Intro to Sociology and the Social Science Core:

*How did I get here?* I don’t know about you, but this is a question I ask myself in all sorts of situations. Getting elected class president in fifth grade, graduating from community college, shopping at the mall with my daughter, getting my new driver’s license after getting married, applying to graduate school, sitting in the hospital with a dying parent, sitting in traffic on the way to class, you name it. Are these events the result of a series of individual choices, dumb luck, or a constellation of social and historical forces in which I am situated?

You may think that a more sociological question would be: *how did we get here?* But this can also be a tricky sort of question. Politicians, professors, family members, news personalities and activists invoke the term “we” all the time. But who is this “we,” anyway? Are they Americans? Men? Heterosexuals? College graduates? Married people? Those without a criminal record? And what about animals, plants, or even technologies, are they part of this “we” that everyone is always mentioning? Why does it matter how we define this term, and how do all of these different “we’s” overlap, interact, and define themselves and each other?

Sociology can begin to help us answer these questions.

Using a term coined by sociologist C. Wright Mills, a “sociological imagination” is a way of considering the intersection of *biography* and *history*. The sociological imagination allows us to see the connections between our seemingly *private troubles* and broader *public issues* occurring across time and space. Sociologists study the way certain phenomena is patterned across and between different time periods, places and social categories. A more formal definition of Sociology is that it is the scientific study of society and social interactions. The sociological imagination shows us an intimate connection between questions about ourselves and about the social world(s) in which “we” live.

*Perennial Questions:* In this course, we will explore the following inquiries: What is the structure of this particular society? What unites us and what divides us? Where does this society stand in human history? How do societies change? This course will likewise emphasize some of the subsequent guiding questions: Is society and/or culture shaped by nature, nurture, or both? What do race, class, gender, and sexuality tell us about power relationships in society? How do we perform or “do” “American” culture at individual, interactional and institutional levels?

*Cultural Diversity:* We will sustain an intense focus on how differences of race, class, gender, and geography are primary forces that shape our personal and collective positions, and how these factors permeate our understandings of all aspects of social life. We will examine different groups’ relations to power and attend to the many ways in which these factors intersect and affect our own lives.
**Historical Perspective:** The development of a “sociological imagination” is the heart of this course. Throughout, we will take up C. Wright Mills’ call for us to investigate the relationship between “personal troubles” and “public issues.” In other words, we will analyze the connections between the seemingly private events of our own lives on the one hand and history and social structure on the other.

**Writing:** While the majority of college students think of writing as something you do once and turn in, good writing is actually an iterative process—meaning it is something you return to again and again. Ideas shape writing, and writing shapes ideas. Writing and critical thinking are together the most important skills you will develop at college.

**Creating a Personal Philosophy:** I will challenge you to use the course to critically examine your previously held assumptions and unarticulated beliefs and to develop a thoughtful and informed approach to life. You should come away with a richer sense of your own place in society and your potential to make a difference in it.

**Methodology:** The way in which sociology as a discipline and sociologists as social scientists are able to report on and study societies must be examined as well as the findings themselves. As part of becoming a critical thinker and an examiner of everyday life, this course will challenge all approaches to obtaining sociological “knowledge” in order for students to better understand our society and other societies.

Subsequently, alongside our more mainstream academic sources, as often prescriptive and more privileged within the academy, we will simultaneously consider less-traditional social science informed research and related topics of inquiry, as based in creative arts, literary, and popular cultural venues.

**Introduction to the Course**

There are probably about as many ways to teach an Intro to Sociology course as there are sociologists. This course will be centered around a number of key sociological questions, and will stress the themes of: the (re)production of power and inequality; challenging the taken-for-granted assumptions of the hegemonic (dominant) cultural construction of reality in the U.S.; and, the co-construction of “natural” and “social” variables.

Course requirements will be primarily writing-focused. You will not only be expected to produce and revise a high-quality paper, but also to offer written reflections on the weekly readings. Participation in class discussions is also a significant component of this course. There will also be a more “objective” component consisting of a mid-term and final exam. All of these will be explained in greater detail below.
Required Texts:


*and by the third week of the course, choose one of the following three:*


***I did not order these through the bookstore. I would suggest ordering a used copy online; otherwise I have also put them on Reserve.

Course Requirements:

20% Quiz/Midterm

20% Final Exam

20% Participation (in-class presentations and reflections on readings)

40% Major Paper

Exams will be in the form of multiple choice and short answer type questions. These requirements should not prove difficult provided you keep up with the readings and class attendance.

Brief written reflections must be submitted by the student for select “sections” of the course (5 total). These reflections should choose one concept (or two, if they are closely related) that is raised by one or more of the section’s readings and thoughtfully relate it to the student’s personal experiences or other current day events. The reflection can either critique or support (or modify or extend) the sociological concept, but must make clear that the student has a thorough understanding of that concept.

At least once in the semester, students will be asked to present their reflection in a form that stimulates class discussion of that concept and relates it to other concepts covered in the course. Students are expected to regularly participate in discussions and to be respectful of the instructor and fellow students by not talking, texting, or conducting other inappropriate business during class time.

Finally, students will write and revise a major paper (approx. 7-10 pages double-spaced) that provides a sociological analysis of one of three pre-selected books. None of the selected texts are written by
sociologists, but they all raise many important sociological themes and concepts. The paper will discuss how the selected text represents an intersection of at least THREE of the ten sections of the course, and will appropriately engage concepts and authors featured in these sections and relate the relevant concepts and arguments to the material presented in the text. This paper may be supportive or critical of different aspects of the text, but must also present a thorough and thoughtful understanding of the text itself. Some of these texts are more challenging than others; I will introduce all of them in more detail in class.

Grades:

90-100 = ~ A
80-89 = ~ B
70-79 = ~ C
60-69 = ~ D

NOTE: ‘Pluses’ and ‘minuses’ are given if the grade is within two points of the upper and lower limit (respectively) for each grade. Eg, an 88 or 89 is a B+, an 80 or 81 is a B-.

Course Outline:

SECTION ONE (1/13/14-1/24/14): INTRODUCTION/ THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Read: Chapter 1 in Ten Lessons;

Section 1 in Thirty Readings (includes excerpts from: Mills, The Sociological Imagination / Berger, Invitation to Sociology / Luker, Dubious Conceptions);


Written Reflection 1 Due 1/24/14

SECTION TWO (1/27/14-1/31/14): INTRODUCTION TO THEORY AND METHODS

Read: Chapter 2 in Ten Lessons;

Section 2 in Thirty Readings (includes excerpts from Durkheim, Suicide / Ragin, Constructing Social Research / Best, Damned Lies and Statistics)
SECTION THREE (2/3/14-2/14/14): SOCIALIZATION, CULTURE AND CAPITAL

Read: Chapter 3 in Ten Lessons;

Reading 9 in Thirty Readings (Excerpt from Schor, The Commercialized Child);

Kate Losse. 2013, “The Return of the Selfie” Available:

…Written Reflection 2 Due 2/7/14

Excerpt from Annette Lareau Unequal Childhoods;


SECTION FOUR (2/17/14-2/26/14): SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Chapter 4 in Ten Lessons;

Section 4 in Thirty Readings (includes excerpts from Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Sprit of Capitalism / Derber, Corporation Nation / Chelin, The Deinstitutionalization of American Marriage);


Arlie Hochschild. Excerpts from The Time Bind. (Part One pp. 1-52; Ch. 13 pp. 175-193; Ch. 14 pp. 197-218; Ch. 16 pp. 239-259).

Written Reflection 3 Due 2/26/14

2/28/14: QUIZ/MIDTERM

SPRING BREAK (3/3/14-3/7/14): Choose and begin reading your book for your major paper ☺
SECTION FIVE (3/10/14-3/14/14): RACE AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Chapter 5 in Ten Lessons;

Section 5 in Thirty Readings (includes excerpts from DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk / Bonilla-Silva, Racism without Racists; Massey and Denton, American Apartheid);


SECTION SIX (3/17/14-3/24/14): CLASS AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Chapter 6 in Ten Lessons;

Readings 16 and 17 in Thirty Readings (includes excerpts from Marx and Engels, “The Manifesto of the Communist Party” / Sherman Class Acts);

G. William Domhoff. 2010. Who Rules America Chs. 2 and 3.;


FIRST DRAFT OF MAJOR PAPER DUE: 3/26/14

SECTION SEVEN (4/2/14-4/4/14): GENDER AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Chapter 7 in Ten Lessons;

Section 7 in Thirty Readings (includes excerpts from West and Zimmerman, Doing Gender / Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought / Gornick and Meyers, Families that Work)

Carolyn Merchant. 1980. Excerpts from The Death of Nature (Introduction, Ch 1, Ch 7 Section 1)

Written Reflection 4 Due 4/4/14
SECTION EIGHT (4/7/14-4/11/14): GLOBAL DYNAMICS

Chapter 9 in Ten Lessons;

Section 9 in Thirty Readings (includes excerpts from Wallerstein, The Modern World System / Barndt, Tangled Routes / Walton, Seddon and Udayagiri, Free Markets and Food Riots)


WEEK NINE (4/14-4/18/14): FORCES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Chapter 8 in Ten Lessons;

Section 8 in Thirty Readings (includes excerpts from Gamson, The Strategy of Social Protest / Piven and Cloward, Poor People’s Movements / McAdam, Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970)


Written Reflection 5 Due 4/18/14

WEEK TEN (4/21-4/25/14): PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY AND REVIEW

Chapter 10 in Ten Lessons

4/30/14: FINAL DRAFT OF MAJOR PAPER DUE

FINAL (IN CLASS) EXAM
A Note on Academic Integrity

Violations of academic integrity are a serious breach of the honor code implicit in the everyday operations of university life. Presenting another’s work as your own is not only intellectually dishonest but also wasteful. Engaging in any form of cheating, plagiarism, and the like only cheats you of the education you are here to get. As such, you are expected to present only your own work, ideas, and insights as your own and, in cases where you do borrow the words or ideas of another, to give credit where credit is due. If you need help with an assignment or feel under pressure to take an “easy way out,” set up a meeting with me instead and we will work something out. For a full statement on the University’s academic integrity policies, please see:

http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/integrity.html.

Disability Statement

Boston College is committed to providing reasonable accommodations and integrated access for students with disabilities to all available academic, social, and recreational programs and activities. Appropriate support and referral services are provided by the Disability Services Office, which serves students with hearing, visual, mobility, medical, and psychiatric disabilities.

If you are a student with a documented disability seeking reasonable accommodations in this course, please contact Kathy Duggan, (617) 552-8093, dugganka@bc.edu, at the Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities and ADHD, or Paulette Durrett, (617) 552-3470, paulette.durrett@bc.edu, in the Disability Services Office regarding all other types of disabilities, including temporary disabilities. Advance notice and appropriate documentation are required for accommodations.

If you are unsure whether or not Disability Services are appropriate for your needs, please make an appointment with Disability Services for a consultation.