

Spring 2026 Monday-Wednesday 2:30PM-3:45PM, Torgersen 1040, and Online

SOC 1004: Introductory Sociology

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Course Description

We are living in an uncharted territory of human history: in just 200 years since the Industrial Revolution, humanity has made over 25 times as much progress as it ever did in the previous 1,800 years combined. The old wisdom of life is constantly being swept into the dustbin of history. How do we keep up with such a restless world and regain a sense control over our future?

Sociologists are those of us who believe rationality can help. We ask questions, design research, collect evidence, analyze data, test hypotheses, build theories, and develop

interventions about virtually every aspect of modern society. We get to know people who have lived through uneventful days as well as world-shaking moments. We interrogate our own common sense and that of other people we have never met. We built the theoretical foundations of social and behavioral sciences as well as professional and engineering disciplines where human factors matter. We are the curators and connoisseurs of human data from which AI models learn.

With 12 case studies, this course introduces you to the ways in which sociologists think and prepares you for any careers that involve asking questions about people.

Learning Objectives

- Explore the principles and basic concepts of human interaction and social organization.
- Engage with the basic theories and research methods of the field to discuss socialization, deviance, social institutions, population dynamics, social change, and social inequality by class, race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.
- Think critically and systematically about human societies, and with knowledge of how cultural, structural, and historical conditions influence people's experiences.
- Apply the knowledge gained from this course to other courses and disciplines, as well as to all aspects of their professional and personal lives.

Course Requirements

There is no prerequisite for this course. This course fulfills Pathways requirements in Reasoning in the Social Sciences, Critical Analysis of Identity and Equity in the United States, and Intercultural and Global Awareness.

All but one required readings will be made available through Canvas: the one book you choose from the "Reading List for TL;DR" for your TL;DR project, which you will need to purchase or borrow a copy on your own.

Participation (30%)

Active learning requires everyone, not just the professor, to come prepared, and not use electronic devices during in-person class unless it is required for class activities.

You are expected to complete all readings before class and regularly participate in class discussions and group projects, in person or online. Each week will be structured around a set of readings, lecture segments, in-class/online discussions, and a worksheet for you to complete.

In-person Students: You will complete the *READING GUIDE* section of each worksheet on your own before Monday's class and bring your response with you. You will then be assigned to groups of 2-4 to discuss your response and complete the *SOCIOLOGIST IN ACTION* section together in class.

Online Students: You will complete the *READING GUIDE* section of each worksheet on your own and share your response on Canvas under the designated discussion thread. You will then be assigned groups of 2-4 to comment on each other's posts and complete the *SOCIOLOGIST IN ACTION* section together before 11:59PM on Friday.

The required readings are all you need to complete the worksheet each week. It is neither allowed nor necessary to consult any external source unless otherwise instructed. You should use your own words and avoid copy and paste verbatim from the readings. You should also not give one-word or bullet-point answers. Elaborate and explain yourself in plain English and complete sentences.

There are 12 worksheets in total. Your lowest 2 scores will be dropped. Each of the remaining worksheets counts for 3% of your final grade.

Exam (20% each)

You will take two open-book exams through Canvas. You should be prepared to reference and discuss specific passages in the readings, lectures, as well as worksheets, but you should use your own words and avoid copying and pasting verbatim from readings, slides, or AI. Explain your answers as clearly as possible in plain English and complete sentences. Questions on the exams will resemble those on the worksheets to some extent, but you will be expected to write more and dive into greater depth.

Each exam counts for 20% of your final grade.

TL;DR (30%)

TL;DR means "Too Long; Didn't Read" — a situation where we don't have the time or patience to engage with long, dense texts and instead need someone to break things down for us (your professors here are paid to give you the TL;DR version of science). Here at VT, you are the one who doesn't want to read, and we are paid to give you the TL;DR version of human knowledge. After you graduate, however, you'll be the one to do it for other people who don't want to read — your boss, your clients, your employees, even — all the people who would only pay you if you can explain things better than ChatGPT can. So let's practice.

You will choose a sociological monograph from the reading list on the last two pages of the syllabus, and create a TL;DR project about it — a project that distills key insights

from the book into a concise but informative format which a particular group of people are interested in consuming.

You will also choose a format that can be easily disseminated online: If you are old style, you can write a review essay for *The New Yorker* or a column for *The Washington Post*; you can record a YouTube video or TikTok clip of yourself telling your followers about the book; slides bore people to death but not if you are in the consulting industry presenting to the Board of Directors; you can also create a podcast episode with Audacity, interactive presentation with Prezi, infographic with Canva, or any new, exciting content creation tools out there. Use your imagination! If you come up with a format that no one has ever used before, you get extra points. There will be extra credit opportunities for you to share your projects with the class near the end of the semester.

Here is the catch: as Nietzsche famously wrote, every artist has to “dance in chains.” Unlike a child playing with sand, you are not free to create whatever you want. Your creativity is subject to two main constraints.

On the one hand, you must create content that best fits the taste of your audience! Who are they? What do they already know? What do they want to know? How long is their attention span? Newspaper readers and podcast listeners won't be satisfied with an abstract of the book that can be generated by ChatGPT in seconds; they want in-depth analysis and personal stories. Social media users, however, prefer bite-sized, eye-catching content and one memorable moment after another.

On the other hand, however short your format is, you must convey enough insights from the book! You need to summarize the author's key research questions, methods, and findings. You will need to make some connection with at least another reading of this class. You will also need to (1) critically evaluate at least one of the questions the author asks (why is it a good/bad question to ask?), (2) critically evaluating some of the findings that answer the question (how well/badly does the finding answer the question?), or (3) articulating an alternative answer to the question (what might be a better explanation for what's going on ...). Most people eventually realize that the shorter your format is, the harder it is to convey complex ideas and stories well.

You are welcome to use generative AI tools to help you brainstorm ideas, check grammar, refine sentences, or even get feedback in the creative process. However, generative AI must NOT create the entire product for you, and you must disclose any significant AI use. For example, you cannot use Google NotebookLM to create the entire episode. You have to write your own script and use your own voice (feel free to invite guests, though). In fact, generative AI models are notoriously ignorant about details in copyrighted content (for both technical and sociological reasons) and frequently pump out false claims and fictional references if you just ask it to write about a not-so-famous or fairly recent book.

Prompt-engineering ChatGPT to generate a creative TL;DR project is going to take you way more time than doing it yourself. And you will be held responsible for any factual errors, omitted references, and inhumanly awkward sentences that end up in the final product. Feel free to consult me if you are not sure about what you are doing.

Worth 30% of your final grade.

Course Policies

Grading Scale

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

NO LATE WORK will be accepted unless there is a documented emergency or an arrangement has been made with the instructor prior to the deadline.

The University promotes efforts to provide equal access and a culture of inclusion without altering the essential elements of coursework. If you are having difficulty keeping up with the course, or you are experiencing challenges that interfere with your learning, please do not hesitate to write and/or talk to me or your TA.

If you are experiencing any of the following emergencies or anticipate needs for accommodation, you should contact the Office of the Dean of Students or Services for Students with Disabilities for professional assistance and proper documentation: illness or death of a family member or friend; off-campus medical appointments or hospital admission; court subpoenas; military orders; and observances of religious, cultural, ethnic, meaning-making, or faith-based beliefs. For more information on institutional support, resources, and policies, please consult the Dean of Students Office, Office of Undergraduate Academic Integrity, Cook Counseling Center, Cranwell International Center, Hokie Wellness, and/or Services for Students with Disabilities.

PLAGIARISM and other violations of the Honor Code, including but not limited to (1) copying verbatim from other sources such as Wikipedia and book reviews, (2) paraphrasing other sources without proper citations, (3) fabricating data, sources, or information, (4) having others do the work for you, and (5) disseminating copyrighted course materials or recording class discussions without prior approval, will result in a zero score on the assignment, a failing grade from the course, and/or disciplinary actions by the Office of

Undergraduate Academic Integrity. For additional information about the Honor Code, please visit: <https://www.honorsystem.vt.edu/>. If you are unsure about what constitutes a violation, I strongly recommend the [Academic Integrity Success](#) and [Understanding the Code](#) Modules on Canvas.

In this course, GENERATIVE AI TOOLS may only be used for specific assignments that are designated by the instructor. Any permissible AI use will be clearly outlined in the assignment instructions and must be properly documented and disclosed by the student. For all other assignments, the use of AI tools is prohibited and constitutes unauthorized assistance under the Honor Code. If you are ever uncertain about the use of AI, it is your responsibility to ask your faculty member before proceeding.

Any HARASSMENT, DISCRIMINATION, INCIVILITY, and DISRUPTIONS TO LEARNING will NOT be tolerated and will be immediately reported to the Dean of Students Office and/or Virginia Tech Police Department.

Any questions about grade should be directed to the instructor before the end of the semester.

This syllabus is subject to change.

Honor Code Pledge

The Undergraduate Honor Code pledge that Virginia Tech undergraduate students must abide by states:

“As a Hokie, I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do.”

Students enrolled in this course are responsible for abiding by the undergraduate Honor Code on each assignment and/or exam. A student who has doubts about how the Honor Code applies to any assignment is responsible for obtaining specific guidance from the course instructor before submitting the assignment for evaluation. Students are strongly discouraged from misusing unauthorized online sources including generative artificial intelligence outlets. Students are strongly encouraged to consult their faculty members regarding the use of such outside materials as the misuse of these sources may constitute a violation of the Honor Code. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the University community from the requirements and expectations of the Honor Code.

Land and Labor Acknowledgment

Virginia Tech acknowledges that we live and work on the Tutelo / Monacan People's homeland and we recognize their continued relationships with their lands and waterways. We further acknowledge that legislation and practices like the Morrill Act (1862) enabled the commonwealth of Virginia to finance and found Virginia Tech through the forced removal of Native Nations from their lands, both locally and in western territories.

We understand that honoring Native Peoples without explicit material commitments falls short of our institutional responsibilities. Through sustained, transparent, and meaningful engagement with the Tutelo / Monacan Peoples, and other Native Nations, we commit to changing the trajectory of Virginia Tech's history by increasing Indigenous student, staff, and faculty recruitment and retention, diversifying course offerings, and meeting the growing needs of all Virginia tribes and supporting their sovereignty.

We must also recognize that enslaved Black people generated revenue and resources used to establish Virginia Tech and were prohibited from attending until 1953. Through InclusiveVT, the institutional and individual commitment to Ut Prosim (that I may serve) in the spirit of community, diversity, and excellence, we commit to advancing a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive community.

Course Schedule

WEEK 1 **What Cool Things Can You Tell About People?**

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 21: Syllabus.

WEEK 2 **How to Become A Marijuana User?**

MONDAY, JANUARY 26: Becker, Howard S. 1953. "Becoming a Marijuana User." *American Journal of Sociology* 59 (3): 235–242.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28: Becker, Howard S. 1958. "Problems of Inference and Proof in Participant Observation." *American Sociological Review* 23 (6): 652–660.

WEEK 3 **How to Read the Room?**

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 2: Pp.17-40 in Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Anchor.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4: Pp. 89-118 in Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 1983. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

WEEK 4 **How to Kill A Group?**

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9: Pp.1-25 in Whyte, William Foote. (1943) 2012. *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11: Pp.25-51 in Whyte, William Foote. (1943) 2012. *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

WEEK 5 **How to Lie with Numbers?**

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 16: Pp.9-44 in Best, Joel. 2001. *Damned Lies and Statistics: Untangling Numbers from the Media, Politicians, and Activists*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18: Pp.45-61 in Best, Joel. 2001. *Damned Lies and Statistics: Untangling Numbers from the Media, Politicians, and Activists*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

WEEK 6 How Do Feelings Become Statistics?

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23: Pp.xxxix-lii and 97-125 in Durkheim, Emile. (1951) 2005. *Suicide: A Study In Sociology*. Edited by George Simpson. Translated by John A Spaulding. London, England: Routledge.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25: Pp.175-219 in Durkheim, Emile. (1951) 2005. *Suicide: A Study In Sociology*. Edited by George Simpson. Translated by John A Spaulding. London, England: Routledge.

WEEK 7 How Do You Know When the Game Is Rigged?

MONDAY, MARCH 2: Pager, Devah. 2003. "The Mark of a Criminal Record." *American Journal of Sociology* 108 (5): 937–975.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4: Rivera, Lauren A and Tilcsik, András. 2019. "Scaling Down Inequality: Rating Scales, Gender Bias, and the Architecture of Evaluation." *American Sociological Review* 84 (2): 248–274.

WEEK 8 Spring Break**WEEK 9 How to Throw Like A Girl?**

MONDAY, MARCH 16: Exam #1

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18: West, Candace and Zimmerman, Don H. 1987. "Doing Gender." *Gender and Society* 1 (2): 125–151.

WEEK 10 How to Tell Me You're A Banker Without Telling Me You're A Banker?

MONDAY, MARCH 23: Rivera, Lauren A. 2012. "Hiring as Cultural Matching: The Case of Elite Professional Service Firms." *American Sociological Review* 77 (6 2012): 999–1022.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25: Tavory, Iddo and Swidler, Ann. 2009. "Condom Semiotics: Meaning and Condom Use in Rural Malawi." *American Sociological Review* 74 (2): 171–189.

WEEK 11 How to Make People Work Their Asses Off When They Don't Want To?

MONDAY, MARCH 30: Pp.46-73 in Burawoy, Michael. 1979. *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process Under Monopoly Capitalism*. Chicago, IL: University of

Chicago Press.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1: Pp.77-94 in Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process Under Monopoly Capitalism*.

WEEK 12 How to Make A Lot of Stuff But Still Be Poor?

MONDAY, APRIL 6: “Wage Labour and Capital,” p. 203-217, “On the Division of Labor,” p. 159-161, and “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof,” p.319-329 in Tucker, Robert C, ed. 1978. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Norton.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8: Hout, Michael et al. “Inequality by Design: Myths, Data, and Politics.”

Chetty, Raj et al. 2017. “The Fading American Dream: Trends in Absolute Income Mobility Since 1940.” *Science* 356 (6336): 398–406.

WEEK 13 How to Keep Planes from Crashing?

MONDAY, APRIL 13: Winner, Langdon. 1980. “Do Artifacts Have Politics?” *Daedalus* 109 (1): 121–136.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15: Langewiesche, William. 2014. “The Human Factor,” October 1, 2014.

WEEK 14 How to Survive A Nuclear War?

MONDAY, APRIL 20: Pp.77-95 in Weber, Max. 1946. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Translated by H H Gerth and C Wright Mills. 196–244. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22: Carlson, Jennifer. 2019. “Revisiting the Weberian Pre-emption: Gun Militarism, Gun Populism, and the Racial Politics of Legitimate Violence in Policing.” *American Journal of Sociology* 125 (3 2019): 633–682

WEEK 15 How to Rip Off Another Country?

MONDAY, APRIL 27: Fernández-Kelly, Patricia and Massey, Douglas S. 2007. “Borders for Whom? The Role of NAFTA in Mexico-U.S. Migration.” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610 (1): 98–118.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29: Content Creation Day

SUNDAY, MAY 3: TL;DR Due.

WEEK 16 **How to TL;DR Like A Pro?**

MONDAY, MAY 4: TL;DR Presentations and Final Review.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 6: TL;DR Presentations and Final Review.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 13: Exam #2.

Reading List for TL;DR

- SOCIOLOGY CAME TO AMERICA:** Morris, Aldon. 2015. *The Scholar Denied: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- WHY KIDS BULLY:** Sanchez-Jankowski, Martin. 2016. *Burning Dislike: Ethnic Violence in High Schools*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- CITY OF MADNESS:** Gong, Neil. 2024. *Sons, Daughters, and Sidewalk Psychotics*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- RELIGION AND BIRTH CONTROL:** Wilde, Melissa J. 2019. *Birth Control Battles: How Race and Class Divided American Religion*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- DUNGEONS, DRAGONS, AND THE SOCIAL WORLD:** Fine, Gary Alan. 2003. *Shared Fantasy: Role Playing Games as Social Worlds*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- RACIAL INEQUALITY IN APPALACHIA:** Brown, Karida L. 2021. *Gone Home: Race and Roots Through Appalachia*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- LIFE AFTER PRISON:** Western, Bruce. 2018. *Homeward: Life in the year after prison*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- LIFE AFTER COLLEGE:** Streib, Jessi. 2023. *The Accidental Equalizer: How Luck Determines Pay After College*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL MEDIA:** Gjika, Anna. 2023. *When Rape Goes Viral: Youth and Sexual Assault in the Digital Age*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- HOW CITIES FIGHT RATS:** McCumber, Andrew. 2025. *Bad Nature: How Rat Control Shapes Human and Nonhuman Worlds*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, May 2, 2025.
- HOW TO KEEP PLANES FROM CRASHING:** Vaughan, Diane. 2021. *Dead Reckoning: Air Traffic Control, System Effects, and Risk*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- WHERE DO POOR PEOPLE SLEEP?:** Lara-Millán, Armando. 2021. *Redistributing the Poor: Jails, Hospitals, and the Crisis of Law and Fiscal Austerity*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- WORKING WITHOUT A BOSS:** Ravenelle, Alexandra J. 2019. *Hustle and Gig: Struggling and Surviving in the Sharing Economy*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

THE SUPER RICH AND SUPER FAMOUS: Mears, Ashley. 2021. *Very Important People: Status and Beauty in the Global Party Circuit*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

WHEN FACTORIES LEAVE TOWN: Broughton, Chad. 2015. *Boom, Bust, Exodus: The Rust Belt, the Maquilas, and A Tale of Two Cities*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

LIFE UNDER THE WALL: Elcioglu, Emine Fidan. 2025. *Divided by the Wall: Progressive and Conservative Immigration Politics at the U.S.-Mexico Border*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

CHINA GOES GLOBAL: Lee, Ching Kwan. 2018. *The Specter of Global China: Politics, Labor, and Foreign Investment in Africa*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.