I. The Course

Sociology presupposes that socially-oriented action accrues into social structures which are intricately bound up with the unfolding of the world—not merely as important consequences, but as substantial causes: They act as social forces to shape human experience and alter human action. The course will interrogate this position—its possibilities and its limits—by touring the social, from momentary moves in conversation to the seasonal cultivation of friends, enemies and customers to the centuries-long rise and fall of occupations, classes, governments and world society. At each scale, we will explore: 1) the nature, variation and meaning of social forms; 2) their life course—emergence, change, and death; 3) the things that give rise to them; and 4) their effect on the world—their effect on things such as the unequal distribution of wealth, violent conflict, and the emergence of distinctive cultures. In this way, the course explores sociology not only as a field but as a project: it leads an expedition through its bustling capital cities—where most of its citizens ply their craft—but also to its sparse frontiers.

II. Readings

Readings will be circulated in class and through the course’s chalk site.

III. Course Requirements

A. READING AND DISCUSSION (10%)

Social Structure and Change is a seminar. Students are expected to read and reflect on all of the assigned readings before class. Participation in class discussion is expected of all class members. I expect students to come to class prepared with at least one substantial question from the reading.

B. SOCIAL EXPLORATIONS (40%)
Each week, students will be asked to write a memo, no longer than 700 words, that explores some social force parallel to (but not the same as) one described in the readings. For example, in the week entitled “Conversations”, one might discuss the genesis, meaning and consequences of embarrassment in social life (through analyzing examples from oneself and some informally interviewed others), or of the social force of “the glare” in which one person punishes another with a look that suggests both the immanence of retribution and the fact that the offender is now under surveillance. During the week we explore social difference and discrimination, students could explore how groups with which they are involved generate and maintain group boundaries and their consequences (or visit and observe those created by another group—a club, business or church). These explorations can draw from student observations of the world, memories, informal interviews, analysis of archives or artifacts; novels or popular media, simple simulations of social systems, and even small surveys of sociological literature beyond that read in class. At least two memos should draw from sociology books or journals; at least two from observation and/or interview; at least one that draws on a simulation or mathematical reasoning. Memos should explore some subset of the following issues: the origin, nature, meaning, variation, and consequences of the social form. Students will post these in an online message board on the course chalk site (although I recommend composing/editing them iteratively outside Chalk). A few of the most promising will be discussed each week in class. I will grade these with a check-plus, check, or check-minus (which roughly corresponds to an A, B+, and B-).

For these memos, the class will be split in half, with half of the students producing memos by Monday, 7pm, and the other half by Wednesday, 7pm. By the end of the quarter, each student will have produced 9 memos. Memos should explore issues at the scale of the current readings (the ones to be discussed the following day.) I will put a few exemplary memos in the syllabus folder of the chalk site, but encourage students to explore their own settings.

C. TWO ANALYTICAL ESSAYS (50%--25% each)

Students will be asked to write two essays that analyze and interpret a situation presented in a vignette or article. These essays will draw from ideas presented in the readings, class lecture and discussion, and exercised through our weekly exploration memos.

D. GRADING (continued)

Borderline grades (Class participation):
Where a student’s final grade is borderline (e.g., teetering between an A- and B+), students with strong attendance and participation will be given the higher grade. Students with weak attendance and participation will be given the lower grade. Essay grades will be posted on Chalk as we move through the quarter.

Essay Extension policy:
Extensions must be requested a MINIMUM of 24 hours before the deadline and must include a proposed new deadline. Late papers which have not been granted an extension will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g., B+ to B), and will lose 1/3 of a letter grade for each additional class period they are late.
IV. Calendar of Reading Assignments

Week 1. The Landscape
Tu(Jan.5): Definitions of Sociology

Th(Jan.7): Conversations


Week 2.
Tu(Jan.12): Conversations


Th(Jan.14): Friends and Enemies
Simmel, Georg. Chapter 3 (The Isolated Individual and the Dyad) and Chapter 4 (The Triad) in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel.* 118-169.


Week 3.
Tu(Jan.19): Groups


Th(Jan.21): Living Together
http://www.soc.jhu.edu/people/cherlin/Cherlin_JMFmarriagepaper.pdf


Week 4.
Tu(Jan.26): Working Together


Th(Jan.28): Professions

Week 5:
Tu(Feb.2): Organizations


Th(Feb.4): Markets


**First Analysis Paper Due Feb. 5, 5pm.

Week 6.
Tu(Feb.9): Organizational Groups & Fields

Th(Feb.11): Community and Cleavage


Week 7.
Tu(Feb.16): Community—Status and Cohesion


Th(Feb.18): Class


Week 8.
Tu(Feb.23): Social Movements


Th(Feb.25): Religion and Culture


Week 9.
Tu(Mar.2): Cities


Th(Mar.4): States


Week 10.
Tu(Mar.9): States and Markets


**Second Analysis Paper Due Thursday, March 18, 5pm.**