What is sociology? Hopefully you have some idea already, or you wouldn’t be taking this course. But if somebody asked you what sociology is, what would you say? When you are finished with this course you should know the answer that question, although if somebody asks you to tell them what sociology is, you still might find it is tricky to sum it up in a way that really covers it. If you do find it easy to sum up…well let’s just say you won’t. The discipline of sociology is broad. There are a variety of topics, opinions, approaches, methods, and theories that fall under the [proverbial] sociological umbrella. At the edges, sociology fades into anthropology, psychology, political science, economics, English, cultural studies, media studies…the list goes on. Sociology fades into so many other social science and humanities disciplines because there is really no arena of social life that some corner of sociology does not deal with. Sociology is a way of looking at the world. It is a way of asking questions, and a way of framing answers. It is a collection of tools and ideas that can be and are applied diversely and expansively. And all of these tools and ideas revolve around the study of people in society.

In this course, I will introduce you to sociology through giving you a fairly wide – but not exhaustive – survey of the discipline, its subareas, and its theoretical frameworks. Most weeks are on separate domains of sociology, but some topics carry over across domains. This is not a course for students who have already declared sociology as their majors, so I do not assume you have any prior familiarity with the sociology. We will start out from the very beginning. What is sociology? What is society? Where does the personal end and where does the social begin?

The Social Science Core

Perennial Questions: In this course we will discuss many broad questions about social life. What is society? What are the relationships between the individual and society? What takes place in everyday interaction that we often take for granted? How do social structures shape our lives?

Historical Perspective: We will discuss how the field of sociology has changed over time, and about how society is changing as different generations of people move between different broad positions in society. We will discuss how historical changes in the social structure shape and are shaped by the lived experience of individuals and groups who live within those structures and through those changes.
Cultural Diversity: We will discuss how differences in race, class, gender and age are portrayed in popular media; and about how social/cultural differences are accompanied by different sorts of social experiences and expectations.

Develop a Personal Philosophy: Students in this course will become familiar with a range of different perspectives for looking at the social world. People tend to gravitate toward certain perspectives and away from others. Students will be responsible for noticing which perspectives they identify with more strongly, and will hone this understanding further as they express their thoughts on social life through class participation and the reflection paper and final paper.

Writing: In total, 70% of the course grade will be based on students’ writing (in the reflection paper and final paper). Sociology as a discipline largely takes place through writing. Sociologists write and read journal articles, theoretical books, popular books, and textbooks. Sociology is influenced by lived experience and current events, and in turn influences lived experience and policy decisions; but the discipline of sociology itself is by and large an enterprise of written communication. Students considering further study in sociology should put a lot of thought into their sociological writing.

Course Requirements:

- 1% first quiz
- 4% second quiz
- 5% chosen topic paper 1 (one page, due date TBA)
- 5% chosen topic paper 2 (one page, due date TBA)
- 5% chosen topic paper 3 (one page, due date TBA)
- 5% third quiz
- 10% attendance
- 10% participation
- 30% reflection paper (3 pages; upload to Canvas March 16 by 11:59pm)
- 25% final paper (5 pages; upload to Canvas May 4 by 11:59pm)
More About Course Requirements: The 3 quizzes will each consist of 4 multiple choice questions. I will space them roughly evenly throughout the semester, and will take place at the beginning of classes, but I will not tell students in advance exactly on what days they will happen. There will not be quizzes during the weeks when the reflection paper and final paper are due. Participation in class discussion is important, but different people have different styles and patterns of contribution. Students who dominate class discussions, leaving others little opportunity to speak, do not get a gold star from me. Students who never say anything in class do not either. Each student should aim to contribute at least once during each class period, although I will not be tallying off precisely how many times so and so spoke, and when. I also consider meeting with me during office hours to count for class participation; although students should keep in mind that participating in class discussions makes class more lively and interesting, and is a good habit for students to get into. More information on the 1-page chosen topic papers, the 3-page reflection paper, and the 5-page final paper will be given out in the form of handouts and posted on Canvas, well in advance of their due dates.

Grading scale

A: 93 – 100%
A-: 90 – 92%
B+: 87 – 89%
B: 83 – 86%
B-: 80 – 82%
C+: 77 – 79%
C: 73 – 76%
C-: 70 – 72%
D+: 67 – 69%
D: 63 – 66%
D-: 60 – 62%
F: 0 – 59%
Academic Integrity

Students must remain honest about their own work, and not plagiarize the work of others or present others’ ideas as their own without referring to the applicable sources of the ideas. Students cannot refer to imaginary facts or sources of information in their work. Students cannot assist others in breaches of academic integrity either. This should all be common sense, but then again, what is “common sense” really? To view the University’s full statement about academic integrity and how students are bound to it, visit: http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/integrity.html (Links to an external site.).

Accommodations

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.

Required Texts:

Ken Plummer. Sociology: The Basics


Paul Taylor and Pue Research Center. The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown

Powell. Postmodernism for Beginners

SCHEDULE

Week 1: INTRODUCTION, January 20, 22

[for] Wednesday: no readings, just come to class

[for] Friday: Sociology: the basics, chapter 1
Week 2: Social Interaction, January 25, 27, 29

Monday: Goffman. “on face-work” in Interaction Ritual

Wednesday: Hochschild. “chapter 3: managing feeling” in The Managed Heart

Friday: Plummer. “chapter 2: thinking the social” in Sociology: The Basics

Week 3: Family, February 1, 3, 5

Monday (you get the idea): Taylor. “ch. 1 introduction” and “ch 8: whither marriage?” in The Next America

Allen and Walker. “ch. 7: Aging and Gender in families: a very grand opening” in Age Matters: realigning feminist thinking, edited by Calasanti & Slevin

Collins. “ch. 3: work, family, and black women’s oppression” in Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment

Week 4: Gender, February 8, 10, 12

Wharton. “chapter 2: the gendered person” & “chapter 3: gender in interactions and institutions” in The Sociology of Gender

Meadows and Davidson. “ch 13: maintaining manliness in later life: hegemonic masculinities and emphasized femininities” in Age Matters: realigning feminist thinking, edited by Calasanti & Slevin

Sims. “Introduction” in Women of Blaxploitation

Week 5: Race, February 15, 17, 19


Taylor. “ch 6: the new immigrants” and “ch 7: hapa nation” in The Next America

**Week 6: Religion, February 22, 24, 26**

Zuckerman. “Ch 5: social life affecting religion” & “Ch 6: religion affecting social life” in Invitation to the Sociology of Religion

Taylor. “Ch 9: nones of the rise” in The Next America

Best. Chapter 1 in Social Problems

**Week 7: Deviance, February 29, March 2, 4**

Cohen. “ch. 1: deviance and moral panics” in Folk Devils and Moral Panics

Goode. “ch. 1: introduction” in Deviance in Everyday Life

Goode. “ch 12: Fred, the philosophical felon” in Deviance in Everyday Life

**Week 8: SPRING BREAK!!!, March 7, 9, 11**

**Week 9: Overview of Sociology 1, March 14, 16, 18**

Plummer. Sociology: the Basics, chapters 2, 3, 4

Best. Social Problems. Chapter 2

*REFLECTION PAPER DUE March 16 (upload to Canvas by 11:59pm)*

**Week 10: Social Movements, March 21, 23, 25**


Taylor. “ch 4: battle of the ages?” in The Next America

Best. “ch 3: activists as claimsmakers” in Social Problems
Illness, Science, Development, Colonization I

McBride. “ch. 4: out of the shadows: Liberia before World War II” & “ch. 6: alliances and utopias: Liberia’s search for development” in Missions for Science

Best. “ch. 4: experts as claimsmakers” in Social Problems

Week 11: Illness, Science, Development, Colonization II, March 28, 30, and April 1

Watts. “introduction” and “ch. 6: yellow fever, malaria and development: Atlantic Africa and the New World, 1647-1928” in Epidemics and History: Disease, Power and Imperialism


Week 12: Economy and Society, April 4, 6, 8

Taylor. “ch 5: money troubles” in The Next America

Hochschild. “ch 7: between the toe and the heel: jobs and emotional labor” in The Managed Heart

Chester. “ch 5: positive attitude” and “ch 7: professionalism” in Reviving Work Ethic

Week 13: Postmodernism, April 11, 13, 15

Powell. Postmodernism for Beginners

Plummer. Ch. 5

Week 14: Overview of Sociology 3, April 18, 20, 22

Plummer. Sociology: the basics, chapters 6, 7, 8 & Conclusion

Best. Social Problems Conclusion
Week 15: NO CLASS, April 25, 27, 29

WORK ON FINAL PAPERS

Week 16: May 2, 4, 6

FINAL PAPER DUE May 4 (upload to Canvas by 11:59pm)