Course Description and Objectives

What is the aim of sociological inquiry? What types of issues does sociology address? How does one do sociology? This course is designed to provide you with an overview of the field of sociology as well as get you excited about sociology! Over the course of the semester, you will become familiar with sociological theories, methods, and key sociological concepts. We will examine the ways that our social worlds are built, the ways they are maintained, and the ways they change. In doing so, we will consider how people create, make sense of, reproduce, and/or challenge the meaning and experience of everyday life. The goal of this course is to provoke thought about what we take for granted as “natural” about the social order of everyday life, in order that we may think more critically about the ways our social interactions create, reinforce and challenge the cultural practices and social institutions which influence our lives.

Since this is a core class, one that fulfills the university’s core requirements in the social sciences, it contains elements common to all university core courses. In this course we will examine the perennial questions guiding sociological inquiry. What is the relationship of the individual to society? What is the role of culture in our lives? Why is there inequality and how can we come to understand it? What is our relationship to global society? What is the value and purpose of sociology? How can we create a better world?

As our individual consciousness and lived experiences are shaped by our place in history, it is imperative that we take a historical perspective. Hence, we will always examine sociological issues within the historical context in which they are embedded. A number of readings will address the issue of cultural diversity in the 21st century society. We will spend a significant amount of time examining how race, class, and gender are constructed and reproduced in contemporary society. Both the class discussions and the readings are designed to encourage you to engage with segments of society that may be very different from your own group memberships. As part of the aim of this course is to provide you with critical thinking skills, we will also examine the various methodological tools sociologists utilize in their research and you will undertake a mini sociological research project.
There is a strong writing requirement for this course. You will be asked to integrate and apply the concepts we discuss in class to real world issues and your own life. It is my hope that the writing assignments will encourage you to not only develop your own sociological perspective but a personal philosophy; one that will offer you new ways of looking at the world and encourage you to use this new knowledge to influence society in ways that will make it a better place.

**Required Text (available in bookstore and on reserve)**


**Course Requirements**

**Class participation (15% of your grade)**

Much of the learning will take place in the classroom through participation in class discussions. It is expected that when you are in class you will participate.

**Assignments (85% of your grade)**

*Reflection Papers (25%)*

You will be asked to complete six (6) reflection papers over the course of the semester. These papers should be a maximum of three (3), double-spaced pages. I prefer that you email these papers to me, but you can hand in a hard copy. Papers must be submitted within one week of the class session you choose to reflect upon, and at least three (3) papers must be completed by mid-semester (on or about March 23rd). All reflection papers must be submitted by the last day of class (May 4th).

In these papers, you may discuss how you are interacting with the course material and discussions—the ideas presented by the authors, the way that you are integrating the readings into your thinking, and the way your personal experiences may/may not relate to the issues raised by the readings/discussions. The writing can be informal, but should be thoughtful and reflective. These entries should NOT simply be a summary of a reading or film, but rather enable you to relate the readings/film/class discussion to each other, to readings from other weeks, and/or your own life. You may also explore ideas that may not be covered in class or that you may be hesitant to assert verbally.

Each paper will be evaluated based on its thoughtfulness, insight, and engagement with the course material, and I may email you brief comments. While I will not compute your grade on these reflections until the end of the semester, you can see me at any time to inquire about your grade to date.
*Discussion Session Leader and Paper (25%)
Early on in the semester, you will choose one class session where you (in partnership with another student) will prepare discussion questions based on the assigned readings as well as serve as a discussion leader. **You will choose your discussion session by February 2nd.** In addition, you will individually prepare a minimum 5-page, double-spaced paper where you will discuss your reflections on the assigned readings as well as the class discussion. More information on this assignment, due dates, and instructions on how to sign up for a class session are outlined on Blackboard Vista.

*Mini Sociological Research Project (35%)
You will be asked to conduct sociological research on a sociological topic of your choice. This paper will be a minimum of 12-pages, double-spaced **due on the last day of class—May 4th.** More information is outlined on Blackboard Vista.

Late work
All assignment and papers must be turned in on the due dates noted in the syllabus and assignment sheets. If you have extenuating circumstances that will prevent you from completing assignments on time, you must come see me (or email me) BEFORE the due date to discuss a possible extension. Otherwise, points will be deducted for lateness.

A Note on Academic Integrity
Sharing of information and ideas are encouraged. However, when working on individual assignments, it is expected that you write your own papers. When using published work, you must cite the work. If there are any questions on proper method of citing or any other matter, please see me. For more information on Boston College’s academic integrity policy, please visit: http://www.bc.edu/integrity.
Course Schedule

Tuesday, January 19
Introduction and course overview

Tuesday, January 26
The sociological imagination
The call for a public sociology

Readings:
*Ferguson, Chapter 1 (C. Wright Mills, The Promise)

Tuesday, February 2
Theorizing about the social world

Film (in class): The Wire, Season 3, Episode 8 (60m)

Readings:
*Ferguson, Chapter 21 (Philippe Bourgois, In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio)

Tuesday, February 9
Research methodology
Research ethics

Readings:
*Ferguson, Chapter 4 (Michael Schwalbe, Finding Out How the Social World Works)
Tuesday, February 16
Socialization and the social construction of self

**RESEARCH TOPIC FOR FINAL PAPER DUE**

*Readings:*
*Ferguson, Chapter 12 (Robert Granfield, Making It By Faking It); Chapter 15 (Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler, Peer Power); Chapter 49 (David A. Karp, Illness and Identity)*

Tuesday, February 23
Social construction of gender
Family, gender roles and gender inequality

*Readings:*
*Ferguson, Chapter 11 (Judith Lorber, Night to His Day), Chapter 28 (Betsy Lucal, What it Mean to be Gendered Me); Chapter 53 (Andrew J. Cherlin, The Deinstitutionalization of American Marriage); Chapter 54 (Ann Crittenden, The Mommy Tax)*

SPRING BREAK MARCH 1-5

Tuesday, March 9
Social construction of race
White privilege, racism, and racial inequality

*Readings:*
*Ferguson, Chapter 31 (Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, New Racism, Color-blind Racism, and the Future of Whiteness in America); Chapter 34 (Katherin M. Flower Kim, Out of Sorts: Adoption and [Un]Desirable Children)*

Tuesday, March 16
Final paper discussion
Stratification and social class

*Film (in class):* Untold Wealth: The Rise of the Super Rich (26m)
**THREE REFLECTION PAPERS DUE**

Tuesday, March 23

Stratification and social class (cont.)

_Readings:
*Ferguson, Chapter 24 (G. William Dornhoff, Who Rules America?); Chapter 26 (Barbara Ehrenreich, Nickel and Dimed); Chapter 39 (Gregory Mantsios, Media Magic)

Tuesday, March 30

Institutional inequality in education and healthcare

_Film (in class):_ Sicko (60/123m)

_Reading:_
*Ferguson, Chapter 47 (Jonathan Oberlander, The U.S. Healthcare System: On a Road to Nowhere?); Chapter 51 (Jonathan Kozol, Still Separate, Still Unequal: America’s Educational Apartheid)

EASTER BREAK APRIL 1-5

Tuesday, April 6

Healthcare (continued)
The culture of “wilding”

_Readings:
*Ferguson, Chapter 35 (C. Wright Mills, The Power Elite) and Chapter 37 (Charles Derber, One World Under Business)

NO CLASS TUESDAY, APRIL 13

Tuesday, April 20

The culture of wilding (continued)

_Readings:

Tuesday, April 27

Discuss final projects

Tuesday, May 4

**FINAL PAPER DUE**

**ALL REFLECTION PAPERS DUE**