

Small Groups

Soc 83

TR 1-2:30 p.m., Sever 107

Instructor:

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Office hours:

Wed. 2-4
or by appointment

Teaching Fellow:

TBA

Micro-sociology is the hard-fought effort to improve upon our commonsense understanding of interaction, emotions, identity, and roles – all things that any competent member of society already feels intimately familiar with. Sociological insight into these phenomena comes in part from the theoretical genius of the likes of Erving Goffman, who had an uncanny ability to recast our everyday experiences in a different light. More often, it comes from the tireless application of the systematic methods of observation, experimentation, surveying, textual analysis, and statistical modeling. This class will review micro-sociological work and theory on cognition, interaction, emotion, values, and small groups, as well as meso-sociological research into networks and interaction within organizations. Requirements include one short paper, two medium-length papers, and a final examination. The course serves as an introductory-level course in the Sociology Department, and is open to all undergraduates.

Course web page: <http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~soc83/>

Required books (available at the Harvard Coop, and on reserve at Lamont):

Wayne Baker, *America's Crisis in Values* (Princeton, 2005)

Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Doubleday, 1959)

Claude Fischer, *To Dwell Among Friends* (University of Chicago Press, 1982)

Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart* (University of California Press, 1983)

Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (Harper, 1974)

Requirements

1 short paper 10%

2 medium-length papers 20% each

Final exam 40%

Participation 10%

Papers: Each of the three papers will require the application of concepts and methodologies covered in class and readings to real-world phenomena. What follows are preliminary descriptions only; details will be provided later.

Paper #1: Due on February 24th, you will be required to analyze the linguistic categories used in some specialized institutional or organizational setting, with an eye to how these arise and function to guide action. Expected length is eight, double-spaced, typed pages. Note that this paper is worth less than the second two – this so as to afford you the

opportunity to get feedback on what counts as academic/sociological writing early in the semester, without severe penalty should you fall short. 10% of your grade.

Paper #2: Due on March 24th, you will be required to apply the various interactionist frameworks to a call-in show, the audio for which will be online, so as to explain an escalating succession of conversational breakdowns and emotional outbursts. Expected length: 10-12 pages, inclusive of short quoted excerpts from the show. 20% of your grade.

Paper #3: Due on May 6th, you will be required to reconstruct the “cognitive networks” of several individuals, and to discuss the possible causes and consequences of any discrepancies. Expected length: 10-12 pages, inclusive of “sociograms” (network diagrams). 20% of your grade.

Note on expected length: I grade for content, not length. Never write something just for the sake of filling up space. See below for writing guidelines.

Final exam: Administered during the exam period in May, this will be a cumulative exam testing your knowledge of the theories and research covered in readings and lectures. 40% of your grade.

A note on readings: *I will not exhaustively summarize readings in class; therefore, it is imperative that you keep up with assigned readings, both because knowledge of these texts is important for the papers, and because this knowledge will be tested on the final.*

Participation: 10% of your grade will be tied to participation in class and in section (see below). Note that you cannot participate if you do not attend. If you have difficulty contributing to class discussions, feel free to email me (or, if we have one, the TF) any thoughts or questions you have, or visit during office hours.

Section: Details for section are contingent upon class enrollment. More information will be provided once the shopping period has ended.

All assignments are due on the dates given, in paper form. Late papers will be docked ½ point per day late, inclusive of weekends. If you finish a paper and cannot immediately deliver a hard copy in person, email a copy and deliver a hard copy as soon as possible. Upon receipt of the emailed copy, the late penalty will cease accruing.

Academic honesty: Any work submitted must be your own, and all sources must be carefully documented. Harvard requires that cases of suspected plagiarism be reported, with severe consequences for anyone found guilty. Consult *Writing with Sources*, available from the Writing Center (there’s a link on the course web page), for advice and guidelines.

Grading: Assignments will be graded at a level appropriate for Harvard undergraduates. Competently completed assignments will earn a B or B+ (or its numerical equivalent – such as 8.5 or 8.8 out of 10). The grade of A will be reserved for exemplary work. This means work that demonstrates not only a mastery of lecture material and readings but that is also well-written and genuinely insightful.

Final grades

93-100% = A	87-89% = B+	77-79% = C+	67-69% = D+
90-92% = A-	83-86% = B	73-76% = C	63-66% = D
	80-82% = B-	70-72% = C-	60-62% = D-
			< 60% = Fail

Note that *all final grades are final*, unless a calculation error was made. Under no other circumstances will a course grade be changed.

Writing

Your written assignments will be graded not only for content but for logic, clarity, and mechanics. Remember to proofread your work carefully. When assignments are returned, take note of any corrections or recommendations, and incorporate these into later writings. Writing resources can be found on the course web page.

Some more specific tips, based on the errors of your predecessors:

1. All papers should have introductory and concluding paragraphs.
2. Write plainly, and avoid rhetorical flourishes.
3. Avoid moral evaluations.
4. Avoid claims that you cannot back up. Only state something as a fact if you have supporting evidence, or you can cite someone reputable who does, or it is something truly self-evident.
5. Use the thesaurus sparingly. So-called synonyms are rarely truly synonymous, and you should never use a thesaurus in an attempt to create the impression that your vocabulary is larger than it actually is.
6. Quote written sources sparingly.
7. Use in-text citations of the format (Gibson 2004, p. 12) or (Gibson 2004:12), and then provide full bibliographic information at the end of the paper. (The format of the bibliography is up to you – the important thing is that you give me enough information that I can locate your sources if I'm so inclined.)
8. DON'T FORGET PAGE NUMBERS!

Course schedule

Date	Lecture topic*	Reading	Due
Feb. 3	Introduction		
Feb. 8	Thought & language	Goffman, <i>Presentation of Self</i>	
Feb. 10			
Feb. 15	Action		
Feb. 17			
Feb. 22	Interaction	Whalen & Zimmerman, "Calls for Help" [†] Clayman, "Punctuality" [†]	Paper #1 due
Feb. 24			
March 1	Roles and identities	Hochschild, <i>Managed Heart</i> , pp. 3-198.	
March 3			
March 8			
March 10	Emotions	Baker, <i>Crisis of Values</i> , pp. 1-187.	
March 15			
March 17	Values		
March 22			
March 24		Paper #2 due	
Spring break			
April 5	Small groups	Milgram, <i>Obedience to Authority</i> , pp. 1-178.	
April 7			
April 12	Authority		
April 14			
April 19	Networks	Fischer, <i>Friends</i> , pp. 1-266.	
April 21			
April 26			
April 28	The internet	TBA	
May 3			
May 5	Conclusion		Paper #3 due
May 27	Final exam		

*Subject to change

[†] Online under "WWW Links"