

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Sociology 3153 Spring Semester 2009

Tuesday and Thursday 12:30—1:45, room 109, Denny Building

Instructor: Murray Webster

Office: Fretwell Bldg, Room 460E

Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 2:00—3:15 and by appointment.

Course Description (from the *UNC-Charlotte* Catalog): Origins and evolution of fundamental sociological concepts and theories.

Course Description for this Semester (from the instructor): This course presents and analyzes the main current strategies of theory building about social phenomena. We examine what theories are, different theories and the kinds of phenomena each seeks to explain, scope of various theories, and areas in which each kind of theory is developing. The primary focus is on the theories themselves, but we also study the goals of theory building and criteria for evaluating sociological theories. We emphasize contemporary, developing theories.

Class meets twice a week, Tuesday and Thursday 3:30—4:45, Robinson Hall room 308.

I designed the course for undergraduate college students, especially for sociology majors, presuming college-level reading, writing, and study skills. Introductory Sociology (1101) is prerequisite; concurrent registration is acceptable. Other introductory social science courses may constitute adequate preparation; however, you need permission to substitute another course for Socy 1101. I am happy to discuss my expectations if you have questions about your preparation or the suitability of this course for you.

Sociology majors constitute the primary candidates for this course, for theory underlies all topics in the discipline. Other social science majors will find the course valuable, for sociological theory often appears in anthropology, political science, and psychology. Applied and professional students often will find sociological theories in social work, business, nursing, and criminal justice courses.

Is this Section Right for You?

Not every course and not every instructor is right for every student. To avoid misunderstanding

and to help you decide whether this is the right section for you, please consider the following.

- I care about this subject matter. Students who show that they want to learn the material will find me happy to spend as much time with them as they find beneficial. On the other hand, it is bad luck to show me you do not much care about sociological theory.
- After (or before) written assignments and exams, I enjoy helping students improve their performance. I do not argue over points.
- Everyone's education is her and his responsibility. Compensating for missed classes, exams, assignments, due dates, forgotten pencils, and problems finding a parking space, are individual responsibilities.
- The course grade reflects performance on the assignments.
- Some seventh grade teachers prepare study guides; I do not. There is no such thing as extra credit—not on VISA, not here.
- Personal misfortunes (e.g., deaths, sick relatives, cars that do not start, crazy room-mates) never substitute for academic work.
- Another instructor may grade higher on average than I do. Please see below on grading for this section.
- If your parents want to help you study for this course, great. If one of your parents would like to help me assign course grades, please be sure he or she attends all classes and reads all the assigned material.
- If you wonder why anyone would have to write this part of the syllabus, then I will be delighted to have you in my class. If this part reveals to you that I am "unfair," I have done you a favor by telling you now, while you have time to drop the course and take a different section of it later.

Course goals and objectives

Kurt Lewin, a theorist working in the 20th century used to say, “Nothing is as practical as a good theory.” That underlies my approach to this course. Theory sometimes is incorrectly said to be opposite to “fact,” or equivalent to “opinion.” Neither claim is correct. One of the first things to appreciate in this course is why theory is practical and why it often is misunderstood. Theory is knowledge; it describes our best understanding of how the world works. As orientation to this course, it will be helpful to keep in mind the overall goal: to develop an understanding of how different kinds of social situations work, and why they work the way they do.

Through this course, I intend to introduce the main contemporary sociological theories, along with ways to assess their usefulness, strengths, and weaknesses. By the end of the semester, students should be familiar with a variety of ways to understand social phenomena for purposes of analysis, research, or intervention. Students should also develop a sense of the kinds of questions you can answer with each theory, and ways to begin answering them.

I hope you come to appreciate the value of theory and that you will enjoy understanding how social systems work.

Study the assigned readings and notes that you take during class meetings. Review your notes and try to connect the different ideas. Find yourself a study partner with whom to study and review; nothing beats talking things over for thorough learning. Study partners can help each other master this material.

Please read assigned material before you come to class each week. That is, read the essays by Cohen and Walker before you come to class week 2.

In class, I will review the assigned material and answer any questions you bring to class. If you have not read the assignments before class, it will be difficult for you to benefit from this part of class time. You may even hear me say I do not want to discuss with you until you have read the assignments so that I do not have to repeat what you could already have learned on your own. I also will lecture on additional topics and recent theoretical papers. Take notes in class and arrange to compensate for

any lectures that you might miss (though as I say below, I urge you to attend all sessions of this class).

Plan to spend 2 hours outside of class for each hour in class; that is, 5 to 6 hours a week of study for this course. That time includes reading, thinking and talking over ideas, and preparing for exams and other work. Try to answer the questions “What does this mean?” and “How does this fit with other facts?” for your study. Those questions are fundamental to every topic here.

Instructor, Office, Office Hours

I am Murray Webster, a sociologist with special interest in theory and group processes. In 2004-05, I chaired the Theory Section of the American Sociological Association. My office is Fretwell Building room 460E. Office hours are Tuesday and Thursday 2:00—3:15 (right after this class). If those hours are inconvenient for you, we can speak another time. Set a time with me in class, call, or just stop by. There will be some days when I must travel this semester. Similarly, I know that students have restrictions from other courses, jobs, family responsibilities, and other things. Despite all these situations, we will find times to talk about anything related to the course. Ask.

My office phone is 704-687-4079; it has voicemail. Leave a message with your phone number and I will call you back. I have a mailbox in Fretwell where you can leave messages. My e-mail address is:

mawebste@uncc.edu.

My web site will have copies of the syllabus and reading list, PowerPoint slides for the lectures, as well as a few of the assigned readings. I will also use it for information related to the course. Please check the web site once a week to stay current. The address is:

<http://www.socanth.uncc.edu/mawebste/>

If you forget that, you can also access my site from the Sociology Department site. Begin at UNC-CLT home page; go to academic departments, to Sociology, to Faculty, to me.

Assigned Readings and Lectures

Assigned readings come from sociological books and journals. Sociologists use journals to communicate ideas and research findings to each other. They often use jargon, and most sociologists are not particularly good writers. Learning to read sociology journals is part of this course, for that is where you will find sociological theory and related issues in coming years. I will offer some suggestions in class on reading journals.

Sociologists use technical writing style. The essential concern is clarity. Many implications follow from that. For instance, technical writing is not supposed to be fun, playful, or evocative to read. That is the job of fiction, poetry, or creative literature. With technical writing, a reader must know quickly and without doubt what the writer intends to communicate. That means “boring” is irrelevant when speaking of technical writing. “Vague” would be a serious criticism.

The readings are available online through the Library’s electronic reserve. Please read assignments each week before the first class. That is, read the assigned pages by Cohen (1989) and Walker (2002) before class on January 22. Keeping up with assigned readings prepares you for lectures and Discussions as described below.

How to Access the Electronic Reserve

You can get the readings at home or at any of the many computer labs on campus. This way you can read the articles online, save them to your computer, or print them out. You will use your Novell username and password. Do this:

- Begin at the Library site of UNC Charlotte. <http://library.uncc.edu/>.
- Under the blue tab Library Services, click “course reserves.”
- Sign in your username and password.
- Click on the third tab “Course Reserve pages by instructor.”
- Find “Webster” from the pull down menu. Click “search.”
- Click “SOCY3153.”
- Accept the copyright laws.
- Say “Eureka.”

Please understand that I am not competent to do much in the way of technical support. If the above directions do not work, no matter how much I wish I could help you, I probably cannot. The Student

Computing Center on the ground floor of Barnard Building has staff with great technical expertise. Show them what you have been trying to do, and they will be able to solve your problems.

We will spend classroom time in two general modes. First, I will review the assigned readings on the sociological theories. I will also try to place the material in intellectual context, and where possible I will describe more recent work or applications of theoretical ideas. Second, I hope you will participate during class. If something is unclear, or if you wish to discuss a point, please do so. Your participation is helpful not only to you, but also to others in class. If you do not understand something, you can bet that at least half the rest of the class does not understand it either. You will be doing them a favor if you will ask about it. Some students find that tape-recording classes helps review for tests and understand someone else’s class notes for days they missed. If you find recordings helpful, bring your recorder.

Think of the lecture and discussion as preparation for the exams. One way to treat class time is to ask whether the material is helping you get ready for the exams. If it is, that’s great. If not, you might want to ask a question or otherwise change the direction of a lecture to make it more useful.

Attendance

I will not take attendance. **However, I urge you to attend all classes.** Whether or not you were present, you may expect to be tested on all material presented or discussed in class. The most common reason students have problems with courses is poor attendance. Even missing one day means missing quite a bit of the lecture material. Put differently: I have never seen a student have trouble with this course if s/he attended regularly. The material is not that difficult. If you keep up and give the material a reasonable amount of your time and attention, you will understand it well. If you let it slide, you may have trouble. Another fact: there are not many ways to compensate for falling behind. If, for instance, you miss 2 class periods, you have missed a full week, or about 10 hours of work. Where are you going to find those hours if you want to catch up? Unless you often wonder what do with 10 extra (waking) hours, it will be difficult to find that time.

Whatever the reason for missing class, absence is associated with less learning. While there are some ways to reduce the losses (particularly, studying with someone who was in class), nothing fully compensates for absences. We might wish that were not so, but it is.

Charlotte's weather is temperate and it seldom forces closing of the University. A decision to close has implications for the calendar (adding days to the end of the semester), and even for the budget and relations with the State Legislature. You can learn whether the University has closed at the weather hotline, the University web site, or one of several TV stations. See below.



Weather Hotline

704-687-2877

Television and radio stations that broadcast closing or delay information:

- WBTV (CBS)	- WCCB-TV (FOX)	- WFAE-FM (90.7 FM)
- WCNC-TV (NBC)	- WBT-AM (1110 AM)	- WEND-FM (106.5 FM)
- WSOC-TV (ABC)	- WSOC-FM (103 FM)	- WDAV-FM (89.9 FM)

If the University is open, you can presume our class will meet.

Course Requirements, Grading

Course marks are determined by two midterms and a final exam. Each exam will have 50 multiple choice questions. Each midterm question is 2 points; each final question is 4 points. Thus 400 points are possible for perfect work in this course.

Course marks are calculated as follows:

- 0—219 points: F
- 220—259 points: D
- 260—299 points: C
- 300—339 points: B
- 340—400 points: A

The first midterm is February 19, and the second midterm is March 19. I must report unsatisfactory progress to the Registrar on February 25,

using performance on midterm #1. The final exam is May 7 from 11:30—1:00 (not from 11:30—2:30). The exam will end at 1:00, not at 2:30 as stated in the online Final Exam Schedule. The first midterm includes material from the beginning of the course through Exchange and Networks; that is, through Feb 17. The second midterm includes material from the first midterm to Conflict; that is, from Feb 24 through March 17. The final exam includes material from the entire semester.

Assignments have dates. If you know you will not be here on the date of a midterm, you can arrange to take it early. If you miss a midterm (for any reason) you may take a makeup within 7 days. That is, the latest you can turn in a makeup for midterm #1 is 5:00 p.m. Thursday Feb 26; the latest you can turn in a makeup for midterm #2 is 5:00 p.m. Thursday Mar 26. Makeups for the midterm will consist of four essay questions.

Exams also have times. If you come late to an exam, please accept responsibility for that. In other words, I care when you finish the exam, not when you begin it. If you want your midterm exam graded, turn it in by 1:45; if you want your final exam graded, turn it in by 1:00.

There are no makeups for the final exam and I do not have authority to change the date of it.

Honest. Totally. Definitely. Fer sure. Like, really. Uh...yes.

Please check the course dates and your other commitments – such as athletic events, weddings, responsibilities in other courses, and job and family commitments. If you know you cannot be here for the final exam, for instance, you might want to take the course another semester, or you might wish to take a different section of this course.

Rules for Exams: All work is open book and open notes. You may use any paper materials you bring, including a dictionary. An electronic dictionary or translator is OK so long as it does not beep. If you bring a notebook computer, do not open the browser during an exam except to access a UNC Charlotte page—NOT Wikipedia or any other site that might give you false information.

The midterms and the final exam are entirely individual work. Do not communicate with anyone

during the midterms or the final, either to give or to get information. UNC Charlotte Policy Statement #105, Code of Student Academic Integrity, applies to this course. PS-105 is available at:

<http://www.legal.uncc.edu/policies/ps-105.html>

I will also describe dress and conduct codes for the exams. Please be sure you understand the rules. I will enforce them.

Final Thoughts

College involves more than study and everyone has a life outside of the classroom. If you find any sort of difficulty – with class or the book, with keeping motivation, with special circumstances affecting your learning – tell me. Come and see me as soon as you know something is wrong. I cannot find a solution to every problem that affects course performance, but I do know some of the resources available at UNC Charlotte, and I can give you some good leads.

Assigned Readings

Sociology 3153, Spring Semester 2009

Order here corresponds to the order of assignment in Topics and Readings
Please read the assigned articles before the class for which they are assigned.

- Shelly, Robert. 2008. "Presidential Address: Micro Lessons for the Macro World." *Sociological Focus* 41: 201—214.
- Cohen, Bernard P. 1989. "From Simple Knowledge Structures to Theories." Chapter 10 pp. 177-197 in *Developing Sociological Knowledge: Theory and Method 2/e*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.
- Walker, Henry A. 2002. "Three Faces of Explanation: A Strategy for Building Cumulative Knowledge." Chapter 2 pp. 15-31 in Jacek Szymatka, Michael Lovaglia, and Kinga Wysienska (Editors), *The Growth of Social Knowledge: Theory, Simulation, and Empirical Research in Group Processes*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Berger, Joseph, and Murray Webster, Jr. 2006. "Expectations, Status, and Behavior." Chap. 12 pp. 268—300 in Peter J. Burke (Ed.), *Contemporary Social Psychological Theories*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Cohen, Elizabeth G., and Rachel Lotan. 1997. Part 1, pp. 3—27 in *Working for Equity in Heterogeneous Classrooms*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Goar, Carla and Jane Sell. 2005. "Using Task Definition to Modify Racial Inequality within Task Groups." 2005. *The Sociological Quarterly* 46: 523—541.
- Molm, Linda D. 2003. "Theoretical Comparisons of Forms of Exchange." *Sociological Theory* Vol. 21 No. 1: 1-17.
- Heckathorn, Douglas D., Robert S. Broadhead, Denise L. Anthony, and David L. Weidliem. 1999. "AIDS and Social Networks: Prevention through Network Mobilization." *Sociological Focus* 32: 159—79.
- Rosenfeld, Michael J. 2005. "A Critique of Exchange Theory in Mate Selection." *American Journal of Sociology* 110: 1284—1325. [Pp. 1308—1318 *passim*.]
- McPherson, Miller, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and Matthew E. Brashears. 2006. "Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks over Two Decades." *American Sociological Review* Vol. 71 No. 3: 353-375.
- Kolata, Gina. 2007. [Find Yourself Packing It On? Blame Friends](#). *New York Times* (July 26, 2007) Front page.
- Tsoudis, Olga and Lynn Smith-Lovin. 1998. "How Bad Was It? The Effects of Victim and Perpetrator Emotion on Responses to Criminal Court Vignettes." *Social Forces*, Vol. 77, No. 2: 695-722.
- Rashotte, Lisa Slattery. 2002. "What Does That Smile Mean? The Meaning of Nonverbal Behaviors in Social Interaction," *Social Psychology Quarterly* Vol. 65: 92-102.
- Nelson, Steven M. 2006. "Redefining a Bizarre situation: Relative Concept Stability in Affect Control Theory." *Social Psychology Quarterly* Vol. 69 No. 3: 215-234.

- Coser, Lewis A. 1967. "Some Social Functions of Violence." Pp. 73-91 in *Continuities in the Study of Social Conflict*. New York: Free Press.
- Collins, Randall. 2000. "Situational Stratification: A Micro-Macro Theory of Inequality." *Sociological Theory* Vol. 18 No. 1: 17-43.
- Kellner, Douglas. 2002. "Theorizing Globalization." *Sociological Theory* Vol. 20 No. 3: 285-305.
- Bergesen, Albert J. and Omar Lizardo. 2004. "International Terrorism and the World System." *Sociological Theory* Vol. 22 No. 1: 38-52.
- Villareal, Andres, and Wei-hsin Yu. 2007. "Economic Globalization and Women's Employment: The Case of Manufacturing in Mexico." *American Sociological Review* 72: 365—389.
- Hawley, Amos H. 1978. "The Presidential Address: Cumulative Change in Theory and in History." *American Sociological Review* Vol. 43 No. 6: 787-796.
- Nolan, Patrick D. 2003. "Toward an Ecological-Evolutionary Theory of the Incidence of Warfare in Preindustrial Societies." *Sociological Theory* Vol. 21 No. 1: 18-30.
- Nielsen, Francois. 2004. "The Ecological-Evolutionary Typology of Human Societies and the Evolution of Social Inequality." *Sociological Theory* Vol. 22 No. 2: 292-314.
- Staggenborg, Suzanne. 2005. "Social Movement Theory." Pp. 753—759 in George Ritzer (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Social Theory* Vol. 2. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Armstrong, Elizabeth A. and Suzanna M. Crage. 2006. "Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth." *American Sociological Review* Vol. 71 No. 5: 724-751.
- Schneiberg, Marc, Marissa King, and Thomas Smith. 2008. "Social Movements and Organizational Form: Cooperative Alternatives to Corporations in the American Insurance, Dairy, and Grain Industries." *American Sociological Review* 73: 635—667.
- Webster, Murray Jr., and Joseph M. Whitmeyer. 2001. "Applications of Theories of Group Processes." *Sociological Theory* Vol. 19 No. 3: 250-270.

Topics and Readings – Sociology 3153 Spring Semester 2009

Assigned readings are available through the Library's electronic reserve. Topics and readings follow. Please read the assignments before the class for which they are assigned.

Weeks	Topics	Work	Readings
1. Jan 13, 15	Introduction. What is theory?		Shelly (2008); lecture material
Jan 19 is MLK birthday observance; Jan 20 is Presidential Inauguration. No Class Jan 20.			
2. Jan 22	Evidence, Information Value, Explanation and Prediction		Cohen (1989); Walker (2002)
3. Jan 27, 29	Status and Expectations		Berger and Webster (2006)
4. Feb 3, 5	Status and Expectations		Cohen and Lotan (1997); Goar and Sell (2005)
5. Feb 10, 12	Exchange and Networks		Molm (2003); Rosenfeld (2005)
6. Feb 17, 19	Exchange and Networks	Midterm #1 Feb 19	Heckathorn et al. (1999); McPherson et al. (2006); Kolata (2007)
7. Feb 24, 26	Affect Control Theory		Tsoudis and Smith-Lovin (1998)
8. Mar 3, 5	Affect Control Theory		Rashotte (2002); Nelson (2006)
Mar 9-13 is Spring Break; no classes			
9. Mar 17, 19	Conflicts	Midterm #2 March 19	Coser (1967); Collins (2000)
March 23 is the last day to withdraw from a course with "W"			
10. Mar 24, 26	World Systems and Globalization		Kellner (2002); Bergesen and Lizardo (2004)
11. Mar 31*	World Systems and Globalization		Villareal and Yu (2007)
13. April 7**	Social Ecology		Hawley (1978); Nolan (2003); Nielsen (2004)

14. April 14-16	Resource Mobilization and Social Movements		Staggenborg (2005); Armstrong and Cragg (2006); Schneiberg, King, and Smith (2008)
15. April 21-23	Applications and Course Review		Webster and Whitmeyer (2001)
16. April 28	Course Evaluation, Course Review		No additional readings
Final Examination Thursday May 7, 11:30—1:00. [NOT 11:30—2:30]			

* Midwest Sociological Society April 2; no class

**Pacific Sociological Assn. April 9; no class