Introduction to Sociology - Syllabus

Course Information
Instructor: Ross Glover
Office Hours: Tues. 3-5pm or by appointment.
Meeting Time: T-TH 1:30
Course Location: O'Neil 211

This course surveys major sociological perspectives, theories, methods, and ideas. We will take a journey in this course from the origins of sociology as a discipline to the formation of current social problems. A key objective for this course is for you to develop what we will call your sociological imagination. This term has become a foundational aspect of what it means to do sociology, and it should be your first and primary goal as a student in this course.

As a part of developing this sociological imagination, you should work toward understanding the major concepts presented in the reading and lectures, improving your critical thinking, reading and writing skills, integrating these new ideas into your personal philosophy, and generating a strong communal learning environment. I have structured this course along three different tracks:

0) Social Philosophy/Theory.

1) The Sociological Discipline.

2) Sociological Experimentation and Practice.

Each of these will provide you with aspects of your's and other's social worlds and will force you to think about the world in different ways. Each week we will delve into new aspects of what it means to think of the social field philosophically; what the discipline of sociology thinks about itself, its theories, and its methods; and what practices we as social animals might utilize to explore our co-constructed world (view).

Philosophy of the Course

I must recognize that students cannot understand their own rights because they are so ideologized into rejecting their own freedom, their own critical development, thanks to the traditional curriculum. Then, I have to learn with them how to go beyond these limits, beyond their own learned rejection of their rights.

-- Paulo Freire --

This course is based in philosophy of collective learning, an anti-hierarchical method of inquiry in which we are all teachers and learners. Often referred to as 'critical pedagogy', I have chosen this framework and philosophy for numerous reasons. First and foremost, it is an ethical decision based on the long history of oppression produced by our taken for granted notions of authority and knowledge. Second, it is my hope that by restructuring our lived classroom environment, you and I will learn together different modes of social organization that may have a continued impact on our lives outside the classroom and on our understanding of the societal formations and structures. Finally, I have chosen this philosophy in order to give you the freedom to develop an intellectual curiosity that might go beyond the limitations of disciplinary boundaries. Given the above, you should note that this will be an open and transparent process. You are welcome to discuss any and every aspect of the course at anytime and should always expect to be listened to and heard. If at any point you feel your participation in the course has been compromised, I encourage you to let me and your classmates know. Your ability to express yourself freely is immanent to this pedagogical approach.
Course Structure

I have structured this course along three different tracks: 0) Social Philosophy. 1) The Sociological Discipline. 3) Sociological Experimentation and Practice. Each of these will provide you with aspects of your's and other's social worlds and will force you to think about the world in different ways. Each week we will delve into new aspects of what it means to think of the social field philosophically; what the discipline of sociology thinks about itself, its theories, and its methods; and what practices we as social animals might utilize to explore our co-constructed world (view).

Since this course fulfills a university core requirement in the social sciences, it necessarily includes attention to the following:

0. A concern with perennial questions

Certain questions in our field continue to remain open to exploration. These questions began the discipline and will likely never have a comprehensive answer. What is more important nature or nurture? What keeps individuals inside particular groups? Why do subjects obey social norms and/or laws? Why are some groups different from others? What are the similar features among groups? Do we have free will? These and other questions will be explored throughout the semester.

1. An examination of historical context

One of the starting points for this course is that we are always already bound to a historical context and contextualized by historical realities. Thus a significant aspect of what we will explore throughout the semester will involve the role of history in the production of knowledge, social institutions, and culture. From the very beginning of the field, sociologists have explored the relationship of society to history and vice versa. Throughout this course, we will examine both how early sociological thinkers as well as contemporary thinkers understand our relationship to history.

2. Cultural diversity

As the planet shrinks and the social field globalizes, it becomes imperative that we take into account differences among our fellow humans. During this course, we will continually work through cultural differences to better understand how our positions in the world engage with, relate to, and co-exist with the difference of others. This will take various forms as the course progresses yet will remain an ongoing concern and focus for everything we study.

3. Methodologies of the field

Coming to a sociological understanding of the world requires taking care to examine the world in particular ways. The methods we employ determine the types of understanding we are capable of having. As a social science discipline, sociology carries with it a wide range of methodological approaches. We will examine some of the more popular methodological choices you have as a sociological thinker, and discuss the various strengths and weaknesses of each, what each has to offer, and how to put them into practice as researchers.

4. Writing Component

While the importance of clear thought and argumentation cannot be denied, the best way to develop your critical thinking skills is through writing. Thus, I emphasize the importance of writing in this
course. You will be offered many outlets to express yourself through the written word, including blogs, forums, chat, wikis, and formal papers. Each of these should be seen as an opportunity to develop your writing skills.

5. Existential Reflection

One of the requirements for a Boston College core course “should be an integration of what the students have learned with how they act.” Therefore, you are encouraged to give voice and thought to how you fit into the social contexts we discuss. You will have numerous points of reflection and places of expression within the structure of this course. And you are encouraged both in class as well as out of class to apply what you learn to your lived reality.

**Coursework**

- **Read** – As much of this course will involve in and out of class discussions, it will be imperative that you keep up with the reading. I have not required any text for this course. Most of our reading will be in the form of documents you can download from this site. Our introductory text can be found at [wiki books](http://www.wikibooks.org). If you are curious about why a wiki book, please read about the [creative commons](http://creativecommons.org) here.

- **Blog Posts** – This will be an integral part of how you express your ideas about what you learn. I expect everyone to write one forum entry each week (10 minimum). These entries should somehow incorporate the ideas from the readings and class discussions, and they should reflect your ability to examine the social world utilizing what we’ve learned. In order to receive credit for a post, it must be a minimum of 200 words.

- **Concept Exploration** – As with any discipline, sociology has its own language. Part of our project this semester is to find and write definitions for a long list of sociological concepts. As a group, you will earn points by defining concepts during the semester.

- **Inquiry** – Part of this course is about inquiry. You will be asked, for some assignments, to explore some basic problems. This approach to learning allows/demands that you examine an issue or problem without prior knowledge of the subject. As a group, you will come to an understanding, a theory, and/or a resolution of the problem.

- **Thinker Profiles** - Each group will create a profile of at least 2 important sociological thinkers. You can find a list of thinkers here.

- **Exam Questions** - Each group will create at least 5 exam questions each week. The top rated exam questions will be used as the questions for the mid-term and final exams.

- **Presentations** - Each group will be required to present the materials for one class period at the end of the semester.