

SOC251H1F
Contemporary Sociological Theory
University of Toronto
Class hours: Wednesdays 14:10 — 17:00
Location: SS1070

Instructor: Sébastien Parker

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Office Hours: By appointment, please refer to Quercus calendar

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Statement of Acknowledgement

We acknowledge this sacred land on which the University of Toronto operates. It has been a site of human activity for 15,000 years. This land is the territory of the Huron Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. The territory was the subject of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and Confederacy of the Ojibwe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. Today, the meeting place of Toronto is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in the community, on this territory. [*Council of Aboriginal Initiatives, 2014*]

Course Description

A selective introduction to major contemporary thinkers and approaches whose ideas have achieved wide influence, as well as an on-going inquiry into the nature and role of sociological analysis. Restricted to sociology majors and specialists.

Prerequisites

The prerequisite to take SOC251H1F is SOC201H. Students without the prerequisite can be removed at any time discovered, and without notice.

Learning Objectives

There are 5 learning objectives in this course:

- 1) Critically read and assess contemporary sociological theorists
- 2) Critically write about the nature and role of sociological analysis
- 3) Draw connections between contemporary theory and current phenomena
- 4) Consider ongoing theoretical debates in the field of sociology and provide your own perspective in peer discussion
- 5) Evaluate implications of different theoretical approaches and reflect on them

Evaluation Components

| Type | Due Dates | Weight |
|-------------------------|-------------|--------|
| Debate reflection | October 12 | 15% |
| First test | October 19 | 20% |
| Representing reflection | November 16 | 15% |
| Problems reflection | November 30 | 15% |
| Second test | December 7 | 20% |
| Participation | Ongoing | 15% |

Grading Description

Participation (15%)

Five times (5 x 3%) Students will have to showcase ongoing, active participation through a series of prompts throughout the term. Prompts will be discussed during selected tutorials and might include, for example, posting questions to the discussion board, engaging with peers, participating in a collaborative review, and visualizing and reflecting on a theory in a group. Participation submissions will be marked on a satisfactory (3 pts), non-satisfactory (1.5 pts), or incomplete (0 pt.) basis.

Reflections (3 x 15%)

Three times (3) during the term, students will have to write reflections based on assigned readings, which will be discussed during tutorials. The first reflection, focusing will ask you to engage with Besbris and Khan 'Less theory. More description' and Kieran Healy's 'Fuck nuance'. The second reflection will engage with Jan Fuhse's piece 'How can theories represent social phenomena?'. Finally, the third reflection will be Prasad's 'Pragmatism as problem solving' and Watts' 'Should social science be more solution-oriented?'. For each reflection, students must write 2-pages single-spaced, in accordance with the general guidelines and expectations communicated during tutorials and in assignment documents on Quercus.

Take-home tests (2 x 20%)

Twice (2) during the term, students will have to have to respond to test questions (worth 20% each). The first take-home assesses comprehension for the first part of the course, while the second take-home assesses comprehension for material covered in the second part. Students will receive the test document, outlining the expectations and test questions, 48 hours before the due date. For both tests, students will have to answer one essay-type question (2 pages, single-spaced) and two short-answer questions (1 page, single-spaced, each).

Course policies

Missed work

Students who miss the test or are late in submitting an assignment for medical reasons, need to email the instructor (not the TA), and also declare their absence on the system (ACORN).

(NOTE: Because of Covid-19, students do NOT need to submit the usual documentation, i.e., medical notes or the Verification of Illness forms).

Students who miss the test or are late in submitting an assignment for other reasons, such as family or other personal reasons, should request their College Registrar to email the instructor.

Handing in assignments

All assignments must be submitted electronically via Quercus. The instructor and TA will not accept electronic copies of assignments via email.

Deadlines

The assignments are due online via Quercus for the stated date. Please refer to the Due Dates stated on page 2 of the Syllabus and the Course Schedule.

Late tests and assignments

If a student misses a test or submit assignments later for medical reasons, the student must contact me (not the TA) within 2 days of the missed test or assignment and also declare their absence on ACORN. For other reasons, such as family emergencies or personal reasons, they must have the college registrar email me.

Accessibility

If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, please visit <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility> as soon as possible.

Ouriginal

Sometimes, students will be required to submit their assignments to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>).

For some of your assignments, we will be using the software Ouriginal. It uses text matching technology as a method to uphold the University's high academic integrity standards to detect any potential plagiarism. Ouriginal is integrated into Quercus. For the assignments set up to use Ouriginal, the software will review your paper when you upload it to Quercus. To learn more about Ouriginal's privacy policy please review its [Privacy Policy](#).

Students not wishing their assignment to be submitted through Ouriginal will not be assessed unless a student instead provides, along with their work, sufficient secondary material (e.g., reading notes, outlines of the paper, rough drafts of the final draft, etc.) to establish that the paper they submit is truly their own.

Student Responsibilities and Expectations

Email Policy

I will respond to your email within two business days (48 hours, except weekends and holidays). In an email exchanges, you must use your official University of Toronto email. Please also include the course code (e.g. SOC251) in the subject line and your full name and student number in your message. Please do not send a repeat email (e.g., "did you get my email?").

In general, please treat emails as you would any other professional communication. You should be respectful in the way you address the instructor and the TA. Email is most suitable for questions that are clear, concise, and easily answerable. If you need help on course material, I strongly encourage you to attend office hours or make an appointment. For all general inquiries, please refer to the course syllabus.

Help from your Teaching Assistant

Your T.A. will hold scheduled office hours and respond to your emails. Please be judicious in your use of email. Use it only for questions that are brief and specific. Before sending a question by email, be sure to check the syllabus to see if an answer is already available. Emails should not be seen as an alternative to doing the assigned reading or attending lectures. Expect to receive a response from your T.A. within two working days. For more in-depth discussions, please take advantage of your T.A.'s office hours.

Grade Appeals

You have 7 days after receiving a mark to appeal it. Please note that upon re-grade your mark may go down, stay the same, or go up. To proceed with an appeal, you must provide a document outlining why you deem your work was marked unfairly and explain why you believe your work should receive a higher mark.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is fundamental to learning and scholarship at the University of Toronto. Participating honestly, respectfully, responsibly, and fairly in this academic community ensures that the U of T degree that you earn will be valued as a true indication of your individual academic achievement and will continue to receive the respect and recognition it deserves.

Familiarize yourself with the University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>). It is the rule book for academic behaviour at the U of T, and you are expected to know the rules.

The University of Toronto treats cases of academic misconduct very seriously. All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following the procedures outlined in the Code. The consequences for academic misconduct can be severe, including a failure in the course and a notation on your transcript. If you have any questions about what is or is not permitted in this course, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you have questions about appropriate research and citation methods, seek out additional information from me, or from other available campus resources like the [U of T Writing Website](#). If you are experiencing personal challenges that are having an impact on your academic work, please speak to me or seek the advice of your college registrar.

Course Schedule

Readings:

All course readings, which are excerpts from selected texts, will be available on the course website. Students are solely responsible for reading all required materials before class.

Please note:

***an asterisk** indicates that there is a scheduled tutorial between 16:00 and 17:00 (4 to 5 p.m. EST) on that day.

Week 1 (September 14)

Outline of course and expectations

Part 1. Continuity and Change**Week 2 (September 21)***

Readings (excerpts)

Mannheim, Karl (1952 [1927]). The problem of generations. In *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. P. Kecskemeti, pp. 163-195. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Ryder, Norman (1965). "The Cohort as a Concept in the Study of Social Change." *American Sociological Review*, 30:843-861.

Reading for tutorial (excerpt)

Milkman, Ruth. (2017). "A new political generation: Millennials and the post-2008 wave of protest." *American Sociological Review* 82, no. 1: 1-31.

Week 3 (September 28)*

Reading for lecture (excerpts)

Bourdieu, Pierre (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Reading for tutorial

Besbris, Max, and Shamus Khan. (2017). "Less Theory. More Description." *Sociological Theory* 35, no. 2: 147-153.

Week 4 (October 5)*

Readings for lecture (excerpts)

Blumer, Herbert (1958). "Race prejudice as a sense of group position." *Pacific sociological review* 1, no. 1: 3-7.

Bobo, Lawrence D. (1999). Prejudice as group position: Microfoundations of a sociological approach to racism and race relations." *Journal of Social Issues* 55, no. 3: 445-472.

Bobo, L., Kluegel, J. R., & Smith, R. A. (1997). Laissez faire racism: The crystallization of a "kinder, gentler" anti-Black ideology. In S. A. Tuch & J. K. Martin (Eds.), *Racial Attitudes in the 1990s: Continuity and Change* (pp. 93-120). Greenwood, CT: Praeger.

Reading for tutorial

Healy, Kieran (2017). "Fuck nuance." *Sociological Theory* 35, no. 2: 118-127.

Week 5 (October 12)****Debate Reflection Due (15%)****Readings for lecture (excerpts)*

Swidler, Ann (1986). Culture in action: Symbols and strategies. *American Sociological Review*, 51(2), 273-286.

Swidler, Ann (2001). *Talk of Love. How Culture Matters*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Week 6 (October 19)***First take-home test due (20%)*****Part 2. Integration and Differentiation****Week 7 (October 26)****Readings for lecture (excerpts)*

Blau, Peter M. (1977). A macrosociological theory of social structure. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83(1), 26-54.

Hedström, Peter. (2005). *Dissecting the social: On the principles of analytical sociology*. Cambridge University Press.

Granovetter, Mark (1985). "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness." *American Journal of Sociology* 91, no. 3: 481-510.

Reading for tutorial

Fuhse, Jan A (2022). "How Can Theories Represent Social Phenomena?" *Sociological Theory* 40, no. 2: 99-123.

Week 8 (November 2)**Reading for lecture & tutorial (excerpts)*

Collins, Patricia Hill (2019). *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Week 9 (November 9)**Reading Week**

Week 10 (November 16)*

Representing Theory Reflection Due (15%)

Readings for lecture

Fraser, Nancy (1990). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. *Social Text*, (25/26), 56-80.

Habermas, Jürgen (1989). "The public sphere: An encyclopedia article." In Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas M. Kellner (eds.), *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader*, pp. 136–42. Translated by Sara Lennox and Frank Lennox. New York and London: Routledge.

Reading for tutorial

Prasad, Monica (2021). Pragmatism as problem solving. *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*.

Week 11 (November 23)*

Reading for lecture

Emirbayer, Mustafa, and Matthew Desmond. (2015). *The Racial Order*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Reading for tutorial

Watts, Duncan J. (2017). "Should social science be more solution-oriented?." *Nature Human Behaviour* 1, no. 1: 1-5.

Week 12 (November 30)*

Social Problems Reflection Due (15%)

Reading for lecture

Go, Julian (2016). *Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory*. Oxford University Press.

Week 13 (December 7)

Second take-home test due (20%)