

## Contemporary Sociological Theory (SOC1 126-001)

Mon/Wed 3:30-5:00, McNeil 286-7

### Instructor

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Office hours: Mon.  
1:30-3:00 or by  
appointment  
(recommended in any  
event)

A sociological theory is a verbal (but sometimes also mathematical) argument about core social processes underlying the apparently irreducible variety of social life. This course will review theoretical perspectives developed after the “classical” period of Durkheim, Weber, and Marx, and particularly since WWII. Theories to be covered include: micro-sociological perspectives of phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and neo-Durkheimian interaction ritual theory; social behaviorism, exchange theory, and rational choice theory; neo-Marxian perspectives on power, conflict, and class; accounts of modernity and post-modernity; and the systems theories of Parsons and Luhmann. Recurring themes will include the micro-macro connection, the relationship between subjectivity and behavior, and the structure-agency problem. The course satisfies the theory requirement for sociology majors.

On the course **Blackboard** site:

- Readings
- Exam preparation
- Writing resources
- Sociology links
- Announcements
- Sociologists in the news
- Assignments

**Required books** (available at the Penn bookstore):

Ruth A. Wallace and Alison Wolf, *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, 6<sup>th</sup> Ed. (Prentice Hall, 2006)

Additional readings are available on the class web site, under “External Links/Readings.” Contact the instructor if any of these become inaccessible.

### **Requirements**

- **Midterm exam:** maximum of 25 points.
- **Final exam:** cumulative—maximum of 35 points.
- **2 papers**, *applying concepts encountered in the primary readings* and explicated in the textbook and lectures. Each paper will draw upon primary readings associated with one of the five main sections of the course. That means that you will write two out of five possible papers, but you *must* write one of the first two papers. More details will be provided two weeks in advance of the due date for a given paper. Anticipated length: 6-8 pages, double-spaced. Each is worth a maximum of 20 points. You have the option of writing a third paper if you don’t like your grade on one of the first two, in which case I’ll take the top two paper grades when calculating your course grade at the end of the semester.

## **Other issues**

**Attendance:** To do well in the course, you need to attend the lectures. No credit will be given for attendance and participation. However, you should attend class since the exams will cover material presented in the lectures but not in the text (and conversely), and you should participate because (a) that gives you a chance to test out your understanding of the concepts and (b) it's more fun to talk than to be lectured to. If you miss a class, you are responsible for getting lecture notes from a classmate—I will *not* put my PowerPoint slides online (except for tables and some figures). If, during the course of a lecture, anything is unclear, ask a question! If something doesn't make sense to you, it probably doesn't make sense to other people either.

**Due dates:** *All written assignments are due on the dates given below, in paper form.*

Assignments will be docked 1/2 point per day late, inclusive of weekends, to a maximum of a 5 point deduction. (Though I require a hard copy, if you submit a paper late you should email me a copy so that I know when to stop applying the penalty.) Extensions on papers will only be granted if you've convinced the College Office that you've encountered a genuine crisis, and they've communicated as much to me. The same procedure applies if you miss the midterm and need to take a make-up exam. Policies regulating make-up final examinations are set by the University and can be found at [http://www.upenn.edu/registrar/pdf\\_main/exam\\_rules.pdf](http://www.upenn.edu/registrar/pdf_main/exam_rules.pdf).

**Reading:** To do well in the course, you also need to keep up with the reading. That includes readings from the text book (Wallace & Wolf), primary readings (i.e., by the theorists themselves), and application readings. (I may or may not ask questions about the last of these on the exams, but they'll give us something to talk about and will illustrate the kinds of things you can write about in your papers.) Be warned that I will *not* summarize all readings during lectures, and I promise that both exams will include questions about aspects of the readings not covered in class.

**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. Some instructions:

1. Papers should have introductory and concluding paragraphs.
2. Avoid moral evaluations.
3. 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 (e.g., "a misstep while crossing the street can result in injury").
4. 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.
5. 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.)

6. Don't make the mistake of putting the citation within the quotation marks: it should be "blah blah blah" (Gibson 2005), not "blah blah blah (Gibson 2005)".
7. Quote written sources sparingly, but strategically.
8. Avoid vacuous statements. An example: "Theorists such as Blau illuminate the social world by theorizing phenomena contained therein."
9. Don't forget page numbers!

**Academic honesty:** Any work submitted must be your own, and all sources must be carefully documented. Cases of suspected plagiarism will be reported, with severe consequences for anyone found guilty. Plagiarism includes submitting a paper written by someone else, submitting a paper that contains facts that are not generally known without attribution, submitting a paper that contains text from some source (including a web site) that you've slightly modified, and of course submitting a paper that contains text copied verbatim from some other source without attribution and quotation marks (or long-quote indentation).

The final grades will be calculated as follows, based on your cumulative percentage for the semester:

97-100% = A+	87-89% = B+	77-79% = C+	67-69% = D+
93-96% = A	83-86% = B	73-76% = C	63-66% = D
90-92% = A-	80-82% = B-	70-72% = C-	60-62% = D-
			< 60% = F

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

### Course schedule

Date	Topic	Readings	Due/exam
1/16	Introduction		
1/21	University holiday		
1/23	Classical theory reprise	W&W 1-14	

#### 1. Functions and Systems

1/28	Parsons	W&W 15-44, 168-174 Parsons*, Iraq kinship*	
1/30			
2/4	Merton Luhmann	W&W 45-57 Merton1*, Merton2*, Hikikomori*	
2/6			

## 2. Self and society

2/11	Symbolic interactionism	W&W 197-235	
2/13		Cooley*, Mead*, Blumer*, Zebibah*	
2/18	Dramaturgy and interaction rituals	W&W 235-247	
2/20		Goffman1*, Goffman2*, Unified Life*	Section 1 paper due
2/25	Phenomenology & ethnomethodology	W&W 261-292	
2/27		Schütz*, Berger & Luckmann*, Moussaoui*	

3/3	Catch-up and review		
3/5			Midterm
3/10, 3/12	Spring break		

## 3. Behavior, exchange, and rational choice

3/17	Homans, Blau	W&W 303-362	
3/19		Blau1*, Washington*	Section 2 paper due
3/24	Coleman, Olson	W&W 363-380	
3/26		Anarchy*	

## 4. Class, conflict, and social reproduction

3/31	Class, power elite	W&W 67-111	
4/2		Wright*, Weeden*, Mills*	
4/7	Bourdieu	W&W 111-120	
4/9		Bourdieu*, Superiority*	Section 3 paper due

## 5. Modernity, identity, and difference

4/14	Modernity	W&W 174-195	
4/16		Habermas*, Giddens*, Democracy*	
4/21	Identity and difference	W&W 255-59	
4/23	Game models & metaphors	Patricia Collins*, Du Bois*, TBA	Section 4 paper due
4/28	Conclusion		
5/5			Section 5 paper due
TBA	Final exam		

\*Online under External Links/Readings