

SOC 200 – Principles of Sociology  
Fall 2004, TR 5:00-6:15, Sangren Hall Room 2304

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**Course Purpose and Goals:**

As its title suggests, the purpose of this course is to introduce you to the discipline of sociology and its principles. More specifically, my goals are for you (1) to learn and be able to critique and apply the major concepts sociologists use, (2) to become familiar with how sociologists study the social world, and (3) to be able to critique sociological research. It is my hope that you will apply what you learn in this course throughout your life because doing so can provide you with a more complete understanding of the social world.

**Course Readings:**

You will need to purchase the following text, which is available at both the University Bookstore (located on the corner of W. Michigan and Howard) and the WMU Bookstore (located in the Bernhard Center):

McIntyre, L. (2002). *The Practical Skeptic: Core Concepts in Sociology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

In addition, I have placed articles on reserve at Waldo Library. You can access these materials by going to the circulation desk.

Finally, I recommend (but do not require) the following references, particularly for anyone with an interest in sociology and/or who may take additional sociology courses:

Johnson, A. (2000). *The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology: A User's Guide to Sociological Language* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Marshall, G. (1998). *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

WMU's Sociology Subject Guide: available at Waldo Library (go to the reference desk on the bottom floor) or online at: <http://www.wmich.edu/library/sr/sociology.html>

These references will provide you with more information about various sociological topics than I will be able to provide in this course.

**Class Format:**

Each class will consist of some mixture of lecture, discussion, videos, and activities. I will use each of these components to build upon the material provided in the textbook (i.e. by providing examples or additional information) in order to help you gain a better understanding of it.

**Assignments and Grading:**

Your grade in this course will be determined based on the number of points you earn on the following assignments:

Short Assignments:

I will regularly ask you to answer a question or a short series of questions regarding the material addressed in the readings, class discussions, or videos. In addition, you may need to answer questions as part of an in-class activity. The purpose of these assignments is to increase and assess your understanding of the material covered in this course, as well as to assess the quality of my instruction.

Each question will be worth 2 points, with 1 point awarded to responses that are partially correct, incomplete, or that show a partial understanding of the material.

These assignments will generally be due either during the same class they are assigned or at the beginning of the following class. Assignments that are due at a later date do not need to be typewritten, provided I can read your handwriting.

While you will complete most of these assignments by yourself, you will complete several with other students.

Since the number and nature of these assignments will depend on the material we cover, I cannot provide the exact number of points you can earn in completing all of these assignments. With that said, I can put forth an estimate of between seventy-five and one hundred points.

Larger Assignments:

You will also have to complete five larger assignments, which will provide the bulk of the points you can earn in this course. I will briefly describe each of these assignments here; you will receive more information about each of these assignments later.

1. Socioautobiography: For this assignment, you will need to select a norm, belief, or value that you believe is central or important to you. You will then need to list the socialization agents that instilled this norm, belief, or value in you and how they did so. Finally, you will need to discuss whether or not the theories of socialization presented in the textbook apply to this situation. Completing this assignment will enable you to apply and critique one of the concepts we will cover in this course. This paper, which will need to be between two and four pages, will be due one week after we finish the section on socialization and will be worth a total of twenty-five points.

2. **Deviance Assignment:** In this paper, you will discuss what happens when you violate a norm. Doing so will illustrate the power of social forces and broaden your understanding of deviance and other central sociological concepts. This paper, which will need to be two to four pages long, will be worth twenty-five points and will be due two weeks after we finish the section on deviance.
3. **Group Presentation:** You will need to participate in an oral group presentation on a social institution. More specifically, you will present an article or reading from a sociological journal or reader that addresses a particular social institution, critique and expand upon this material, and lead class discussion on this material. This assignment will provide you with an opportunity to apply the concepts discussed in this course and to learn about and critique sociological research on the topic you select. By September 30<sup>th</sup>, you will need to hand in a piece of paper listing three institutions you are interested in (in order of preference) so that I can place you in groups. A list of institutions can be found on pages 131-133 of the textbook. The presentations will begin on October 21<sup>st</sup> and continue until the end of the semester. This assignment is worth fifty points.
4. **Article Critique:** You will need to summarize, reflect upon, and critique an article from a sociological journal that addresses a topic of interest to you. This assignment, which will need to be around five pages in length, will be due on November 11<sup>th</sup> and will be worth fifty points.
5. **Central Issues Paper/Final Exam:** Your final assignment, which will be due on December 7<sup>th</sup>, is to construct and complete your own final exam. More specifically, you are to form three short essay questions. You are then to discuss why you selected these questions (in other words, why these questions are central to an understanding of sociology) and answer them. This assignment will be worth fifty points and should be between three and six pages.

All of these assignments need to be type-written and stapled; I will not accept papers that are handwritten and/or not stapled.

Please bring any questions you have about these assignments to my attention.

#### Grading:

I will determine your course grade by dividing the number of points you received by the total number of possible points. I use the following scale:

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Percentages</u>
A	93-100%
BA	88-92%
B	83-87%
CB	78-82%
C	73-77%
DC	68-72%
D	60-67%
F	0-59%

On every assignment, I will provide you with the number of points you earned, the number of points the assignment was worth, and the total number of points you could have earned in the course so far. I will also post your grades if you desire. In order to protect and respect your privacy, I will only post your grades if you provide me with a code name. I will hand out a short form that will ask for your name and code name within the first week of the semester.

I may provide an opportunity for extra credit. If so, I will provide more details at a later time.

I will give someone who has almost earned enough points to have a grade with that grade (for example, give someone with a 92% an A) if he or she regularly provides insightful comments and questions during class discussion.

If you have any questions about your grade (i.e. if you wonder why you did not receive full credit), please bring this issue to my attention as soon as possible. (Since the university discourages discussing grades via email, I will not do so.)

**Late Policy:**

If you know that you will be unable to attend class the day an assignment is due (because of a sporting event, doctor's appointment, etc.), you can send it to me by email (either in the body of the email or as a Microsoft Word attachment for the short assignments or as a Word document for the larger assignments), give it to me in person, or place it in my mailbox. Either way, I must receive your assignment prior to the end of the class period in which it is due.

I will only accept work after the deadline if you are having a personal or family emergency. (Please note that I may ask for documentation.)

**Missing Class and Class Cancellations:**

If you miss a class, you will need to get notes from a classmate. I will let you know of any assignments that are due the next class period if you contact me.

In the rare event that class is cancelled (due to inclement weather or my falling ill, for instance), the material assigned for that day, as well as any assignments, will be due the following class period, and the topic for that day will be discussed the following class period.

**Plagiarism:**

I expect all of you to do your own work. In other words, plagiarism and cheating (which includes failing to cite sources) will not be tolerated. In fact, it will result in you getting a "0" for the assignment at the very least. Please see the Student Handbook for more information on the University's policy on plagiarism; I will follow their guidelines in terms of what behavior is considered to be cheating/plagiarism and of what sanctions are appropriate when cheating/plagiarism occurs.

**Classroom Expectations:**

First, we all need to respect one another. While we do not need to agree and not all of our ideas are equally “correct,” we need to show common courtesy and decency to each other. If we do so, we will be better able to “compare notes” and hopefully end up with as informed an opinion as possible. To put it another way, the point is not to win or prove that other people are wrong. Instead, the point is to understand different points of view and to have a better idea of why you believe what you do, as well as to recognize that your experience is limited and may be affected by bias. Personal attacks have no place in this classroom, and anyone who behaves in this manner will be asked to leave. At the same time, anyone who shares an opinion must be willing to explain why he or she holds that belief. In addition, please refrain from using crude language and swearing since this may disrupt the discussion.

Second, discussion will be a central part of this course because I want you to be able to apply the knowledge you already have in order to understand and critique the concepts I will present in class. In addition, discussion can reveal information that cannot be provided by activities or lecture. As a result, your participation is essential. For that reason, I will call on people if no one volunteers. I do not like this practice, but I understand that people often refrain from participating because of social pressures rather than an actual lack of understanding. In addition, I firmly believe that you all know more than you think you do.

Third, in order to keep distractions to a minimum and to get the most out of your time in the classroom, please remember to turn off your cell phone and/or pager before class, to arrive to class on time, and to avoid having private conversations with your classmates during class. While I would prefer that you do not eat in class, I am willing to be flexible since this class meets around the dinner hour. As a result, you can eat in class, provided you can do so in a way that does not distract others or leaves more work for the custodians. You may bring something to drink under the same conditions. Finally, please do not sleep in my class, if for no other reason than you are wasting your time and potentially disturbing other students. If you are too tired to participate in discussion or take anything in, please (for your own good) stay home. This also applies if you are too sick to learn anything or to even think straight. While all of these points are common sense and common courtesy, I mention them so that we are all clear on what my classroom expectations are. I will ask people who do not follow these guidelines to leave.

**Students with Special Needs:**

If you have any special needs you wish or need to bring to my attention, please do so, and I will do what I can. Please also inform me if you will regularly miss class due to other obligations, such as belonging to a sports team.

**Changes to the Syllabus:**

I reserve the right to make any changes necessitated by unforeseen events and unique circumstances.

**Acknowledgements:**

Finally, I wish to acknowledge and thank the faculty and the other graduate students in my department, particularly the Teaching Practicum and Teaching Circle, for their (continuing) help.