

## Soc202 Contemporary Sociological Theory

Term 2: 2009

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<b>Course Title</b>	:	Contemporary Sociological Theory
<b>Course Code</b>	:	SOC202
<b>Recommended Study Year</b>	:	2 and 3
<b>No. of Credits/ Term</b>	:	3
<b>Mode of Tuition</b>	:	Lecture-Tutorial
<b>Class Contact Hours</b>	:	Three hours per week
<b>Category in Major Prog</b>	:	Discipline Concentration-required
<b>Discipline</b>	:	Sociology
<b>Prerequisite(s)</b>	:	(a) SOC101 Introduction to Sociology, or  Sociology, or  (b) Grade D or above in AL  (c) CUS106 The Making of Modern Culture
<b>Co-requisite(s)</b>	:	None
<b>Exclusion(s)</b>	:	None
<b>Exemption Requirements(s)</b>	:	None

### Aims

This course aims to acquaint students with the main schools of modern sociological theory. Students will scrutinize salient concepts and key thinkers. They will learn how sociological theory is relevant to understanding modern life. They will become adept at recognizing, and evaluating, the conflict tradition, rational-utilitarian tradition, the Durkheimian tradition, and the micro-interactionist tradition. Students will also be exposed to the connections between classical and contemporary theory and to debates around the following questions: What is “scientific” knowledge in the social sciences? How much impact can individuals have in shaping social structure? What is the nature of social action, social conflict and social ritual?

### Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students

1. Will be able to recognize the origins and structure of modern sociological theory
2. Will be able speak and write clearly on the major concepts and theorists covered in this course
3. Will be able to explain the similarities and differences between social and natural science approaches
4. Will be able to evaluate contemporary sociological theories and apply them to social research questions

### **Assessment of Learning Outcomes**

The above learning outcomes will be assessed, respectively, by

1. Requiring students to write a term paper (30%) on at least one key issue in modern sociological theory, and writing an examination (40%) that encompasses all four sociological paradigms
2. Tutorial group presentations (20%), preceded by an advisory pre-tutorial meeting with the instructor to ensure that the salient issues are understood. Class participation, measured by the instructors' notes on attendees, will earn up to a further 10%
3. Regular instructor feed-back sessions throughout the term to gauge student comprehension.
4. Class simulations in which sociological theories are applied to Hong Kong issues (e.g. mass response to emergency [SARS], social conflict, rituals of patriotism, crime and delinquency).

Hence: Continuous Assessment (tutorial presentation, class participation, term paper) = 60%

Examination = 40%

### **Good Practices**

1. The instructors will be regularly available to see students, talk to them by phone and communicate with them through email
2. The instructor will return all student work within two weeks of its submission
3. Students will attend all classes of this course and do so on time
4. Students will produce the work that is required of them on the day that it is required
5. Students and the instructor will create a respectful atmosphere in which plural and contrasting views can be expressed

### **Indicative Content**

1. Introduction: The nature of social theorizing.
2. Science, values, explanation and prediction.

3. Action and social action.
4. Varieties of conflict theory I: Power
5. Varieties of conflict theory II: Revolutions and Ethnic Cleansing
6. The Durkheimian legacy I: the nature of religion
7. The Durkheimian legacy II: Interaction ritual theory.
8. Ethnomethodology.
9. Symbolic interactionism.
10. Social Exchange and Rational Choice theory.
12. Critical Theory.
13. Postmodernism and poststructuralism.
14. Hermeneutics and the “canon”.

### **Required Reading**

Jeffrey Alexander, *Twenty Lectures: Sociological Theory Since World War II*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

Randall Collins, *Four Sociological Traditions*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

### **Recommended/ Supplementary Readings**

Peter Berger, *A Far Glory. The Quest for Faith in an Age of Credulity*, New York: Free Press, 1992.

Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Len Doyal and Roger Harris, *Empiricism, Explanation and Rationality*, London: Routledge, 1987.

Norbert Elias, *The History of Manners*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978.

Francis Fukuyama, *The Great Disruption*, London: Profile Books, 1999.

Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967.

Anthony Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984.

Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, New York: Harper, 1974.

Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, 2<sup>nd</sup> and expanded ed., London: Palgrave, 2005.

Karl Popper, *Objective Knowledge*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972.

Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy. Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Paul Ricouer, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*

Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.

Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978.

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### **DETAILED COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course examines selectively a range of sociological theories. It is often assumed that these theories (for instance, conflict theory, exchange theory, Durkheimian theory) are alternatives from which one must choose. My approach is to suggest that many theoretical perspectives in sociology can be combined to produce a rich understanding of modern life. Over the last century, sociology has made great strides. But the greatest advances have been made by people who knew well, and who adapted, sociology's classical tradition. This course will do the same. It will build on the classics (Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Mead etc.) To that extent, it will also help reinforce the other course which most of you did last term: Classical Sociological Theory.

The key text of this course is Randall Collins, *Four Sociological Traditions*. Also useful, is Randall Collins, *Four Sociological Traditions: Selected Readings*, to which I will also refer.

Three other texts that cover a lot of the ground this course deals with are:

- a) Jeffrey Alexander, *Twenty Lectures: Sociological Theory Since World War II*
- b) Randall Collins, *Theoretical Sociology*
- c) George Ritzer, *Contemporary Sociological Theory* (available in a number of editions; any one will do)

This is a demanding and challenging course. You are advised to prepare carefully for it.

#### **Course Assessment:**

A) *Tutorial Presentations* = 20%

Tutorial presentations should be clear, invite discussion and be between 25 and 30 minutes long. They should end with at least two questions posed to the tutorial group for discussion. Attendance in tutorials is **mandatory**; students who miss tutorials without good reason (explained to the instructors), will have marks deducted from the continuous assessment portion of their grade. Tutorials will run on alternate weeks, so as to provide extra time for reading and preparation. The group responsible for the *In-class tutorial* presentation must come to see me **the previous week** during the scheduled tutorial period, with an **outline** of their presentation. I will offer feedback and suggestions.

*B) Participation = 10%*

All students are expected to contribute to the tutorials by asking questions, by contributing ideas, all underpinned by reading for the course.

*Term Paper = 30%*

You can choose a title from the tutorial topics below - students should ask me for extra reading but are expected to search for their own – or you can formulate your own question *provided it is first negotiated with me*. **Students are not allowed to choose, for the term paper, their tutorial question.** Term papers should be around 3000 words, typed, and double-spaced. The deadline is Friday April 17th at 5.00 pm. Term papers **must** be fully referenced either using footnotes or endnotes. A list of references on the final page of the paper is insufficient. Typically, a term paper will utilize at least eight references, so you must read more than the texts listed below (do your own research in the library!). Cite your sources (references) in detail – give the page numbers - and be careful to avoid plagiarism. **This means that you must note the sources of quotations, data and general information in the essay. These sources/references should appear in alphabetical order in your list of references/bibliography.**

According to Lingan University and Social Sciences Programme policy, plagiarism is **"presentation of another person's work without proper acknowledgment of the source"**. **Plagiarism** (unattributed copying) will be heavily penalised and may attract a zero mark and disciplinary action.

*End of Term Exam = 40% NOTE: THE EXAM IS SCHEDULED FOR THE LAST WEEK OF TERM ON APRIL 26*

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*Week 1 (January 19-24) Introduction to the Course.*

*Week 2 (January 26-30)*

*CHINESE NEW YEAR. NO CLASSES FOR THIS COURSE*

**Week 3 (February 2-6)** The Sociological Imagination/The New Sociological Imagination. C. Wright Mills and Steve Fuller.

***In-class tutorials this week on study and library methods***

**Week 4 (February 9-13)** The Nature of Scientific Theory: A contrast between Karl Popper and Thomas Kuhn

**Week 5 (February 16-20).** Conflict Theory I: Marx and Weber – Origins of Capitalism; Class, Status and Party; the modern state

***In-class tutorials this week.***

Topic:

“Modern societies are stratified along many different dimensions. Some of these dimensions are just as, if not more, important than class.” Explain and discuss this statement.

Reading:

- a) Randall Collins, *Four Sociological Traditions*, pp. 102-120
- b) Randall Collins, “A Conflict Theory of Stratification,” in Randall Collins, *Four Sociological Tradition: Selected Readings*, pp. 109-132.
- c) Edward Grabb, *Theories of Social Inequality. Classical and Contemporary Perspectives*, pp. 178-188 (on Frank Parkin).

**Week 6 (February 23-27).** Conflict Theory II: Michael Mann’s theory of ethnic cleansing; John Mearsheimer on the “tragedy of great power politics”

**Week 7 (March 2-6)** Interaction Ritual Theory I: Durkheim, Collins, Goffman and the Presentation of Self.

***In-class tutorials this week***

Topic:

“The most effective forms of power are those that you cannot see”. What is meant by this statement? Do you agree with it?

Reading:

- a) Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (a book of 57 pages)
- b) Bent Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter*, pp. 116-128.
- c) Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power Vol. 1: A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760*, chapter 1 (“Societies as organized power networks”).

**Week 8 (March 9-13)** Interaction Ritual Theory II: SARS in Hong Kong as an interaction ritual event. Summing up the course this far.

**Week 9 (March 16-20).** The Rational/Utilitarian Tradition: Weber’s four principles of “social action” and his theory of rationality. Simon on “bounded rationality.” Networks, diffusion and “tipping points”.

***In-class tutorials this week***

Topic:

Imagine that you have just come out of prison. You were jailed for armed robbery. Using the work of Erving Goffman, describe the tactics you might use to avoid people knowing of your “stigma.”

Reading:

- a) Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, chapter 1.
- b) Erving Goffman, *Stigma. Notes on the management of spoiled identities*.
- c) Anthony Giddens, “Erving Goffman as a systematic social theorist”, in Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology*, chapter 5.
- d) Randall Collins, *Four Sociological Traditions*, pp. 181-214 or Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, chapters 1 and 2; or Randall Collins, *Theoretical Sociology*, chapter 6 (“Interaction Ritual”).

**Week 10 (March 23-March 27) Guest Lecture by Lucia (Leung-Sea) Siu** on “The Science Wars: Implications in Policy-making, Risk assessment and Public participation”.

Reading:

- a) Ian Hacking, “Why ask what?” in *The Social Construction of What?*
- b) Ulrich Beck, “Politics of Risk Society,” in Jane Franklin,(ed.) *The Politics of Risk Society*, pp.9-22.
- c) Trevor Pinch, and Harry Collins, “Putting the Golem to work” in *The Golem: What Everyone Should Know About Science*, pp. 141-151.

**Week 11 (March 30-April 3)**

The Microinteractionist Tradition: Ethnomethodology

***In-class tutorials in the week of March 31-April 4***

Topic:

“Disaster may cause chaos but it also the capacity to increase social solidarity”. Discuss this statement in relation to a) the SARS epidemic in Hong Kong in 2003, and b) the Sichuan earthquake in 2008.

Reading:

- a) Kai Erikson, *A New Species of Trouble* (choose a couple of chapters to read and also the Epilogue “On Trauma”)
- b) Anthony Wallace, “The Disaster Syndrome” in his *Revitalizations and Mazeways*.
- c) Thomas Abraham, *Twenty First Century Plague: The Story of SARS*, chapters 2 and 3.

**Week 12 (April 6th -10). Science and human values**

**Week 13 (April 13-17) EASTER HOLIDAYS. NO CLASSES FOR THIS COURSE**

**Week 14 (April 20-25). Revision**

***In-class tutorials***

Question:

What role do values play in the social sciences?

Reading:

- a) Bent Flyvbjerg, “Values in social and political inquiry” in *Making Social Science Matter*, chapter 5.
- b) Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation”, in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber* pp. 129-156. (Available in Chinese translation; look up the library catalogue under Weber, “Wissenschaft als Beruf”.)
- c) David Silverman, *Qualitative Methodology and Sociology*, chapter 9.

**Week 15 April 26 EXAM**

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