SC00104: Introduction to Sociology

Instructor: Prof. Matthew Williams, PhD
Course meeting time: 2:00-2:50 p.m., Monday, Wednesday & Friday
Course location: Cushing Hall 333
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 sociological autobiography 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:

97+: A+  
87-89: B+  
77-79: C+  
67-69: D+
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
Every other week starting Friday, January 27, 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."1 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 exams, a midterm and final, the first worth 18% of your grade, the second 33%. Both exams will involve short essay (a couple of paragraphs) questions—the midterm will be one question and the final two. 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 Friday, February 17th and be due in class on Friday, March 2nd. The final will be passed out on Friday, April 27th and be due on Friday, May 11th, the scheduled exam date. 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 (though focusing on the latter half of the semester). 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.

**Sociological Autobiography**

I will ask you to write a ten-page sociological autobiography--an examination of how your life has been shaped by the society of which you are a part. This will be worth 20% of your grade and be due on the last day of class, Wednesday, May 2nd. The in-class discussions and exercises should help you think about these issues over the course of the semester. I don’t actually expect you to tell me your whole life story--instead, you should highlight certain parts, those that most fit with the sociological analysis you are engaging in.

This paper should look at your life in light of the sociological imagination. Think about your *personal troubles* are connected with larger *social issues*. In doing so, you should cover three major themes:

1) Reflect on your own social background and how it has influenced your *life chances* (that is, to do well in life and get ahead), including your childhood, your current state, and your future prospects. You must discuss the effects of *race, class and gender* on your life. You may discuss other aspects of your social background, such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion (particularly if you are a religious minority), age, (dis)ability, etc., if you wish, but you are not required to. You should also discuss the resources--*economic, social and cultural capital*--you control or have access to, how this is shaped by your race, class and gender and how these affect your life chances.

2) Discuss how *one major social institution*--the economy, government, mass media, educational system, religion or social movements--has affected your life. As part of this, you should discuss your relationship with at least one “*distant other*”--someone living a profoundly different life than yours that you will likely never meet, but to whom you nonetheless have a connection. They could be the poorly paid workers who make your clothes or your food, which you need to survive; or it could be President Obama, who shapes the laws that govern our lives, decides when and how to wage war with other countries, etc. Look at the ways you are dependent on this social institution in general and this distant other in particular--it may be for material necessities like food and clothing (the economy); for providing order and security to society (government); information and knowledge (the mass media or educational system); or a sense of community or larger meaning to your life (religion); or a push for social justice that has improved your life (social movements). What ways does this institution *enable* you--meeting your basic needs and/or allowing you to pursue your goals? In what ways does it *constrain* you--limit the choices you can make, keep you from getting access to certain things you might want? How does this highlight your *interdependence* with others?

3) Think about the *social roles* you have--student, son or daughter, sibling, employee, in a few cases a parent, a member of an extracurricular group such as an athletics team, volunteer group, musical group, theater group, etc. Think about how these social roles shape your life: What are the *scripts* (including *feeling rules*) that go with each role--that
is, how are you expected to act because of them? In what ways do they reinforce each
other? In what ways do they conflict? (Think of the difficulties of working full time and
being a student.) How do you manage these conflicts? How did you socialization into
these roles take place? Who are your significant others? What do they expect of you?
What does the generalized other expect of you? How do you deal with expectations that
you don’t like? How do your social roles, socialization, significant others, and
generalized other shape your sense of who you are--that is, your sense of self-identity?
Would you think of yourself the same way if you didn’t have some particular social role?

Although you should cover all these themes, there is no one right way to organize the
paper--you can do it in three separate sections or weave the themes together into one
chronological story or choose some other approach. I am not expecting you to do in-
depth library research for this paper, but you may want to do some research to better help
you understand some of the things you are writing about, such as your chosen social
institution and distant other. For these, reliable sources on current events may be
sufficient.

Paper Format
All papers--the journal entries, the exams, and the sociological autobiography--should be
typed and double-spaced. 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**

NOTE: Periodically, throughout the syllabus, you will see days set aside for class discussion. This does not mean that we will only be having class discussion on those days and the other days will be entirely lecture. I plan on having class discussion or in-class exercises almost every day of class. A fifty-minute period, however, only leaves limited time for class discussion on a day where I also lecture. Thus, I have found it helpful to set aside additional periods devoted solely to class discussion.

**Introduction**

Wednesday, January 18, *Introduction*
No reading--first day of class

Friday, January 20, *The Sociological Imagination*
Ferguson, chs. 1, 2, & 40 (Mills, “The Promise;” Gaines, “Teenage Wasteland;” Sternheimer, “It’s Not the Media”)

Monday, January 23, *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”)
Enloe & Seager, pp. 16-17, 74-75

Wednesday, January 25, *Social Structure: Discussion*
No reading--discussion day

Friday, January 27, Culture
Hatmann & Uggen, ch. 46 (Marsiglio, “Healthy Dads, Healthy Kids”)

Journal entry due

Monday, January 30, Culture & Power
Ferguson, chs. 10 & 30 (Trask, “Lovely Hula Hands;” Loe, “Working at Bazooms”)

Wednesday, February 1, Culture: Discussion
No reading--discussion day

Friday, February 3, Sociological Research
Blackboard: Joel Best, More Damned Lies and Statistics, ch. 6 (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004)
Hatmann & 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

Monday, February 6, 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”)

Wednesday, February 8, Social Interaction, part 1
Movie (in-class): Quiet Rage: The Stanford Prison Experiment (producer, Ken Musen; Stanford, CA, Stanford University, 1991)

Friday, February 10, Social Interaction, part 2
Ferguson, chs. 17 & 22 (Williams, “Shopping as Symbolic Interaction;” Boswell & Spade “Fraternities and Collegiate Rape Culture”)
Journal entry due

Monday, February 13, *The Sociology of Emotions*
*Passionate Politics*, edited by Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, & Francesca Polletta (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2001)

Wednesday, February 15, *Individuals, Networks and Communities*

Friday, February 17, *The Individual in Society: Discussion*
No reading--discussion day
**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

Wednesday, February 22, *Inequality in Resources*

Friday, February 24, *Cultural Dimensions of Inequality*
Ferguson, chs. 11 & 52 (Lorber, “Night to His Day;” Ferguson “Bad Boys”)

**Journal entry due**

Monday, February 27, *Power, Privilege and Oppression*
Ferguson, ch. 32 (LeDuff, “At the Slaughterhouse, Some Things Never Die”)

Wednesday, February 29, *Dimensions of Inequality: Discussion*
No reading--discussion day

**Social Institutions and Social Change**

Friday, March 2, *Politics & Power*
Enloe & Seager, pp. 36-37, 68-69

**Midterm exam due**

Monday, March 5, Wednesday, March 7 & Friday, March 9
NO CLASS--Spring Break

Monday, March 12, *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

Wednesday, March 14, *Politics & Power: Discussion*
No reading--discussion day

Friday, March 16, *Social Movements and Strategy, part 1*
Hartmann & Uggen, ch. 59 (Stoecker, “Community Organizing and Social Change”)

Journal entry due

Monday, March 19, Social Movements and Strategy, part 2

Wednesday, March 21, The Culture of Social Movements
Blackboard: Francesca Polletta, Freedom is an Endless Meeting, pp. 149-175 (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002)

Friday, March 23, Social Movements: Discussion
No reading--discussion day

Monday, March 26, The Mass Media
Film (in-class): Mickey Mouse Monopoly (director, Miguel Picker; Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2001)
Blackboard: Charlotte Ryan, Prime Time Activism, pp. 53-74 (Boston, South End Press, 1991)
Enloe & Seager, pp. 40-43

Wednesday, March 28, The Mass Media: The News
Hartmann & Ugge, ch. 16 (Lindner, “Controlling the Media in Iraq”)
Web: Democracy Now (Producer: Amy Goodman; New York, Democracy Now, 2010): 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.

Friday, March 30, The Mass Media: Advertising and Entertainment


**Journal entry due**

Monday, April 2, *The Mass Media: Discussion*

No reading--discussion day

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”)


Friday, April 6 & 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

Friday, April 13, *The Economy, Work & Welfare, part 2*

Ferguson, ch. 26 (Ehrenreich, “Nickel-and-Dimed”)

Martmann & 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

**Journal entry due**

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

Wednesday, April 18, *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”)

Friday, April 20, *The Economy: Discussion*
No reading--discussion day

Monday, April 23, *Globalization and Politics*

Wednesday, April 25, *Economic Globalization*

Friday, April 27, *Globalization and Culture*


Enloe & Seager, pp. 102-103

Journal entry due

Final exam passed out

Monday, April 30, Globalization: Discussion
No reading--discussion day

Wednesday, May 2, Real Utopias

Sociological autobiography due

Friday, May 11, 12:30 p.m.
Final exam due