you to change your beliefs. I do expect you to take the ideas in this class seriously, however, and to wrestle with them. If nothing else, I hope that you will at least come away from this class having thought through those beliefs more deeply.

Since this is a core sociology class, we will also address the following matters:

- We will consider some of the perennial questions that sociologists ask: How is society possible, and how much social conformity is necessary for it to survive? What is the nature of human freedom and what are the limits of our ability to withstand oppression? How do cultures and societies evolve?
- We will spend a class considering the various methods that sociologists use. These systematized methods of empirical research are what make sociology a science, as opposed to a field of philosophical speculation.
- We will consider issues of cultural diversity, particularly issues of race, class, and gender. As part of this process of exploring diversity, we will read articles by authors who are themselves from culturally diverse backgrounds.
- We will consider why a historical perspective is an important element of sociology. Societies are not static, but change over time and if we are to understand why things are the way they are today, we must understand the history and causes of these changes.
- This class will be writing intensive, including both journal writing and take-home short essay exams. This will give you multiple opportunities to explore and refine your ideas and your responses to the class material.
- Finally, I hope this class will help you develop a personal philosophy. In particular, I hope that you will come to understand how larger social forces have shaped your life and the lives of others and consider the implications of this for issues like ethics, social policy and social justice.

**Readings**

I ask that you complete all reading assignments on the day that they are due. You will be held responsible for all readings on the exams, even those we do not cover in class. (At the same time, if you have a question on a reading we did not cover in class, please feel free to ask about it.)

**Books**

The following books will be used in the class and are available at the BC bookstore; they will also be on course reserve at the library:


**On-Line Course Reserve**

Many of the readings will be available in PDF format in the library’s on-line course reserve system. While this may be less convenient than a pre-printed coursepack, it is also considerably cheaper (as in free).

**Web**

A few of the readings will be available on the internet. The URLs for such readings are provided in the syllabus.

**Grading**

Your final grade will be calculated as follows: Your midterm and final exams (both take-homes) will each be worth 30% of your grade, your journals worth 20%, class participation 15%, and attendance 5%.

I will give numerical grades on your exams. BC’s grading system is, however, letter based, so your grades will be translated into letter format when I enter them into the system at the end of the semester. The scale translates as follows:

- 93+: A*
- 90-92: A-
- 87-89: B+
- 83-86: B
- 80-82: B-
- 77-79: C+
- 73-76: C
- 70-72: C-
- 67-69: D+
- 63-66: D
- 60-62: D-
- 0-59: F

* There is no A+ in BC’s grading system.

**Attendance and Class Participation**

I put in a good deal of work preparing for class and, in return, I ask that you come to class regularly. Additionally, we will be discussing certain facts and ideas in class that will not be in the readings, but that you will be expected to know for the exams. Thus, attendance is worth 5% of your grade. You are allowed two unexcused absences. If you have two or fewer unexcused absences, your grade for attendance will be a 95%. For every absence after the first two, I will deduct 3 points from your attendance grade (i.e., after three absences, your grade would be a 92%, after four, an 89%, etc.). Thus, good attendance can boost your grade, while poor attendance can hurt it.

If you come into class late, after attendance has been taken, please check in with me at the end of class to make sure you are not marked as absent. If you are more than fifteen minutes late, you will be credited with only half an attendance.

I hope to have in-class exercises and discussions in which everyone will participate on a regular basis. This will give you a chance to actively explore the ideas we examine in this class and debate with others. Thus, class participation is worth 15% of your grade.
Exams
There will be two take-home exams, a midterm and final, each worth 30% of your grade. Both exams will involve three short essay (a couple of paragraphs) questions. Both exams will be open-book and open-notebook. My goal is not to test whether you have memorized the material, but how well you understand and can apply the ideas. You may study in groups, but the work on the exams should be your own. The midterm will be passed out in class on Monday, March 15 and be due in class on Monday, March 29. The final will be passed out on the last day of class, Wednesday, May 5, and be due on Friday, May 14 at 10:00 a.m. The midterm will test you on all the material in the first half of the class, including both the reading and the lectures, while the final will be cumulative. Please keep in mind that, while I do not necessarily expect you to agree with any of the ideas in this class, I do expect you to be able to understand, clearly explain and apply them in your exams.

Paper Format: Responses to all exam questions should be typed and double-spaced. Please number your pages and use 12-point type in a common font such as Times New Roman or Courier. Please be sure to attend to such matters as proper grammar, organization and writing in a clear style. The better your writing, the more clearly you can convey your ideas. While some important thinkers have been bad writers, there is no reason to emulate them in this. More often than not, unclear writing reflects unclear thinking. If you are having trouble with the writing process, you may see me during office hours or make an appointment with the Connors Family Learning Center (http://www.bc.edu/libraries/help/tutoring.html).

Late Papers: For every day a paper is late, I will deduct three numerical points from it. A paper handed in on the due date, but after the time listed on the exam, will be counted as half a day late—that is, I will deduct 1.5 points from it. If you want to turn in a paper late on a non-class day, you should both e-mail me a copy (so I have proof of when you finished it) and leave it in my mailbox (#71 in McGuinn 410) so I do not have to print it out myself. If you fail to e-mail me a copy and I only find a copy in my box, I reserve the right to count it as having been turned in on the day I find, which may cost you additional late points. E-mail alone, however, is not sufficient. As a general rule, I will not grade your paper until you give me a hard copy. I may make exceptions in very unusual circumstances.

Extensions: If you need an extension, please ask. I am willing to be flexible in when your papers are due—but you must plan ahead. I ask that you request an extension well ahead of time; the later you ask for an extension, the less likely I am to say yes. I will make exceptions to all these rules in the case of a documented medical or personal emergency. If you’re handing in a paper on which you received an extension on a day when class does not meet, please follow the procedures for late papers given above.

Journals
As part of this class, I will ask you to keep a journal, responding to the readings, lectures, films, class discussions and class exercises. This journal will constitute 20% of your grade. You should write in your journal at least twice a week, filling at least a couple of pages each time. (If you feel inspired and want to write more, all the better.) One possible approach is to write an entry reflecting on the week’s reading before class and then write another entry reflecting on the discussions and exercises in class; you do not need to follow that format though if it doesn’t
work for you. I will collect and review your journals three times over the semester, on Wednesday, February 17; Wednesday, April 7; and Wednesday, May 5.

**Free-Writing:** In writing your journal entries, I will ask you to do something called “focused free-writing.” In normal free-writing, you are free to let your thoughts go wherever you wish. In focused free-writing, you should remain focused on the topic at hand--in this case, the topics we are covering in class--but you can say whatever comes to mind about them. The purpose of this sort of writing is exploratory and expressive--you are not trying to come up with anything polished, but to explore new ideas. In a journal, it is also perfectly acceptable to say you are uncertain about something and play with perhaps contradictory ideas. You can take the time to work through different ideas, trying to figure out what you think of them, evaluating them as you write. You should be sure to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of various arguments, the empirical support for them, etc., but you don’t need to know where you’re going when you start writing--and you don’t need to come to a firm conclusion.

Additionally, it is acceptable to express strong emotions about the class material. If you find some new ideas or facts that excite you and gives you new insights into something you care about, you give voice to your enthusiasm; if you find some of the ideas in the readings disturbing or angering, you can say as much; if someone else said something upsetting in class, but you didn’t feel comfortable responding there, you can respond in your journal. Just be sure to take the time to explore why the material you are responding to arouses these emotions in you. Don’t just say you love or hate something we read--say why you love or hate it.

I also encourage you to engage with the material not only at an intellectual level, but on a personal level. You can use the journals as an opportunity to reflect on events in your own life, now or in the past, as long as it is connected with course material. You may want to draw connections with events in the news or things you’re learning in other classes as well. (Just be sure to explain what the ideas from the other classes, in case I’m unfamiliar with them.)

**Purpose:** The purpose of this journal is to help you to reflect on the readings, class discussions, etc. outside of class. Many people find it helpful in developing their thoughts to free write--in other words, many people think best on paper, having the leisure to explore ideas on their own, before sharing them with others in conversation. For those of you who are cautious about speaking up in class, having a chance to do this sort of exploration first may give you more confidence to speak, since you will have had a chance to think things through thoroughly first. By digging into the material in your journals, it should also become clearer to you what points in the class material you do and do not understand, so you can ask questions during class to help you deepen your understanding. Free-writing in response to the materials should prepare you for the exams, where you will be asked to make original arguments using the class material, something that requires you to have thought deeply about it. Finally, this is a chance for a more personal sort of writing, giving you a chance to more deeply connect with the ideas we discuss in class.

**Questions:** When you begin this process, you may have trouble knowing what to say in response to the reading material. Each week I will send out questions related to the class reading which can use for inspiration when you write. I also offer some additional questions here to help spark
your thoughts about the reading material. Please keep in mind, these are just suggestions. You do not have to respond to any of the questions I supply if your thoughts are taking you in another direction.

- What in the class materials do you find confusing?
- What in the class materials do you find new and surprising?
- What in the class materials do you disagree with? Why?
- How does this week’s material relate to material from other parts of the course?
- How do the class materials connect with your personal experiences? Have they lead you to change your understanding of your own life or your actions?
- How do the class materials related to current events? Do they lead you to understand the news in a different light?
- Do the class materials give you a different or deeper understanding of social movements in particular or politics in general? How is this material challenging or changing your beliefs?
- Are you having a strong emotional reaction to any of the class materials? If so, examine why. Do you find it offensive? Does it challenge your beliefs in a way you find disturbing?

**Grading:**
The purpose of the journals is not to see if you understand the material correctly. (That is what exams are for.) You should thus feel free to make mistakes or admit you just don’t understand something. I will not grade your journals on how well you understand the material, but based on how deeply you engage with it. Nor will I grade your journals on your grammar and writing style. Free-writing by its very nature tends to be ungrammatical, as you move from one thought to the next. (Please do try to keep your writing comprehensible though--I don’t want to encounter a bunch of disconnected sentence fragments I can’t make heads or tails of.) Instead, you will be graded on how deeply you engage with material--how much you are in dialogue with the class material. This engagement, as I’ve already indicated, can take many forms--exploring how the class materials related to your own beliefs, wrestling with ideas in the reading, looking at your own life in light of the readings. There isn’t any one correct approach, as long as you really dig into the material and think about it.

Due to the volume of journals, I will not have time to read all your journal entries. Each time you turn your journals in, please flag the three best entries. I will read these in depth. I will also skim through the rest of your journal, both to verify that you have been writing regular entries and to get a sense of what else you have been writing about. Your grade will be based partly on the quality of your three flagged entries and partly on completeness (whether or not you have been making regular entries.)

Your journal entries will be graded on a √-, √, √+ system. I will give you a zero (no credit) if your journal entry shows no evidence that you are familiar with the class material--i.e., it appears you haven’t been doing the reading, paying attention in class, etc. I will also give you a zero if you do nothing (or very little more) than simply summarize the class materials. I don’t want a summary of what we’ve read and discussed--I want your reaction to what we’ve read and discussed. A √- indicates what seems like a minimal engagement with the material on your part--you’ve written something, but it doesn’t look like you’re really thought about the material much. A √ indicates that you seem to be taking the material seriously and are really thinking about it as you write. A √+ indicates that you seem to be engaging very deeply with the material, really getting in to it, whether intellectually or personally. This is, of course, somewhat
subjective. If you don’t feel like I’ve given you due credit for the degree to which you’re engaging the material, you may come talk to me about your grade.

**Format:** While I would prefer type-written journal entries, if you are more comfortable free-writing by hand, please feel free to do so. Just make sure that you write legibly. If I cannot easily read your hand-writing, I will return your journal entry to you and ask you to hand in a typed-up version of it. Before turning in your journals, feel free to go back and remove any entries that you feel are potentially embarrassing, whether because it’s too personal or because you were venting about the class in a way you think might offend me. (If you’re writing by hand, you may want to put each entry on a separate set of pages, so you can easily remove them from your notebooks.) If you do remove an entry for these reasons, please indicate you’ve done so, so I know you’re not skipping entries. (On the other hand, if I find too many such removed entries, I will become suspicious that you’ve been blowing off writing in your journal and are trying to hide that fact.)

**Academic Integrity**

Please familiarize yourself with BC’s definition of academic integrity, at http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/resources/policy.html#integrity. If you have any questions about how to interpret it in the context of class assignments, please feel free to ask me. Any violation of academic integrity will result, at a minimum, in a zero on that assignment. Additionally, I will report the incident to your dean and the Committee on Academic Integrity. This is as much for your protection as mine, since the Committee will conduct an independent review of the incident in order to determine whether or not I have made a fair judgment.

**Special Needs**

If you have a learning disability or other special need, please tell me during the first week of classes, so that I can best prepare to accommodate you.

**Course Schedule**

January 20, *Introduction*
No reading--first day of class

January 25, *The Sociological Imagination*
Ferguson, chs. 1-3 (Mills, “The Promise;” Gaines, “Teenage Wasteland;” Romero “An Intersection of Biography and History”)
Goodwin & Jasper, ch. 20 (Collins “Black Public Intellectuals”)

January 27, *Social Structure*
Ferguson, ch. 50 (Crow Dog & Erdoes, “Civilize Them With a Stick”)
February 1, *Culture*
Goodwin & Jasper, ch. 16 (Gusfield, “Keyword: Culture”)

February 3, *Culture & Power*
Goodwin & Jasper, ch. 17 (Peterson, “Roll Over Beethoven, There’s a New Way to Be Cool”)

February 8, *Sociological Research*

February 10, *Social Psychology: Socialization and the Self*
Goodwin & Jasper, ch. 1 (Zussman, “Keyword: The Self”)

February 15, *Social Psychology: Social Interaction, part 1*
No reading due--read ahead

February 17, *Social Psychology: Social Interaction, part 2*
Ferguson, chs. 17 & 22 (Williams, “Shopping as Symbolic Interaction;” Boswell & Spade “Fraternities and Collegiate Rape Culture”)
Journals due

February 22, *Economic Inequality*
Movie (in-class): *True Colors* (producers, Mark Lucasiewicz and Eugenia Harvey; Northbrook IL: MTI/Film & Video, 1991)

Goodwin & Jasper, chs. 21, 26 & 33 (Jackson, “Keyword: Inequalities; ” Herring, “Is Job Discrimination Dead?;” Jacobs, “Detours on the Road to Equality”)


February 24, *Cultural Dimensions of Inequality*

Goodwin & Jasper, chs. 35 (Morning, “Keyword: Race”)


March 1

*Spring vacation--no class*

March 3

*Spring vacation--no class*

March 8, *Solutions to Inequality*


Goodwin & Jasper, ch. 38 (Conley, “Forty Acres and a Mule”)

March 10, *Research Study Participation*

Susan Legere leading class

No reading due--read ahead

March 15, *Politics & Power*


Ferguson, chs. 35 & 36 (Mills, “The Power Elite”; Clawson et al., “Dollars and Votes”)


Midterm handed out

March 17, *Social Movements, part 1*

March 22, *Social Movements, part 2*
Goodwin & Jasper, chs. 57 (Meyer, “How Social Movements Matter”)

March 24, *The Mass Media*

March 29, *The Economy & Power, part 1*

April 5
Easter weekend--no class

April 7, The Economy, Work & Welfare
Ferguson, chs. 42 & 43 (Leidner, “Over the Counter”; Hochshild, “The Time Bind”)
Goodwin & Jasper, chs. 23 & 28 (Rank, “As American as Apple Pie: Poverty & Welfare;”
Journals due

April 12, The Global Justice Game, part 1
Web: Materials for the Global Justice Game, “Biopiracy in Plantanaguay” scenario:
http://www.globaljusticegame.mrap.info/the_game/participants/participants_biopiracy_in
_plantanaguay.html

April 14, The Global Justice Game, part 2
No reading due--read ahead

April 19
Patriot’s Day--no class

April 21, The Global Justice Game, part 3
Course reserve: Lori Wallach & Patrick Woodall, “It’s Not About Trade” & “The WTO’s
Operating Procedures and Enforcement System,” pp. 1-17, 239-261, Whose Trade
Course reserve: Vandana Shiva, “Threats to Biodiversity” & “Biopiracy,” pp. 40-68, Protect or

April 26, Globalization and Development
Goldman, preface, chs. 1-2

April 28, The Sociology of Knowledge
Goldman, chs. 3-4

May 3, Environmental Sociology
Goldman, chs. 5-7

May 5, Political and Economic Alternatives
Course reserve: William Julius Wilson, “A Broader Vision,” ch. 8, When Work Disappears (New
Course reserve: Hilary Wainwright, “Porto Alegre,” pp. 42-69, Reclaim the State (New York,
Verso, 2003)
Web: Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain, “Redressing Ecological Poverty Through Participatory
Democracy,” Political Economy Research Institute, Working Paper # 36, December 1,
2000, download as a PDF: 
http://www.peri.umass.edu/Publication.236+M55a927957b3.0.html

Journals due
Final handed out