

St. Francis Xavier University
Department of Sociology
Winter 2023

Course: Sociology 301: Classical Social Theory
Instructor: Dr. Peter Mallory
Email: pmallory@stfx.ca
Office: Nicholson Tower 610
Lecture Schedule: E4 Mondays 6:30-9:30

In-Person Office Hours: Monday 2:00-3:00PM; Tuesday 1:00-4:00PM
Wednesday 10:00-12:00 Noon. Online and phone appointments are also available.

Course Description

In this course you will read some of the foundational texts of early social thought. The ideas and theoretical questions we will explore are at the center of what gives sociology and the social sciences their distinctive outlooks and approaches to understanding social life. We will pay particular attention to how certain questions recur throughout the classic and contemporary works of social theory and how different authors approach them, questions such as: What holds societies together? How are we to understand social conflict? What is the relationship between the ideas people think with and the material conditions in which people live? How can modern societies become democratic? And what are the prospects and conditions for just, democratic societies in the modern world? How is social theory implicated in wider historical processes like colonialism, the expansion of capitalism, and political questions about power, representation, and exclusion? By considering how the classical authors approached these (and other) questions, the course provides students with the intellectual foundations to engage more fully with contemporary topics and problems in the social sciences.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- understand many of the central concepts, ideas, and approaches in the discipline of sociology
- engage with the key debates in classical social theory and understand how theorists have built on and contested each other's approaches to understanding social life
- appreciate how long-standing intellectual traditions continue to influence contemporary sociological theory and scholarship.
- effectively use social theories and concepts to make sense of contemporary events and phenomena in the social world
- read challenging texts in the social sciences and trust your own ability to interpret their arguments.

Course Evaluation

25%	Mid-term Exam
10%	Class Participation
35%	Final Exam
30%	Weekly Quizzes

Mid-term Test:

There will be an in-class test on February 13. The purpose of the test is to give you feedback on your progress in the course.

Class Participation:

Active participation is an important part of this course. Participation comprises attendance, active listening, giving other students an opportunity to speak, raising and answering questions, and providing relevant comments on the material discussed in lecture and the class readings. Please bring the readings to class and be prepared to offer your questions and insights.

Exam:

An exam will be scheduled during the regular examination period. It will be closed book and details will be provided in class.

Weekly Quizzes

At the start of each class, we will have a short quiz on the day's readings. Each quiz will consist of three short questions about the readings assigned for the week. The readings for this course are challenging, but one key for success in the course is to work through them before class. The main purpose of the quizzes is to help you prepare for lectures and class discussions. If you must miss a class for a valid reason, please let me know before the class.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND READINGS

January 9. What is Classical Social Theory? Why study it?

- Welcome to Sociology 301. In this class we look ahead to the major course themes and begin to outline the core concepts you will need for the topics ahead.

January 16. Alexis de Tocqueville: Democracy, Despotism, and Power

- Tocqueville, Alexis de. 2003 [original 1835/1840]. *Democracy in America*. New York: Penguin. [Selections]

January 23. Mary Wollstonecraft on Inequality and the Rights of Women

- Wollstonecraft, Mary. 2010 [original 1792]. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. New York: Verso. [Selections]

January 30. Emile Durkheim: Social Solidarity and the Sacred and Profane

- Durkheim, Émile. 1995 [1912]. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Karen E. Fields, trans. New York: The Free Press. [selections]
- Durkheim, Émile. 1982 [original 1895]. “What is a Social Fact?” Pp. 50-59 in *The Rules of Sociological Method*. New York: The Free Press.

February 6. Max Weber on Rationality and Interpretive Sociology

- Weber, Max. 1978 [1922] “Basic Sociological Concepts from Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology.” Pp. 37-50 in *Cultural Sociology: An Introductory Reader*, edited by M. Wray. New York: Norton.
- Weber, Max. 1978 [1922]. “Protestant Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism.” Pp. 138-173 in *Weber: Selections in Translation*, edited by W.G. Runciman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

February 13. Mid-term Exam

- In-class test. No readings this week.

February 20. Winter Study Break

- No classes – Enjoy!

February 27. Karl Marx: Capitalism and Social Class

- Marx, Karl. 1996 [1844]. “Alienated Labor.” In *Modern Political Thought: Readings from Machiavelli to Nietzsche*. David Wootton, ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing. Pp. 790-797.
- Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. 2004 [1846]. Selections from *The German Ideology* and *The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof*. In: *Readings in Social Theory: The Classic Tradition to Post-Modernism*. James Farganis, ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill. Pp. 43-54.

March 6. Georg Simmel: Strangers and the Social Forms of Modern Life

- Simmel, Georg. 1971 [Original 1908]. “The Stranger.” Pp. 143-149 in *Georg Simmel: On Individuality and Social Forms*, edited by D. Levine. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Simmel, Georg. 1971 [Original 1903] “The Metropolis and Mental Life.” Pp. 324-339 in *Georg Simmel: On Individuality and Social Forms*, edited by D. Levine. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

*Friday, March 10—Last day to drop second-term three-credit courses

March 13. Franz Fanon: Colonialism, Decolonization, and Recognition

- Fanon, Frantz. 2008[Original 1952]. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press. [Selections]
- Fanon, Frantz. 2004[1963]. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press. [Selections]
- Coulthard, Glen Sean. 2014. *Red Skin, White Masks. Rejecting The Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. [Selections]

March 20. W.E.B DuBois and Charles Taylor: The Politics of Recognition

- DuBois, W. E. B. 2007 [original 1903]. “Of Our Spiritual Strivings.” Pp. 7-14 in *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Oxford.
- Taylor, Charles. 1994. “The Politics of Recognition.” Pp. 25-37 in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, edited by C. Taylor, A. Gutman, et al. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

March 27. Contemporary Thinking With and Against the Classics

- Graeber, David and David Wengrow. 2021. *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*. Toronto: Signal Press. [Selections]

April 3. Conclusion to the course

- No readings. Come to class prepared to talk about what you learned in the course.

COURSE INFORMATION AND POLICIES

A Note on Course Content

We will deal with difficult and sometimes upsetting topics in this course. I invite you to work with me to create a classroom where we can engage with serious issues of justice and injustice in a way that is sensitive to people’s experiences. We will approach all topics in a way that uncovers what sociologists have to offer in understanding them.

Attendance

Attending all classes is the best way to ensure you do well in the course. Please let me know if you will be absent from class.

If you are unable to attend our class because of a requirement for another course (such as a mandatory class, public lecture, quiz, exam, or class project that is scheduled outside normal class hours), then please contact me.

Office Hours

I hold regular student office hours throughout the week, and you do not need an appointment. You can come to my office if you wish to meet in person. If you prefer to meet online or talk over the phone, contact me by email and we can schedule an appointment.

Course Texts

Most readings will be available on the course Moodle Page.

Late Policy

Late papers submitted without prior permission will incur a late penalty of 5% of the total assignment per day, including weekends.

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

Since this course requires you to complete a written assignment, you should familiarize yourself with standards for proper referencing of all materials cited (i.e. books, journals, newspaper articles, internet resources etc.). Students who attempt to pass off someone else's work as their own (plagiarism) will be dealt with through the university policy on academic honesty. Please ensure that you fully understand this policy (see section 3.8 in the calendar).

Classroom Technology

If you use a laptop for note taking, please do so in a way that does not distract others. Audio or video recording of this class is not permitted.

Special Accommodations

If you develop a prolonged illness or encounter a personal crisis that will impact your progress in the course, please contact me as soon as the problem becomes apparent. If you contact me early, we can develop a plan to help you complete the course.

Other Accommodations

If you are a student with physical, learning, or psychiatric disabilities that require reasonable accommodation in teaching style or evaluation you should contact the Tramble Centre for Accessible Learning so that appropriate arrangements can be made. Feel free to contact me if I can be of assistance.