

Spring 2025 TuTh 9:30AM-10:45PM, Architecture Annex 7

SOC 1004: Introductory Sociology

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*Office Hour: **W 2:00PM-5:00PM** and by appointment, McBryde 524*

Course Description

This course introduces you to the field of sociology.

Bathed in anxieties about a series of sweeping transformations from the Industrial Revolution onward, and thrown into a bizarre modern world where traditional wisdom and old ways of life have been smashed into irrelevance, sociologists are a group of people who stand at the crossroads of human history and look. We believe that a rationalized worldview and a scientific methodology can help us regain an understanding of why the world is the way it is, and a sense of control over individual destiny as well as the future of humanity.

From uneventful daily routines to world-shaking revolutions, sociologists ask and answer questions about everything human with curiosity, respect, and methodological rigor. How do friendship groups emerge and fall apart? What role does our body play in shaping our identity and selfhood? Why does inequality exist and persist? How do we become, without realizing it, a docile herd of political animals, corporate men, and prisoners of prosperity and digitality? What does it take for us to resist?

In this class, we will learn about how sociologists formulate research questions, design research, collect data, analyze data, develop theories, test hypotheses, and change the

world, by reading some of the best work (I think) in sociology. We will get to know people who have lived and struggled in the United States and elsewhere. We will interrogate our common sense and what we have taken for granted, as well as the common sense of other people whom we have never met. No matter who you are, where you come from, and what kind of career or lifestyle you are envisioning for yourself, at the end of this class, I hope you will find sociologists' curiosity and conscience appealing to you, and sociologists' perspectives and methodologies relevant to your future.

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

All but one required readings will be made available through Canvas: the book you choose to write your memo about, which you will need to purchase or borrow a copy on your own.

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.

Assignments (25%)

You will complete 15 weekly reading assignments, by posting your response to each Canvas discussion thread, no later than every Thursday at 11:00PM Eastern time. You may be assigned to a random group for some of the assignments, or asked to read and respond to each other's posts. Your responses will be evaluated, depending on the questions, based on whether and how well you can (1) find which passages in which readings are most relevant to the question, (2) summarize the key questions and core evidence in the relevant passages, and/or (3) critically evaluate how the key questions and core evidence in those passages are developed and defended. You should not consult any external

sources or AI-generated content unless otherwise instructed. You should not copy and paste verbatim from the readings. You should not give one-word or bullet-point answers. You should explain, in plain English, complete sentences, and your own words, what the author(s) has argued and how it is relevant to the questions. Most questions take 3-5 full sentences to answer. No late assignments will be accepted except for documented emergencies, but your 3 lowest scores will be dropped when calculating the final grade.

Worth 25% of your final grade.

Exams (25% each)

You will take two exams, each administered through Canvas and to be completed within 1 hour and 20 minutes once you start it. The exams are not cumulative. You can start the exam at any time within the designated exam period, but you will not be able to pause, save, or return to the exam after the time runs out.

Each exam is worth 25% of your final grade.

Memo (25%)

You will write a 5-page critical reading memos on one book of your choice from the list of recommended books interspersed throughout the syllabus. The goal is to hone your reading and writing skills and accumulate sociological knowledge on one topic that you find most interesting and relevant. The memo should consist of two parts. In the first part, no more than 2 pages, you will summarize the author's key questions and findings in the book. In the second part, no less than 3 pages, you will reflect on what you just read, by (1) critically evaluating some of the questions (why is it a good/bad question to ask?), (2) critically evaluating some of the findings (how well/badly does the finding answer the question?), or (3) articulating an alternative explanation to one of the questions (I have a better explanation for what's going on ...).

You should not consult any external sources beyond what is covered in this class. You will be required to type your memo in a Microsoft Word document (doc or docx), using a 12p Times New Roman font, double spacing between lines, 1-inch page margins, and page numbers at the bottom. You will be evaluated based on whether you can (1) follow the prompt and formatting instructions, (2) summarize the key questions and findings in the book, (3) reflect on connections to other class materials, and (4) cite class materials in a proper format. Plagiarized and ghost-written memos will receive a score of zero and may result in a failing grade on the whole course. Memo that are shorter than 750 words will receive no more than half credit. There will not be an opportunity for you to revise and resubmit memos after they have been graded.

Worth 25% 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

LATE and MISSED WORK will result in a score of zero unless otherwise arranged with the instructor prior to the deadline. If you are having difficulty keeping up with the course, or you are experiencing significant challenges that interfere with your learning, please do not hesitate to talk to me. If you are experiencing any of the following emergencies or anticipate needs for longer-term accommodation, you should contact the Office of the Dean of Students 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, Office of Inclusion and Diversity, 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 and 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.

ANY HARASSMENT, DISCRIMINATION, INCIVILITY, and DISRUPTIONS TO LEARNING will NOT be tolerated and will be immediately reported to the Dean of Students Office.

Any questions about grade should be directed to the instructor before the end of the semester. This syllabus is subject to change.

Course Schedule

WEEK 1 **Why Do We Need Sociology If We Already Have Physicists and Statistics?**

“If you are a good economist, a virtuous economist, you are reborn as a physicist, and if you are an evil, wicked economist, you are reborn as a sociologist.”

– Jagdish Bhagwati

TUESDAY: “A Sociologist’s Apology” and “The Myth of Common Sense,” p.xiii-29 in Watts, Duncan J. 2011. *Everything Is Obvious: *Once You Know the Answer*. New York, NY: Crown.

THURSDAY: “The Importance of Social Statistics,” p.9-29 in Best, Joel. 2001. *Damned Lies and Statistics: Untangling Numbers from the Media, Politicians, and Activists*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

WEEK 2 **What Do Sociologists Do All Day?**

“What does sociology bring to the table? ...Everyone has something he wants. Everyone has some plan he’s trying to pull off. ‘What’s the reason?’ is the real question. So that’s what you do. It’s like you’re watching a play and you— You’re the guy who knows that everyone is there for a reason.”

– Howard S. Becker

TUESDAY: Gopnik, Adam. 2015. *The Outside Game*, January 12, 2015.

THURSDAY: Becker, Howard S. 1953. “Becoming a Marihuana User.” *American Journal of Sociology* 59 (3): 235–242.

RECOMMENDED: Becker, Howard Saul. (1982) 2008. *Art Worlds*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

WEEK 3 **Suicide**

“The private experiences usually thought to be the proximate causes of suicide have only the influence borrowed from the victim’s moral predisposition, itself an echo of the moral state of society. To explain his detachment from life the individual accuses his most immediately surrounding circumstances; life is sad to him because he is sad. Of course his sadness comes to him from without in one sense, however not from one or another incident of his career but rather from the group to which he belongs.”

– Émile Durkheim, *Suicide*

TUESDAY: “Introduction” and “Atomic Suicide,” p. Durkheim, Emile. (1951) 2005. *Suicide: A Study In Sociology*. Edited by George Simpson. Translated by John A Spaulding. London, England: Routledge.

THURSDAY: Gawande, Atul. 2020. “Why Americans Are Dying from Despair.” *The New Yorker*, March 12, 2020.

RECOMMENDED: Gong, Neil. 2024. *Sons, Daughters, and Sidewalk Psychotics*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

WEEK 4 **Group**

“Two’s company, three’s a crowd.”

TUESDAY: “Bowling and Social Ranking,” p.14-25 in Whyte, William Foote. (1943) 2012. *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

THURSDAY: Monroe, Rachel. 2024. “How a Homegrown Teen Gang Punctured the Image of an Upscale Community.” *The New Yorker*, June 21, 2024.

Thompson, Derek. 2024. “Why Americans Suddenly Stopped Hanging Out.” *The Atlantic*, February 14, 2024.

RECOMMENDED: Sanchez-Jankowski, Martin. 2016. *Burning Dislike: Ethnic Violence in High Schools*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

WEEK 5 **Religion**

“If religion gave birth to all that is essential in society, that is so because the idea of society is the soul of religion.”

– Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*

TUESDAY: Durkheim, Emile. (1912) 1995. *The Elementary Forms of The Religious Life*. Translated by Karen Fields. New York, NY: Free Press.

THURSDAY: Bellah, Robert N. 2005. “Civil Religion in America.” *Daedalus* 134 (4): 40–55.

RECOMMENDED: Wilde, Melissa J. 2019. *Birth Control Battles: How Race and Class Divided American Religion*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

WEEK 6 **Emotion**

“One seemed alone with an inscrutable society.”

– Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

TUESDAY: Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Anchor.

THURSDAY: Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 1983. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

RECOMMENDED: Fine, Gary Alan. 2003. *Shared Fantasy: Role Playing Games as Social Worlds*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

WEEK 7 **Race**

“The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line.”

– W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

TUESDAY: Pager, Devah. 2003. “The Mark of a Criminal Record.” *American Journal of Sociology* 108 (5): 937–975.

THURSDAY: Legewie, Joscha. 2016. “Racial Profiling and Use of Force in Police Stops: How Local Events Trigger Periods of Increased Discrimination.” *American Journal of Sociology* 122 (2): 379–424.

RECOMMENDED: Brown, Karida L. 2021. *Gone Home: Race and Roots Through Appalachia*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

WEEK 8 **Gender**

“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”

– Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

TUESDAY: Carlson, Jennifer. 2015. “Mourning Mayberry: Guns, Masculinity, and Socioeconomic Decline.” *Gender and Society* 29 (3): 386–409.

THURSDAY: 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.

RECOMMENDED: Gjika, Anna. 2023. *When Rape Goes Viral: Youth and Sexual Assault in the Digital Age*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

WEEK 9 **Class**

“Class distinctions do not die; they merely learn new ways of expressing themselves.”

– Richard Hoggart, Introduction to George Orwell’s *The Road to Wigan Pier*

TUESDAY: Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

THURSDAY: Friedman, Sam and Reeves, Aaron. 2020. “From Aristocratic to Ordinary: Shifting Modes of Elite Distinction.” *American Sociological Review* 85 (2): 323–350.

RECOMMENDED: Rivera, Lauren A. 2016. *Pedigree: How Elite Students Get Elite Jobs*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

WEEK 10 **Culture**

“No human exists except steeped in the culture of his time and place,”

– Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods*

TUESDAY: Tavory, Iddo and Swidler, Ann. 2009. “Condom Semiotics: Meaning and Condom Use in Rural Malawi.” *American Sociological Review* 74 (2): 171–189.

RECOMMENDED: Arjomand, Noah Amir. 2022. *Fixing Stories: Local Newsmaking and International Media in Turkey and Syria*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

THURSDAY: Exam #1.

WEEK 11 **Work**

“The factory constituted individuals as a single body to the double advantage of the boss who surveyed each element within the mass and the unions who mobilized a mass resistance; but the corporation constantly presents the brashness of rivalry as a healthy form of emulation, an excellent motivational force that opposes individuals against one another and runs through each, dividing each within.”

– Gilles Deleuze, *Postscripts on the Societies of Control*

TUESDAY: “The Production of Consent,” p.77-94 in Burawoy, Michael. 1979. *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process Under Monopoly Capitalism*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

THURSDAY: Sharone, Ofer. 2013. “Why Do Unemployed Americans Blame Themselves While Israelis Blame the System?” *Social Forces* 91 (4 2013): 1429–1450.

RECOMMENDED: Milkman, Ruth. 1997. *Farewell to the Factory: Auto Workers in the Late Twentieth Century*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

WEEK 12 **Inequality**

“...in all these societies, half of the population own virtually nothing.”

– Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*

TUESDAY: Grusky, David B. 2018. “The Stories About Inequality that We Love to Tell.” In *The Inequality Reader*, 2–14. Routledge.

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

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

RECOMMENDED: Harrington, Brooke. 2020. *Capital without Borders: Wealth Managers and the One Percent*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

WEEK 13 **Capitalism**

“Production of too many useful things produces too large a useless population.”

– Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*

TUESDAY: “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.

THURSDAY: Menand, Louis. 2016. “Karl Marx, Yesterday and Today.” *The New Yorker*, October 2, 2016.

RECOMMENDED: Wright, Erik Olin. 2021. *How to Be an Anticapitalist in the Twenty-First Century*. London, England: Verso Books.

WEEK 14 **State**

Sir Humphrey: When the chips are down, Minister, and the balloon goes up and the lights go out ... there has to be somewhere to carry on government, even if everything else stops.

Hacker: Why?

Sir Humphrey: Government doesn't stop just because the country's been destroyed! Annihilation's bad enough, without anarchy to make things even worse!

Hacker: You mean you'd have a lot of rebellious cinders.

– *Yes, Minister*, Series 1, Episode 3

TUESDAY: 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.

THURSDAY: Western, Bruce and Beckett, Katherine. 1999. “How Unregulated Is the U.S. Labor Market? The Penal System as A Labor Market Institution.” *American Journal of Sociology* 104 (4): 1030–1060.

RECOMMENDED: Lara-Millán, Armando. 2021. *Redistributing the Poor: Jails, Hospitals, and the Crisis of Law and Fiscal Austerity*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

WEEK 15 Globalization

“That same Europe, where they were never done talking with humanity, never stopped proclaiming that they were only anxious for the welfare of humanity. Today we know with what sufferings humanity has paid for every one of their triumphs of the mind.”

– Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

TUESDAY: Go, Julian. 2020. “The Racist Origins of U.S. Policing.” *Foreign Affairs*, July 16, 2020. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-07-16/racist-origins-us-policing>.

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

DUE: Exam #2.

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.