"We revolt simply because, for many reasons, we can no longer breathe” - Frantz Fanon (1925-1961)
“Life is about responsibility” – John Trudell (1946-2015)

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Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday 10:30-11:30, by appointment

Welcome to Introductory Sociology! Sociology is a sprawling discipline, studying everything from the functioning of small groups, up through nation-state formation. This course will provide a survey of different areas within sociology as well as methodological approaches (how the research happens). Our main objective: develop our sociological perspectives, our lenses to understanding the world and our place in it.

A sociological perspective asks us to connect individual stories to larger structures and histories. Consider addiction. On the one hand, addiction can be seen as a personal problem, reflecting a deficit in character. Alternatively, we might consider the upbringing, education, and overall wellbeing of an individual dealing with dependence. Going further in this direction, we might ask “cui bono” or “who benefits” from the drug trade and the so-called war on drugs. Taking an historical view, one could even ask why some drugs are (il)legal? A sociological perspective seeks to weave together the different forces at play, be they individuals or small groups, nation states or even non-human actors.

Poverty, racism, war, hunger, ecological degradation, sexual violence, patriarchy, homelessness, the growth of prisons and the arms industry: these are all collective social problems faced by millions or billions of people, even while individuals face them in their own ways. These problems involve large institutions and have powerful vested interests. To understand the complexity of such issues means to understand the challenges in alleviating or eliminating them. Sociology departments, especially the one at BC, take pride in acting on one of Marx’s famous lines: “philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.”

Social Science Core

Exploring the interplay between individuals and society is one of the perennial questions. We’ll regularly counterpose individual and social responsibility (structure and agency in the language of sociology). How much is success in life about working hard and making good decisions? How much does society provide some with opportunities and constrain others? Who has power and why?

This course mostly focuses on contemporary social problems, but some historical perspective is necessary to understand the present. As historian Howard Zinn said: “if you don't know history it is as if you were born yesterday.” We’ll also learn how sociology has changed over time.

Cultural diversity is an important component of this course. We will spend a great deal of time discussing how patterns of experience emerge along lines of race, class, and gender. This is especially the case regarding unequal access to power and resources. Other identities and characteristics like language, age, and ability join together with race, class, and gender as powerful forces, which influence daily life, socioeconomic outcomes, mannerisms, social networks, and more. It is important to understand how our individual perspectives
have been shaped and to be able to see others’ perspectives.

The materials covered draw on a range of different methodologies, from ethnographic explorations of a few individuals to large-scale quantitative studies to more cultural and historical accounts. This is meant to provide a sense of the diverse ways sociologists research and understand social problems.

This course is writing-intensive. You’ll write five reflection papers as well as an autobiographical essay. These are not purely for evaluation. Engaging and effective writing is an important skill, in just about any path you take. And the only way to become a better writer is practice. For many, writing is also a way of learning, about oneself and the world.

This course will help you create a personal philosophy. You will be drawn to some perspectives more than others. Try to be aware of what you are drawn to and why that might be. You’ll be able to reflect on this in your reflection papers as well as your two essays.

The Readings
You do not have to purchase any texts! All the readings are in a flashdrive I’ll pass around. You can also bring your own flash drive to get the readings. All the readings are also uploaded in this folder (https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B5i8aT_in0-nMTN2aW1ULVJmNkU) called “Wengronowitz 2016 intro to sociology readings”.

Most academic articles are difficult to read. There are excellent books, but these are longer. I’ve intentionally limited reading and worked hard to avoid difficult pieces. It is critical that you read them before the class, please do so!

While you don’t need to purchase books for this course, if you need help purchasing books in other courses, contact the Montserrat Coalition (Montserrat.coalition@bc.edu).

Request for Accommodations/Accessibility
Advance notice and appropriate documentation are required for accommodations. If you have an accessibility issue or otherwise will be requesting accommodations for this course, please contact Kathy Duggan (617-552-8093, dugganka@bc.edu) at the Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities and ADHD. Contact Paulette Durrett (617-552-3470, paulette.durrett@bc.edu) in the Disability Services Office regarding all other disabilities, including temporary ones.

Academic Honesty
Your work must be your words and ideas. When writing papers, use quotation marks around someone else’s exact words and identify whose words they are. If you come across a good idea, use it, but be sure to acknowledge that person. Failure to comply will result in (a) automatic failure of the assignment, and (b) a report to the Dean and the Committee on Academic Integrity. For further information, please review the College’s policies here: http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/integrity.html

Grading scale

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5 reflection papers  Before Tuesday classes*5  25%
Final Exam  Draft: Mar. 22 Final: May 5  25%

Assessment

Participation: Your participation grade is made up of your attendance and participation during class. You may miss two classes without any repercussions. However, each missed class after that lowers your grade by one percent. If you miss a substantial part of any class (more than 15 minutes), I will consider it a whole class unless you have a legitimate excuse.

Participation in class discussion is necessary to receive a high mark. I know different people have different styles and patterns of contribution. Those who dominate class discussions, leaving others without opportunity to speak, do not receive a gold star. Neither do students who say nothing in class. You should aim to contribute at least once during each class period, though I will not tally when so and so spoke. Please consider our community agreements as highly relevant to your participation. For example, interrupting someone else will lower your grade; respectfully highlighting a different perspective will raise your grade.

Autobiographical Essay: You'll write a 3-4,000 word autobiographical essay describing the intersection between your biography and history using what C. Wright Mills called the “sociological imagination.” How do you situate your own biography in relation to historical changes and larger structural forces in society? What has shaped your life? How has your background—race, gender, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation—influenced your position in society as well as the person you are. I’m not looking for your whole life history. I am looking for you to sociologically discuss some of the significant aspects of your story.

In the essay, please consider three themes: 1) Reflect on your own social background—childhood, current state, future prospects—and how it has influenced your life chances. You must discuss the effects of race, class, and gender on your life, and you may bring up other aspects. You should also discuss the resources you have access to (economic, social, and cultural). 2) Discuss how a major social institution has affected your life (government, religion, education, movements, military, etc). How are you dependent and how are you constrained by that institution? 3) Think about social roles you might occupy: sibling, friend, student, child, employee, activist, athlete, etc. How do these roles shape your life? What are the rules and scripts in these roles? How do they influence each other and create conflicts and opportunities? How do you internalize the social world and understand yourself? That is, what is your self-identity and how did you come to it?

Should you wish to write a draft, it’s due January 28. The final draft is due March 3. Please print double-sided and bring to class. Organize the paper however you see fit. Feel free to visit office hours and discuss.

5 Reflection Papers: For 4 of the 5 papers, react to the readings in 500 words or less. Please feel free to include current events and personal reflections. If you summarize the material, do so very briefly. These assignments are meant to make sure you understand the readings, so try to comment on the bulk of the pages for any given week. These reflection papers are also an opportunity to try out themes for your autobiographical essay. You can do a reflection paper any week we have two classes. They are due before class starts (no exceptions). Please upload them to Canvass. Email them to me if you have trouble. You may also bring a printed copy to class.

For the 5th reflection paper, please relate a given week’s readings to a story you heard on Democracy Now! or another independent news program. Independent means no
government funding, corporate underwriting, or advertisements. Please feel free to talk to me about any media you are considering. Be prepared to discuss how the program is funded. **Final Exam:** There will be an in-class final exam on May 5 or during the university’s predetermined time—whatever we decide to do. (Alternatives: T/TH 9 = Sat, May 14 at 9:00 a.m. T/TH 12 = Thurs. May 12 at 9:00 a.m.) The exam will be cumulative. The exam will consist of short answer essays and possibly multiple-choice questions. These will not be “gotcha;” rather, I’m interested in you utilizing the knowledge you’ve accumulated over the semester. More information will be forthcoming.

**Community Agreements**

- With your help, we will try to maintain a supportive and safer space for all those present, regardless of biological sex, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, cultural background, physical and mental ability, or age.
- Respect others and their ideas; no insults or judgments. We all can air our views in a safe and open atmosphere. We will not verbally attack persons; we will engage with their arguments.
- No one dominates discussions.
- No one interrupts when someone is speaking.
- We will try to maintain relevance to the issue being discussed.
- We will turn off our cell phones, pagers, and other sound making devices in class.
- We live in a digital age. I don’t want to make a blanket rule excluding electronic devices (computer, phones, etc.) because I personally like to take notes on a laptop. However, I will do so if they become an issue. I expect you to be taking notes and that’s all. Violation of this policy will result in harm to your grade and potentially class-wide changes.
- What would you like to add?

**Note well:** I may modify the syllabus and will let you know in class and via email if I do so. Please consult the Canvas page for this course regularly for announcements, grades, course materials, a copy of the syllabus, etc. **Please, look before you email.** If you email me and don’t receive a response within a week, it’s because you don’t need me to tell you the answer to your question.

**Week One – January 19, 21 – Sociological Imagination**


King, Martin Luther, Jr. April 4, 1967. “Beyond Vietnam, Questions and Answer” | [2 pages]


**Week Two – January 26, 28 – Foundations of sociology**

**Draft of autobiographical essay due by 11:59 PM, January 28.**


*Sociological classics, should you wish to pursue them. You don’t have to read these!*

Marx, Karl. 1852. *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.*


Week Three – February 2, 4 – Gender, sexuality, feminism

**Week Four – February 9, 11 – Gender, sexuality, feminism cont’d**
Rich, Adrienne. 1980. “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence.” *Signs* 5(4):631–60. | I gave you two versions, the original article (~30 pages) and an abridged version (~15). The original will give you a better sense, but the shorter one captures the important elements and I’d rather have you read that closely than skim the longer one, but take your pick.

**Week Five – February 16, 18 – Race and ethnicity**
Survey handed out in class—simply for feedback purposes.


Week Six – February 23, 25 – Race and ethnicity cont’d


Week Seven – March 1, 3 – Class

Final autobiographical essay due March 3 by 11:59 PM.


March 8, 10 SPRING BREAK!

Week Eight – March 15, 17 – Intersectionality, Privilege


“Love as the practice of freedom”


**Week Nine – Mach 22, 24 (NO class on the 24th, Easter) – Body and BC**

Explore the Disability Awareness Committee at Boston College:

https://www.facebook.com/BC.disabilityawareness?_rdr=p


Johan Hari, June 2015, “Everything you think you know about addiction is wrong.”

(http://www.ted.com/talks/johann_hari_everything_you_think_you_know_about_addiction_is_wrong) I’ve uploaded the transcript of the 15 minute talk as well (“Hari2015..”).

Aaron, Kwesi. 2015. “Boston College Serves a Kinder Supremacy.” *Verge Campus*.


**Week Ten – March 29, 31 – Social institutions: family**


**Week Eleven – April 5, 7 – Social institutions: education**


**Week Twelve – April 12, 14 – Social institutions: religion**

Possible guest lecture!


Francis, Pope and Naomi Oreskes. 2015. Encyclical on Climate Change and Inequality: On Care for Our Common Home. Brooklyn, NY: Melville House. | The required reading is Oreskes’ intro (see “Oreskes...”) and optional is as much of the encyclical as you like. No need to buy the Pope’s encyclical, you can get it online for free.

**Week Thirteen – April 19, 21 – Climate change**


**Week Fourteen – April 26, 28 – Climate change and environmental justice**

**Film!** Lewis, Avi and Naomi Klein. 2015. This Changes Everything. (90 minutes, we'll get through it during class)


Allen, Paul, Christina French, Lisa Hopkinson, and Philip James. 2016. Zero Carbon: Making It Happen, a Multi-Disciplinary Investigation into Overcoming the Barriers to a Zero Carbon Future. Initial Findings. Powys, Wales: Centre for Alternative Technology. | Reading is titled “zero carbon...” [40 pages, easy to read, has pictures] A nice overview, in clear language, about how different disciplines think about climate. As the title suggests, the report focuses on getting to zero carbon emissions, which can be done, but requires large and small changes.


**Week Fifteen – May 3, 5 – Activism, Organizing, and Civic Engagement**

**In-class video of** Trudell, John, on Democracy Now!, December 9, 2015. “RIP John Trudell, Longtime Native American Activist; Hear Him Read One of His Poems in 1998.” | I placed a partial transcription in the readings (“Trudell1998...”) but please listen/watch to the 20 minute talk here:
http://www.democracynow.org/2015/12/9/rip_john_trudell_longtime_native_american

Essig, Kate. 2014. “Activism Or Slacktivism? How Social Media Hurts And Helps Student Activism.” *St. Louis Public Radio.* | [5 pages]

Final exam on May 5 or during the university’s predetermined time