SC00101: Introduction to Sociology for Majors

Instructor: Prof. Matthew Williams, PhD
Course meeting time: 10:30-11:45 a.m., Monday & Wednesday
Course location: McGuinn 415
Office hours: 12:30-1:30 p.m., Monday & Wednesday; or by appointment. Please be warned though that I am teaching at another school Tuesday & Thursday and will only be on campus Monday, Wednesday & Friday and will not be available for appointments on other days.
Office location: McGuinn 426D
Instructor’s e-mail: mw21@mindspring.com, willibhi@bc.edu or matthew.williams.3@bc.edu (All these e-mails ends 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 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 in particular about something. 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 due, that is the day 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 Boston College bookstore; they will also be on course reserve at the library:

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 (a one-question take-home) will be worth 18% of your grade, your final (a two-question take-home) 33%, your research paper 20%, class participation 12%, journal entries 12%, and attendance 5%.

I will give numerical grades on your papers. They translate into letter grades as follows:

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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. I will try to make note of people who come in late, but cannot guarantee that I will do so. 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 12% 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 a piece of scrap paper or (preferably) an index card with notes of anything you said during large group 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.

Journal entries
Roughly every other week starting Wednesday, January 25th, I will ask you to turn in journal entries reflecting on the past two weeks’ readings, lectures and class discussions/exercises. This will come to a total of seven journal entries. (The specific due dates are listed in the syllabus.) I am asking you to engage in a particular form of journaling, known as a “dialogue journal.” First, record your notes summarizing some important part of the readings, lectures, and/or class discussions you wish to reflect upon. Second, I ask you “to create an interactive commentary on the material--posing questions, raising doubts, making connections, seeing opposing views, linking course material with
personal experience [or current events], expressing confusion, and so forth.” In short, this is a place for you to engage in dialogue with the class material, perhaps to raise issues you wanted to bring up in class discussion, but didn’t get a chance to. You may cover anything in the past two weeks since the last journal entry, but you certainly don’t need to cover everything. In fact, in many cases, less is more—it generally makes more sense to write in greater depth about fewer topics than to write briefly and shallowly about many. Your commentary does not need to be polished. Indeed, I encourage you to free write, that is to write in a stream of consciousness style, going with whatever thoughts come up, as long as they are in some way related to the class.

The length of each journal entry should be two to three pages (types and double-spaced), with no more than a quarter devoted to summarizing the course material.

The journal entries 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 you show a good comprehension of the class materials in the first part of the journal entry. 2) The degree to which you are engaged with the class material, shown by having something interesting to say about it. 3) Original insights, such as connecting the class materials together in new ways; connecting the class materials with things outside of class, whether your experience, current events, or what you have learned in other classes; raising perceptive criticisms of the class materials; etc.

This will be worth 12% of your grade. If you miss class on the day journal entries are due, please e-mail me a copy of yours, then bring in a hard copy next time you come to class. Journal entries not turned in on time can be turned in up to a week late for half-credit. If you know you will be having a busy week on one of the weeks the journals are due, it is perfectly legitimate to do it a week ahead of time, when you have less work, and turn it in one the due date. I am not expecting you to cover all the class material anyway.

Exams
There will be two take-home essay exams, a midterm and final, the first worth 18% of your grade, the second 33%. 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 Wednesday, February 15th and be due in class on Wednesday, February 29th. The final will be passed out on Wednesday, April 25th and be due on Friday, May 11th, the scheduled exam day. The midterm will test you on all the material in the first half of the class, while the final will be cumulative (though focusing on the latter half of the semester). Please keep in mind that, while I do not necessarily expect

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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 or phenomenon. 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?
You should use at least three sources, at least one of which must be a book; the others may be articles or 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. This does not mean it has to be written by an academic--journalists, activists and others can write well-researched, sociologically insightful work. Please try to carefully evaluate the quality of the material you are using to determine if it is of scholarly quality. 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 the race relations, do not use a book from the 1950s--a lot has changed since then. You may use websites for references, but in most cases, they should not be one of your primary sources. Please take the time to go through the library’s catalogues and physical shelves to find in-depth, solid sources.

On Monday, February 20th, 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 make sure that 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. On Monday, April 2nd, I will ask you to turn in an outline of your paper, providing a detailed summary of your argument. Again, this is to allow me to gauge if you are on the right course with the paper. The paper itself will be due the last day of class, Wednesday, May 2nd.

**Paper Format**

All papers--the journal entries, 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. (Given the nature of journal writing, these are less important for that assignment, but I still need to follow what you
say—if you are free-writing, you may want to go back and clean things up a bit.) 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 a copy 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 mailbox, 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 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 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.

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

Introduction

Wednesday, January 18, Introduction
No reading--first day of class
Monday, January 23, *The Sociological Imagination*
Ferguson, chs. 1, 2, & 40 (Mills, “The Promise;” Gaines, “Teenage Wasteland;” Sternheimer, “It’s Not the Media”)

Wednesday, January 25, *Social Structure*
Hartmann & Uggen, ch. 23 (Stone, “The Rhetoric and Reality of ‘Opting Out’”)
Ferguson, ch. 50 (Crow Dog & Erdoes, “Civilize Them With a Stick”)

**Journal entry due**

Monday, January 30, *Culture*
Hartmann & Uggen, ch. 46 (Marsiglio, “Healthy Dads, Healthy Kids”)

Wednesday, February 1, *Culture & Power*
Ferguson, chs. 10 & 30 (Trask, “Lovely Hula Hands;” Loe, “Working at Bazooms”)

Monday, February 6, *Sociological Research*
Hartmann & Uggen, chs. 65-67 (Adler & Adler, “The Promise and Pitfalls of Going into the Field;” Weiss, “In Their Own Words;” Lavaglia, “From Summer Camp to Glass Ceilings”)

**The Individual in Society**

Wednesday, February 8, *Socialization and the Self*
Ferguson, chs. 14, 28 & 49 (Dyer, “Anybody’s Son Will Do;” Pascoe, “Dude, You’re a Fag;” Karp, “Illness and Identity”)
Hartmann & Uggen, ch. 39 (Wilcox, “Religion and the Domestication of Men”)

**Journal entry due**
Monday, February 13, Social Interaction, part 1
Movie (in-class): Quiet Rage: The Stanford Prison Experiment (producer, Ken Musen; Stanford, CA, Stanford University, 1991)

Wednesday, February 15, Social Interaction, part 2
Ferguson, chs. 17 & 22 (Williams, “Shopping as Symbolic Interaction”; Boswell & Spade “Fraternities and Collegiate Rape Culture”)
Midterm exam passed out

Social Inequality

Monday, February 20, Institutional Discrimination
Blackboard: Frank Dobbin et al., “Diversity Management in Corporate America,” Contexts, 2007, vol. 6, no. 4, pp. 21-27
Enloe & Seager, pp. 14-15
Research paper proposal due

Wednesday, February 22, Inequality in Resources
Hartmann & Uggen, ch. 11 (Downey & Gibbs, “How Schools Really Matter”)
Enloe & Seager, pp. 24-27, 76-77
Journal entry due

Monday, February 27, Cultural Dimensions of Inequality
Ferguson, chs. 11 & 52 (Lorber, “Night to His Day;” Ferguson “Bad Boys”)

Wednesday, February 29, Power, Privilege and Oppression
by Margaret L. Andersen & Patricia Hill Collins (Belmont CA, Thomson-Wadsworth, 2007)
Ferguson, ch. 32 (LeDuff, “At the Slaughterhouse, Some Things Never Die”)

**Midterm exam due**

Monday, March 5 & Wednesday, March 7
NO CLASS--Spring Break

**Social Institutions and Social Change**

**Monday, March 12, Politics & Power**
Enloe & Seager, pp. 36-37, 68-69

**Wednesday, March 14, Political Participation**
Blackboard: Theda Skocpol, “Voice and Inequality,” *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2004, pp. 3-20
Enloe & Seager, pp. 34-35, 38-39

**Journal entry due**

Monday, March 19, *Social Movements and Strategy, part 1*
Hartmann & Uggen, ch. 59 (Stoecker, “Community Organizing and Social Change”)

Wednesday, March 21, *Social Movements and Strategy, part 2*

Monday, March 26, *The Culture of Social Movements*
Blackboard: Francesca Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting*, pp. 149-175 (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002)
Blackboard: Cheryl Gooding, “Building a Multicultural Union Women’s Organization,”
New Solutions, Spring 1997, pp. 62-75

Wednesday, March 28, The Mass Media: The News
Blackboard: Robert W. McChesney, “Journalism: Looking Backward, Going Forward,”
The Hedgehog Review, Summer 2008, pp. 69-84
Blackboard: Charlotte Ryan, Prime Time Activism, pp. 53-74 (Boston, South End Press, 1991)
Hartmann & Uggen, ch. 16 (Lindner, “Controlling the Media in Iraq”)
Blackboard: Michael Corcoran, “A Tale of Two Elections: Iran and Honduras,” NACLA
Blackboard: Thomas Olesen, International Zapatismo: the Construction of Solidarity in
http://www.democracynow.org/ NOTE: Watch (or read the transcripts of) one set
of headlines and one or two of the feature stories. They do not necessarily need to
be from the same broadcast—pick ones that look interesting to you.
Enloe & Seager, pp. 40-43

Journal entry due

Monday, April 2, The Mass Media: Advertising and Entertainment
Blackboard: Robert Goldman & Stephen Papson, “Nike Culture,” pp. 126-134 in
Readings for Sociology (7th ed.), edited by Garth Massey (New York, WW
Norton & Co., 2012)
Blackboard: Alison J. Pugh, “Care and Belonging in the Market,” pp. 163-175 in
Readings for Sociology (7th ed.), edited by Garth Massey (New York, WW
Norton & Co., 2012)
Blackboard: Karin A. Martin & Emily Kayzak, “Hetero-Romantic Love and
Heterosexiness in Children’s G-Rated Film,” pp. 331-346 in Understanding
Society (4th ed.), edited by Margaret L. Andersen, Kim A. Logio, & Howard F.
Taylor (Belmont CA, Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2012)
Web: Jonathan McIntosh, “Buffy vs. Edward: Twilight Remixed,” YouTube June 19,
2009: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZwM3GvaTRM&feature=related
Web: Jonathan McIntosh, “What Would Buffy Do?: Notes on Dusting Edward Cullen,”
Women in Media and News, July 1, 2009:
http://www.wimnonline.org/WIMNsVoicesBlog/?p=1272

Research paper outline due

Wednesday, April 4, The Economy, Work & Welfare, part 1
Movie (in-class): A Days’ Work, A Day’s Pay (directors, Kathy Leichter and Jonathan
Skurnik; New York, Mint Leaf Productions, 2001)
Martmann & Uggen, chs. 22 & 27 (Rank, “As American as Apple Pie: Poverty and
Welfare;” Lerner, “Global Corporations, Global Unions”)
Stratification (3rd ed.), edited by David B. Grusky (Boulder CO, Westview Press,
2008)

Monday, April 9
NO CLASS--Easter Weekend

Wednesday, April 11, The Economy & Power
Ferguson, ch. 37 (Derber, “One World Under Business”)
Enloe & Seager, pp. 46-49, 82-83
Journal entry due

Monday, April 16
NO CLASS--Patriot’s Day/ Boston Marathon

Wednesday, April 18, The Economy, Work & Welfare, part 2
Ferguson, ch. 26 (Ehrenreich, “Nickel-and-Dimed”)
Hartmann & Uggen, ch. 29 & 41 (Gerson & Jacobs, “The Work-Home Crunch;” Furstenberg et al., “Growing Up is Harder to Do”)
Enloe & Seager, pp. 28-29, 50-55

Monday, April 23, The Economy and Culture
Ferguson, ch. 42 & 43 (Leidner, “Over the Counter;” Hochschild, “The Time Bind”)
Hartmann & Uggen, ch. 9 (Edin & Kefalas, “Unmarried with Children”)

Wednesday, April 25, Globalization and Politics

**Journal entry due**

**Final exam passed out**

Monday, April 30, *Economic Globalization*

Wednesday, May 2, *Real Utopias*

**Research paper due**

Friday, May 11, 9:00 a.m.

**Final exam due**