

Sociology 490: Current Issues in Sociology
Fall 2008
Maxey 310

Bill Bogard, coordinator

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TTh 10:30-11:30

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Objectives:

Welcome to your senior year in sociology! The primary objective of this course is to deepen your grasp of sociological thinking through study and discussion of recent literature in the field. In addition, significant attention will be paid to helping senior majors select a thesis topic and develop a problem statement and literature review/research proposal for the thesis that you will be completing in the spring semester. This class is a capstone course in that it serves to deepen your understanding of sociology as a discipline through reading and discussion of recent research, and through preparation for your own original sociological research and writing.

Communication With Each Other:

An email listserv has been created on the SOC 490 CLEo website for communication between students, and with faculty (soc_490_a_f08@cleo.whitman.edu). The faculty will send reminders about assignments, course scheduling and other information periodically using the listserv, so check your email regularly. Please only use the email for reminders for the good of the class, and/or for email response assignments (see below).

In-Class Presentations and Discussion:

Following the first class meeting, there will be 4 class sessions where we meet in two sections of approximately 10 students each, to discuss recent articles in sociology. Two faculty members will attend and participate in each section. Sections will meet in either the Prentiss or Douglas Hall conference rooms. In each section, a team of two or three students will be responsible for presenting the day's assigned reading material – to summarize basic arguments, define key concepts, and raise various questions and criticisms – after which the class will open up to a general discussion. During a few subsequent class periods, the course will meet back in Maxey 310 and will focus on the thesis process and career options in sociology. Finally, the class will divide into two sections again to discuss more research articles, with each section to be led by a group of two or three students (readings are listed below in the course schedule). Presenting teams will be formed by random assignment during the first class period.

How we assign grades for team presentations:

Each student in the class will be responsible for two team presentations, each worth 15% of his or her final grade. To help everyone get to know each other, and to facilitate as much diversity in discussions as possible, presenting teams in one section (e.g., Prentiss) will rotate out to the

other section (Douglas) the week following their presentation. Faculty members will also rotate on a weekly basis.

The faculty encourages presenting teams to meet with them prior to class to discuss the material and consider possible formats for its presentation. Please arrange these meetings as far in advance as possible, and come to them on time and prepared with questions or ideas for discussion. While not a direct part of your evaluation, these discussions can have a major impact on the quality of team presentations, which are a portion of your final grade.

Your team will earn an "A" if it meets all the criteria below:

- 1) Briefly but thoroughly summarizes the **key concepts** and arguments of the assigned readings for the day
- 2) Draws **connections** both between the readings and to broader issues in sociology
- 3) Effectively **facilitates the participation** of everyone in class
- 4) Incorporates the **email reactions** of class members to the readings
- 5) Equally **divides the labor** between presenters
- 6) Shows **preparation and creativity** in its presentation

Your team will earn a "B" if your presentation could be improved in one or two areas listed above, a "C" if improvement is needed in about half of the areas, and a "D" or "F" if many or most of the criteria are not met.

How we assign grades for participating in discussions:

On the days when you are not presenting, all students in the class are expected to read carefully the assigned readings for each class period. You should make a copy of each reading and bring it with you to class on the day that we discuss it. You will be evaluated on your discussion participation on each of the six days you do not act as a presenter. These discussion grades will add up to 30% of your final grade.

- 1) You will earn an "A" if you contribute substantially in a quantitative sense and move the discussion forward by making insightful and relevant remarks, referring to specific passages or arguments in the text.
- 2) A "B," if you contribute only once or twice but still manage to move the conversation forward with insightful and relevant remarks.
- 3) A "C," if you contribute minimally in a quantitative sense, and your remarks were off topic or failed to engage the discussion.
- 4) A "D," if you were a physically present but otherwise inert mass during discussion.
- 5) A zero, if you miss a discussion without a good reason.

E-mail Group Responses:

For the 8 class periods involving readings, each section will divide itself into several small discussion groups (*of no fewer than 2 students and no more than 4 students each*) to complement the work of the presenters. These groups must arrange to meet prior to class to discuss the readings and compose a short (200-300 word) response to them. Written responses must be emailed to everyone on the CLEo listserv (soc_490_a_f08@cleo.whitman.edu) no later than 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday preceding class in order to give everyone an opportunity to read and reflect on them. Please note that presenters are not required to submit email responses for the articles they present. They must, however, integrate email responses in some way into their discussion-leading. Students must rotate their membership in these groups, so that teams are made up of different combinations of people for each class.

Thoughtful responses can take many forms, including critical assessments of an article's importance or relevance, the quality of its research, its limitations, its connections to other readings in the course, its practical or theoretical implications, counter-arguments, and so on. However, reactions should address all the readings for a given day, not just one of them. Further, they should be more reflective than a summary, and more detailed than a simple critique based on personal student tastes. All emails must be electronically "signed" by the students who generated them. Students should print copies of all the questions they receive and bring them to class. Responses will be graded by the faculty according to the following criteria: check-plus = thoughtful reaction submitted on time; check = minimal effort but submitted on time; 0 = not submitted on time or not turned in. What is the difference between thoughtful and minimal responses? Thoughtful responses draw connections to other readings, previous class discussions, outside readings, larger sociological issues, contain more than just a summary, and are written efficiently. They can be critical of the readings, but only in a way that demonstrates seriousness and sophistication.

Together, these 6 e-mail responses will be worth 10% of your final grade in the course.

Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to attend all scheduled classes, and any absences must be excused. If you must miss a class for an excused reason, please inform Professor Bogard **before class meets that week**. Each unexcused absence will result in a penalty of one letter grade of your final course grade.

The Senior Thesis Problem Statement and Proposal:

I. Written Resources: For your information, and as general resources as you anticipate and begin work on your thesis, copies of the following books have been placed on reserve in the library.

- The Sociology Writing Group. 1998. *A guide to writing sociology papers, 4th ed.* New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Johnson, William A., Jr., Richard P. Rettig, Gregory M. Scott, & Stephen M. Garrison. 2004. *The sociology student writer's manual, 4th edition.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

- Rudestam, Kjell Erik, & Rae R. Newton. 1992. *Surviving your dissertation: A comprehensive guide to content and process*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Pyrczak, Fred, & Randall R. Bruce. 1992. *Writing empirical research reports: A basic guide for students of the social and behavioral sciences*. Los Angeles: Pyrczak Publishing.
- Krenzin, Joan, & James Kanan. 1997. *Handbook of the mechanics of paper, thesis, and dissertation preparation*. Washington, D.C.: ASA Teaching Resources.

Each of these books is directly relevant to planning, researching, and writing a high quality senior thesis, and the faculty strongly recommends that you make use of them both this semester and next.

In addition to these resources, sociology honors theses are available in the library. These are often helpful to students who wish to see examples of successful theses in sociology, both in terms of content and format.

2. *In-Class Resources*: There will be several class days devoted exclusively to thesis preparation. Topics will include: information literacy, research styles, ethics, views from alums on the thesis-writing process, discussion of thesis due dates and procedures, and examination/critique of past theses for format ideas.

3. *Assignments*:

A. **Problem Statement**: On **October 16th**, there will be a special meeting of all students in Maxey 310 to discuss various aspects of the senior thesis process. Please bring 4 copies of a short (2 pages) typed statement of your potential thesis topic, and be prepared to give a brief one or two minute explanation of it for the rest of the class. Your problem statement must include a list of at least 5 sources that you have examined for ideas on the topic. You must also meet with at least one faculty member in the sociology department (of the 4 listed on this syllabus) to discuss your topic. In your problem statement, please include a paragraph describing this discussion – which faculty member you met with and what the conversation covered. You also need to include a statement on ethical issues raised in your proposed project. Since problem statements are likely to be tentative at this early point in the senior thesis process, they will not be assigned grades. The faculty will collect these at the end of class and will give feedback in varying forms. A more detailed handout of this assignment will follow.

A NOTE FOR HONORS CANDIDATES: For those of you who are honors candidates, your problem statement is your application for honors in the sociology department. In addition, an Application for Honors in Major Study cover sheet, available on the Web or from the Registrar's Office, must accompany all four copies of your problem statement that you turn in to faculty members in class on October 16th.

B. **Thesis Proposal**: This semester, you will write a 10-12 page paper describing the thesis topic which you intend to investigate next semester. This paper must include a) a clear statement of

your thesis problem; b) the presentation of a clearly *sociological* perspective – either theoretical and/or empirical – that serves to frame your problem; c) a review of the literature relating to your problem, based upon and referring to at least **fifteen** appropriate journal articles or books drawn from professional resources such as Sociological Abstracts (you are advised to develop this section carefully in consultation with departmental faculty to determine which materials are most relevant to your problem); d) a concluding section entitled Next Steps (1-2 pages), in which you describe how you intend to proceed with your project next semester; e) a statement on ethical considerations; and f) a full reference section *in proper sociological citation format*, citing each of the sources which you referred to in your paper.

These papers will be read and evaluated by each of the four instructors, and grades will be assigned according to the following criteria: a) the clarity, originality, and overall importance of the problem which the student has chosen to investigate; b) the extent to which the approach which will be taken in investigating this problem is (largely, if not exclusively) sociological in nature; c) the presentation of a review of the literature, grounded primarily in the discipline of sociology, which pertains directly to the issue in question; d) the quality of the paper as a piece of written work; and e) the inclusion of a full, properly formatted bibliography of the sources utilized in the paper. This proposal is worth 30% of your course grade.

Due December 11. Please make FOUR COPIES of this paper (one for each faculty member), double-sided (to save paper), typed, and double-spaced.

Evaluation:

30%	2 in-class presentations (15% each)
30%	6 discussion participation grades (5% each)
30%	10-12 page Proposal
<u>10%</u>	Group e-mail responses (6 x 1.67% each)
100%	

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS:

9/4 Introduction to class: all students and faculty meet in Maxey 310.

For the remaining classes, here are instructions for finding the full-text articles online:

Login to the CLEo website and navigate to SOC 490 A F08/Resources/Readings. The readings can also be found under "Schedule." The articles are in PDF form and can be downloaded to your computer. Print and bring the articles with you to class. Oh yes, don't forget to read them, too.

9/11 Student Presentations

Prentiss & Douglas Conference Rooms

Maratea, Ray. 2008. "The e-Rise and Fall of Social Problems: The Blogosphere as a Public Arena." *Social Problems* 55(1): 139-160.

Piven, Francis Fox. 2008. "2007 Presidential Address: Can Power From Below Change the World." *American Sociological Review* 73: 1-14.

9/18 Student Presentations

Prentiss & Douglas Conference Rooms

Gaunt, Ruth. 2008. "Maternal Gatekeeping: Antecedents and Consequences." *Journal of Family Issues* 29(3): 373-395.

Mikelson, Kelly S. 2008. "He Said, She Said: Comparing Mother and Father Reports of Father Involvement." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 70: 613-624.

9/25 Student Presentations

Prentiss & Douglas Conference Rooms

Lundquist, Jennifer Hicke. 2006. "The Black-White Gap in Marital Dissolution among Young Adults: What Can a Counterfactual Scenario Tell Us?" *Social Problems* 53(3): 421-441.

Yancey, George. 2007. "Homogamy over the Net: Using Internet Advertisements to Discover Who Interracially Dates." *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 24(6): 913-930.

10/2 Student Presentations

Prentiss & Douglas Conference Rooms

Brulle, Robert J. and Lindsay E. Young. 2007. "Advertising, Individual Consumption Levels, and the Natural Environment, 1900-2000" *Sociological Inquiry* 77(4): 522-542.

Marshall, Brent K. and J. Steven Picou 2008. "Postnormal Science, Precautionary Principle, and Worst Cases: The Challenge of Twenty-First Century Catastrophes." *Sociological Inquiry* 78(2): 230-247.

10/9 Special meeting in Maxey 310 to discuss thesis preparation, research styles, ethics, & past thesis projects. Please bring an honors sociology thesis from the Library with you to class.

10/16 Special meeting to discuss senior thesis logistics and next steps. All students meet in Maxey 310. Please bring four copies of your thesis problem statement with you and be prepared to summarize and discuss it in class. If you are an honors candidate, please include an Application for Honors in Major Study cover sheet with each copy you submit to faculty members.

Please note that there will be a party for all sociology majors at Kari Norgaard's house, 511 Bryant Avenue, following class.

10/23 Special meeting to discuss career options in sociology. All students meet in Maxey 310.

Read "Careers in Sociology" and "Sociology Major – Preparation for Careers." To do this, visit www.asanet.org, click on "Careers" and choose the two documents from the menu. These are short but very helpful documents with links to more detailed individual chapters.

10/30 Student Presentations

Prentiss & Douglas Conference Rooms

Boykoff, Maxwell T 2008. "Lost in translation? United States television news coverage of anthropogenic climate change, 1995–2004." *Climatic Change* 86:1–11.

Freudenburg, William R., Robert Gramling and Debra J. Davidson. 2008. "Scientific Certainty Argumentation Methods (SCAMs): Science and the Politics of Doubt." *Sociological Inquiry* 78(1): 2–38.

Please bring an updated copy of your personal resume to your section. The Career Center will evaluate these and return them to you with suggestions and corrections in couple of weeks.

11/6 Student Presentations

Prentiss & Douglas Conference Rooms

Morris, Edward W. 2007. "Researching Race: Identifying a Social Construction through Qualitative Methods and an Interactionist Perspective." *Symbolic Interaction* 30(3): 409-425.

Sohoni, Deborah. 2007. "Unsuitable Suitors: Anti-Miscegenation Laws, Naturalization Laws, and the Construction of Asian Identities." *Law and Society Review* 41(3): 587-618.

11/13 Student Presentations

Prentiss & Douglas Conference Rooms

Gill, Rosalind, Karen Henwood and Carl Mclean. 2005. "Body Projects and the Regulation of Normative Masculinity." *Body & Society* 11(1): 37-62.

Monaghan, Lee F. 2007. "McDonaldizing Men's Bodies? Slimming, Associated (Ir)rationalities and Resistances." *Body & Society* 13(2): 67-93.

11/20 Student Presentations

Prentiss & Douglas Conference Rooms

Holland, Dana G. 2008. "Discipline in the Context of Development: A Case of the Social Sciences in Malawi, Southern Africa." *Higher Education* 55: 671-681.

Jeness, Valerie. 2008. "Pluto, Prisons, and Plaintiffs: Notes on Systematic Back-Translation From an Embedded Researcher." *Social Problems* 55(1): 1-22.

12/4 Alums' views on the thesis writing process. All students meet in Maxey 310.

12/11 End-of-semester class party at Michelle Janning's house, 1103 Figueroa Street. Four copies of Thesis Proposal due, one for each professor. All papers are due on this date, no exceptions. Please also turn in class evaluations on this date. Have a happy holiday!

Soc 490 Presentations and Room Assignments

For our first class meeting (9/11), go to the room that your name is next to in this column:

9/11

Prentiss: _____

Douglas: _____

For the classes beginning 10/26, start at the room next to your name in this column:

10/30

Prentiss: _____

Douglas: _____

9/18

Prentiss: _____

Douglas: _____

11/6

Prentiss: _____

Douglas: _____

9/25

Prentiss: _____

Douglas: _____

11/13

Prentiss: _____

Douglas: _____

10/2

Prentiss: _____

Douglas: _____

11/20

Prentiss: _____

Douglas: _____

