SC001: Introduction to Sociology, section 01 (for majors)

Instructor: Prof. Matthew Williams, PhD
Course meeting time: 4:30-5:45 p.m., Monday & Wednesday
Course location: McGuinn Hall 334
Office hours: 12:45-2:45 p.m.; or by appointment. Please note that I will only be able to come to campus Monday, Wednesday, Friday to meet with you. I am teaching at another school Tuesday, Thursday.
Office location: McGuinn 426D
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Instructor’s e-mail: matthew.williams.3@bc.edu, willibhi@bc.edu, or mw21@mindspring.com (They all end up in the same place.)

Disclaimer: This syllabus is not set in stone. I may change things on it, if I judge doing so will better meet the needs of the class. Please pay attention for any messages I send out indicating such changes.

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; those few sociologists who are conservative tend to be anti-free market communitarians. I don’t necessarily expect you to change your political 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 in-class free-writing, take-home short essay exams, and a semester-long writing project. 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.

**Communications**
When I have something important to notify the class of, I will try to do so both through an announcement in class and through an e-mail message to the class; at times, it may be by e-mail only though. I may also e-mail students individually if I feel the need to communicate with them about something in particular. I ask that you please read your e-mail regularly and, if I ask you to respond, to do so promptly. If you are not able to check your e-mail regularly for some reason, please let me know early in the semester, so we can agree on an alternate method of communication.

If you need to communicate with me outside of class, please e-mail me. Include the name of the class in the subject line, so I know that it is class-related and therefore deserving of prompt attention--and so I know to which of the classes I am teaching it is related.

Readings

I ask that you complete all reading assignments on the day that they are listed on the syllabus. 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:


Recommended Book
This book too will be available at the bookstore and on reserve at the library. The readings in this book are not required, only recommended. If you are feeling a bit lost in class, either after the lectures or class discussion, or when you sit down to take the exams, you can use this as a reference to help you.


Blackboard
Many of the readings will be available in PDF format on the Blackboard system.

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

Grading and Written Assignments
Your final grade will be calculated as follows: Your midterm and final exams (both take-home) will each be worth 20% and 30% of your grade respectively, your research paper worth 20%, class participation 15%, weekly quotes from the reading 10%, and attendance 5%.

I will give numerical grades on your papers. 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-
50-59: F

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

Attendance
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. For every absence, I will deduct 3 points from your attendance grade (i.e., after one absence, your grade would be a 97%, after two, an 94%, 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, I will only credit you with half an attendance.

While I permit students to leave early if need be (i.e., for an appointment which couldn’t be scheduled so it didn’t conflict with class), if you leave more than fifteen minutes early, I will only credit you with half an attendance.

Class Participation
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.

In order to properly keep track of who has said what during class discussion, at the end of each class, I will ask you to turn in an index card with notes of anything you said during large groups discussion. These don’t have to be elaborate—just enough to jog my memory. While ideally I would remember what everyone has said during class and would not need these cards as an aid, my memory is fallible and I find if I don’t use this system, I often forget to credit people with participation. This system is meant to allow you to get proper credit for participating.

Please remember that if you don’t come to class, you can’t participate. Thus, unexcused absences will also count against your class participation grade.
**Weekly Quotes**
On Wednesday of each week starting January 26, I will ask you to turn in three quotes from the reading and a one or two paragraph explanation of why you chose these three quotes. Please make sure you provide the source for your quotes—both the individual reading it is from and the page number. The length of your commentary on the three quotes should range from a half-page to one page, double-spaced. This should give you enough space to say something interesting about each quote. Your selection of the quotes should be based on one of two reasons: 1) They capture central concepts or arguments in the reading nicely; or 2) you find the quotes provocative, whether because they’ve caused you to look at an issue in a new way, they contain striking facts you were unaware of, you strongly disagree with them, or because they clearly capture some belief of your own.

The weekly quotes will be graded on a 12-point scale. (A 12 is roughly equivalent to an A, an 11 to an A−, on down to a 1, which is roughly equivalent to an F.) The criteria by which I will grade the assignment are: 1) The degree to which your selection of the quotes and comments on them shows a good understanding of the reading as a whole. (Simply paraphrasing the quotes will result in a poor grade.) 2) The degree to which you are engaged with the reading, shown by having something interesting to say about the quotes. 3) Original insights, such as connecting different quotes or readings together in new ways; connecting the quotes with other material--from this class or another--in new ways; raising perceptive criticisms of the quotes/readings; etc. If you can tie your comments on each quote together into a whole, that may make your commentary stronger, but it is not absolutely necessary for a good grade.

You are allowed three weeks in which you do not turn in the weekly quotes. This will be worth 10% of your grade.

If you miss class, please e-mail the weekly quotes to me on the day they are due, then bring in a hard copy next time you come to class. Quotes not turned in on time can be turned in up to a week late for half-credit. If you turn in more than the minimum required number of quotes, I will eliminate the equivalent number of weekly quotes with the lowest score (i.e., if you turn in quotes every Wednesday, I will eliminate your three lowest scores.)

**Exams**
There will be two take-home essay exams, a midterm and final, the first worth 20% of your grade, the second 30%. The midterm will consist of one question, the final of two; in all cases, your answers should be from 5-6 pages. 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 February 16 and be due in class on March 2. The final will be passed out on May 2, and be due May 16. 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.

**Research Paper**

I will ask you to write a ten-page research paper about some social issue relating to class inequality. This paper will be worth 20% of your grade. It may be on any issue of interest to you, as long as it is connected with sociology. This leaves you a lot of room to play with—if it has to do with human interaction, it’s probably fair game. Still, make sure that what you are writing is a sociology paper, not a psychology or philosophy paper. Some of the issue areas that sociologists and psychologists look at are the same or overlap, but they have different perspectives on them. These perspectives are both important—in fact, they complement each other—but the goal of this class is to help you develop a sociological perspective. Do not consider questions of individual psychology (or at least, do not focus on them), but those of how larger groups, social structures, and/or culture play out in terms of the issue you are interested in. If for instance, you are interested in doing a paper on romantic relationships, you should not focus on the psychology of the individuals; instead, you should look at things like the cultural norms about romantic relationships in our society, how differences in gender roles create tensions in heterosexual relationships, or how race and class shape mutual attraction. Many of the issues that sociologists study are also ones that philosophers, theologians and others make ethical evaluations of. Such ethical evaluations are important and you may include them in your paper, but your focus should be on the concrete workings of some social phenomenon, not on how you judge it in terms of your values. If, for instance, you were to do a paper on abortion, you should not focus on arguing for your position, whether pro-choice, pro-life, or somewhere in between. You should instead look at something like changing cultural norms about abortion, the dynamics of either the pro-choice or pro-life movements, or how people come to have the beliefs about abortion they do. Indeed, you might be well served by trying to understand the position you oppose on its own terms, even if only to better argue against it.

Possible paper topics you might pursue and analytical questions you might ask about them include (You should by no means feel limited by these suggestions. These are simply to spark your thinking.):

- **Class relations:** How and why has the class structure of the US changed over time? How have people adapted to changes in their class position (the on-going decline in the middle class for instance)?
- **Globalization:** What are the causes of globalization? Who benefits and who is hurt by it? How are social movements going about trying to create a counter-globalization movement?
- **Healthcare:** Why is the US the only major industrialized nation without a national, state-managed healthcare system? What strategies do people use to get by in an unequal and often complicated and bureaucratic healthcare system?
- **Immigration:** Why do people immigrate? How do immigrants adapt to the new lands they move to? Why is there a backlash against immigrants in the US?
- **Love and romance:** What social forces shape who people are attracted to? How and why have the norms related to love and romance changed over time?
• *Poverty*: What are the causes of poverty? How and why have attitudes towards the poor changed over time? How do the poor get by on low incomes?

• *Race relations*: How and why have race relations changed over time? Why do racial inequalities persist? Can affirmative action effectively address racial inequalities?

• *Sexual orientation*: How and why has our understanding of sexual orientation changed over time? How are differences in sexual orientation understood differently in different cultures? What effects has the gay rights movement had on the larger society--and how has it wrought these changes?

• *Social movements*: How and why did some particular social movement arise? What effects did it have on the larger society and how did it achieve these?

• *The welfare system*: How do people on the welfare system get by? What were the political causes for welfare reform? What have been the effects of welfare reform?

You should use at least three sources, at least one of which must be a book; the others may be articles of individual chapters from edited books. You are certainly free to use more sources and, assuming you make good use of them, this can raise your grade. Please be careful of what sources you use, drawing primarily on scholarly ones. Many people use the internet for information nowadays, but much of the information on the internet is not reliable. This is also, of course, true for printed material, but the internet has allowed people whose work would never otherwise be published because of its lack of credibility to self-publish. On the other hand, there is also a great deal of valuable information on the internet. Please try to evaluate the quality of the material you are reading, whether it is printed or on-line. Is it a reasoned, scholarly consideration of an issue, backed up by empirical research? Or is it a political rant, without much evidence to back it up? There is nothing wrong with sources that make political judgments, but these judgments should be based on empirical research which you can draw on in your paper and to make your own conclusions. Also make sure that the sources you are using are current. If you are writing a paper on race relations, do not use a book from the 1950s--a lot has changed since then. When looking for sources, in addition to searching through the Online Catalogue for books in the library, I encourage you to also use the numerous databases of scholarly articles that you can access through the library’s home page. JSTOR can be particularly useful because it provides you with access to the articles you find listed in it as PDFs, saving you the trouble of hunting them down.

On February 16, I will ask you to turn in a proposal for your paper--briefly stating the topic you are interested in and listing a preliminary bibliography. This will allow me to see if you are on the right course with your paper and that you’re not heading off in some direction that might result in a poor grade. Failure to turn in the proposal will result in the deduction of three points from your final paper grade. On April 23, I will ask you to turn in an outline of your paper, providing a detailed outline of your argument. Again, this is to allow me to gauge if you are on the right course with the paper. Failure to turn in the outline will also result in the loss of three points from your final paper grade. The paper itself will be due the last day of class, May 4. If I feel that you have made only a perfunctory attempt at completing the paper proposal and/or outlines, I reserve the right
to give only partial credit to you--i.e. to deduct something like 1 or 2 points from your final paper.

**Paper Format**

All papers--the weekly quotes, the exams, and the sociological autobiography--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 (in McGuinn 426) 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 on one of your exams or the research paper, 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.

**Academic Integrity**

Please familiarize yourself with BC’s definition of academic integrity, at http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/resources/policy.html#integrity. In addition, two pamphlets, one on plagiarism and one on properly citing sources, are available on Blackboard. I encourage you to read and refer to them.

If you have any questions about how to interpret the academic integrity policy 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 may 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**

**Wednesday, January 19, Introduction**
No reading--first day of class

**Monday, January 24, The Sociological Imagination**
Ferguson, chs. 1-3 (Mills, “The Promise;” Gaines, “Teenage Wasteland;” Romero “An Intersection of Biography and History”)
*Recommended:* Neubeck & Glasberg, ch. 1

**Wednesday, January 26, Social Structure**
Ferguson, ch. 50 (Crow Dog & Erdoes, “Civilize Them With a Stick”)
*Recommended:* Neubeck & Glasberg, pp. 45-47, 56-77

**Monday, January 31, Culture**
Goodwin & Jasper, ch. 16 (Gusfield, “Keyword: Culture”)
*Recommended:* Neubeck & Glasberg, ch. 5

**Wednesday, February 2, Culture & Power**
Ferguson, chs. 10 & 30 (Trask, “Lovely Hula Hands;” Loe, “Working at Bazooms”)

**Monday, February 7, Sociological Research**

Recommended: Neubeck & Glasberg, ch. 2

Wednesday, February 9, Social Psychology: Socialization and the Self
Goodwin & Jasper, ch. 1 (Zussman, “Keyword: The Self”)
Ferguson, chs. 14, 28 & 49 (Dyer, “Anybody’s Son Will Do;” Pascoe, “Dude, You’re a Fag;” Karp, “Illness and Identity”)
Recommended: Neubeck & Glasberg, ch. 2

Monday, February 14, Social Psychology: Social Interaction, part 1
Movie (in-class): Quiet Rage: The Stanford Prison Experiment (producer, Ken Musen; Stanford CA: Stanford University, 1991)
Ferguson, chs. 17 & 22 (Williams, “Shopping as Symbolic Interaction”; Boswell & Spade “Fraternities and Collegiate Rape Culture”)
Recommended: Neubeck & Glasberg, pp. 80-92

Wednesday, February 16, Social Psychology: Social Interaction, part 2
Goodwin & Jasper, chs. 2 (Barbelet, “Keyword: Emotion”)
Passionate Politics, edited by Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, & Francesca Polletta (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2001)

Midterm exam passed out
Research paper proposal due

Monday, February 21, Power, Privilege and Oppression
Goodwin & Jasper, ch. 38 (Conley, “Forty Acres and a Mule”)
Recommended: Neubeck & Glasberg, chs. 7 & 8

Wednesday, February 23, Dimensions of Inequality: Job Discrimination
Goodwin & Jasper, chs. 21, 26 & 33 (Jackson, “Keyword: Inequalities;” Herring, “Is Job Discrimination Dead?;” Jacobs, “Detours on the Road to Equality”)
Blackboard: Frank Dobbin et al., “Diversity Management in Corporate America,” Contexts, 2007, vol. 6, no. 4, pp. 21-27

Monday, February 28, Dimensions of Inequality: Resources
Goodwin & Jasper, ch. 17 (Peterson, “Roll Over Beethoven, There’s a New Way to Be Cool”)

Wednesday, March 2, Cultural Dimensions of Inequality
Goodwin & Jasper, ch. 35 (Morning, “Keyword: Race”)
Ferguson, chs. 11 & 52 (Lorber, “Night to His Day;” Ferguson “Bad Boys”)

Midterm exam due

Monday & Wednesday, March 7 & 9
NO CLASS—Spring vacation

Monday, March 14, Politics & Power
Ferguson, chs. 35 & 36 (Mills, “The Power Elite”; Clawson et al., “Dollars and Votes”)
Recommended: Neubeck & Glasberg, ch. 11

Wednesday, March 16, Political Participation

Monday, March 21, Social Movements and Strategy, part 1
Goodwin & Jasper, ch. 57 (Meyer, “How Social Movements Matter”)
Recommended: Neubeck & Glasberg, pp. 313-325
Wednesday, March 23, *Social Movements and Strategy, part 2*

Monday, March 28, *The Culture of Social Movements*
Blackboard: Francesca Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting*, pp. 149-175 (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002)

Wednesday, March 30, *The Mass Media: The News*
Blackboard: Charlotte Ryan, *Prime Time Activism*, pp. 53-74 (Boston, South End Press, 1991)

Monday, April 4, *The Mass Media: Advertising and Entertainment*

Wednesday, April 6, *The Economy, Work & Welfare, part 1*
Recommended: Neubeck & Glasberg, ch. 12

Monday, April 11, *The Economy & Power*
Goodwin & Jasper, ch. 25 & 27 (Swedberg, “Keyword: Market;” Davis, “American Cronyism”)
Ferguson, ch. 37 (Derber, “One World Under Business”)

Wednesday, April 13, *The Economy, Work & Welfare, part 2*
Ferguson, ch. 26 & 42 (Ehrenreich, “Nickel-and-Dimed”; Leidner, “Over the Counter”)

**Research paper outlines due**

Monday, April 18
NO CLASS--Patriot’s Day

Wednesday, April 20, *Globalization and Development, part 1*
Movie (in-class): *Deadly Embrace: Nicaragua, the World Bank, and the IMF* (producers, Elizabeth Canner and Ashley Eames; Wentworth NH, Compas de la Primavera, 1999)
Dupuy, preface, chs. 1-2
*Recommended:* Neubeck & Glasberg, pp. 47-56, 298-307

Monday, April 25
NO CLASS--Easter Monday

Wednesday, April 27, *Globalization and Development, part 2*
Dupuy, chs. 3-4

Monday, May 2, *Globalization and Development, part 3*
Dupuy, chs. 5-6

**Final exam passed out**
Wednesday, May 4, *Social Movements Revisited: Institutionalization*


**Research paper due**

Monday, May 16

**Final exam due**