Sociology 350: Social Theory

Dr. Kristin Park
Class Time: TR 9:20-10:50
Class Location: Patterson 108
Fall, 2017

Office hours: MWF 9:30 - 11
and by appointment
Office: Patterson 301
Office phone: 724-946-7251

Course website: https://learn.westminster.edu/d2l/home/16233

Email: kpark@westminster.edu
Campus mailbox: Box 103, or SOC/CJS
Department mailbox in PH 327 (break room)

Course Description: We all, more or less consciously, create and test theories about how the social world works. For example, our theories explain why we choose the friends or partner that we do, why religion persists in the contemporary United States, why income inequality in the United States is increasing over time or how we make decisions about choosing a college major or launching a career.

This course provides a general introduction to the major classical and contemporary theories in sociology. Social theories try to describe and explain human behavior, social structure, the functioning of social institutions and societal development in systematic, testable ways. We examine the major tenets and critiques of these theories while nesting them in their historical and cultural contexts. We also discuss theoretical applications in contemporary sociological research.

Student Learning Objectives: By the end of the course you should be able to:

- summarize basic biographical and contextual information about major sociological theorists (consultant reports; mini-assignment 2, exams);
- summarize the assumptions and tenets of the major theoretical traditions in sociology (exams, theory application presentation and paper);
- compare major theorists and theoretical traditions on their views of the relationship between the individual and society, the sources of social order, conflict, or change, their explanations for individual behavior and their prescribed goals and methods for sociological study (in-class group work; exams);
- critique major theories and theoretical traditions on their internal structure and when tested with empirical data (consultant reports; exams, theory application presentation and paper);
- apply these theoretical traditions to several contemporary social issues and problems (mini-assignments 1, 3 and 4; theory application presentation and paper; exams);
- understand and evaluate original research, published in sociological journals, that applies and tests these theories or variants of them (theory application presentation and paper; exams).

What I expect of you, and you can expect of me: This is a demanding course in terms of the sheer volume and the complexity of its material. Needless to say, regular attendance is essential to performing well in this course. I expect you to regularly come to class with the readings completed and with your having made a sincere effort to understand their basic points. It is also helpful to look over your notes from the previous class period before the next one to provide continuity.
I need you to give me feedback on the pace of the class and to ask questions when material is unclear. Keep asking until it is clear! Rest assured that other students have the same questions. Do see me during office hours if you are having difficulty with the course.

I also expect you to participate actively in whole-class and paired or small-group discussions. Actively grappling with, critiquing, and applying these theories to the “real world” will help you really learn them rather than just memorize their tenets. **Think of these theorists as alive and engaged in discussion with you.**

As more advanced students in the major or minor and in your college career, **I expect you to write well and to be able to summarize complex ideas in your own words.** Papers that do not meet this standard will be returned to be rewritten, with a penalty attached. Occasionally I will recommend or require that a student receive assistance in the Learning Center, with appropriate documentation required.

Wandering around or outside of the classroom, during class time, is unacceptable.

**You can expect me** to be prepared for class, responsive to your questions, and available for consultations during office hours or scheduled appointments. Also, think of the syllabus as a contract between us. Any major changes (e.g. in dates for exams) will only be made in consultation with you and as the result of a majority class decision, with alternative arrangements for students in the minority for whom the changes pose problems.

**Course Requirements:** These consist of three exams, a group oral presentation and individual paper that applies theory in a journal article OR a role play exercise in which you enact the biography, ideology and policies of an historical or contemporary character or movement inspired by Marxist theory.

**Weighting of the requirements is as follows:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exam 1</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exam 2</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theory Application</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9% indiv, 5% group)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(14% for role play participants)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory Application/Role Play Paper</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini-assignments</td>
<td>6% (1% each)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consultant report—spaced throughout semester</td>
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<tr>
<td>#1 Durkheim suicide application essay</td>
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<tr>
<td>#2 <em>Communist Manifesto</em> “Introduction” and “Context and Creators” (by Boyle) question answers</td>
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</table>
#3 Communist Manifesto “The Manifesto’s Legacy” and “Aftermath” (by Boyle) outline
#4 Analysis of The Insider film
#5 CJS/SOC Capstone poster attendance and assessments

**Can substitute ONE of #1-4 for attendance at Sociology-related session at Westminster’s Professional Networking Symposium on Sat. Sept. 16. Details forthcoming.**

**Additional mini-assignment options may become available and substitute for one or more of the above, with my advance permission to do this.**

The **exams** will have a mixed format but will consist primarily of identifications and short and longer essay questions. Out-of-class review sessions will be scheduled before the exams. You will receive the final exam questions in advance; the exam is partially cumulative.

There are two variants of the **theory application assignment.** Most students will work with an academic journal article that applies one of the theorists or theoretical paradigms from class to a contemporary social issue. You will work with other students assigned to the article to summarize and critique it in a presentation given to the class. Individually, you also will write a paper on the article.

Other students, on a volunteer but incentivized basis, will do research on and create and perform a role play of 1) Fidel Castro of Cuba; 2) Michelle Bachelet of Chile, 3) Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, 4) Evo Morales of Bolivia, 5) an Occupy Wall Street activist and/or 6) former Democratic Presidential Candidate Bernie Sanders. I am open to other suggestions for role plays that you might want to perform. You will locate sources, write and perform a script and write a follow-up paper on your work. Props and costumes are encouraged!

You will occasionally complete take-home assignments that ask for, for example, your reactions to a video or summaries of historical context for a theoretical tradition. These **mini-assignments** will be graded on scale of S+ (95), S (85), S- (70) and U (60 or less). The total of them is worth 6% of your course grade and your grade on them is determined by how many you complete in a satisfactory manner. **No make-ups are allowed for these assignments except for documented, excused absences. Otherwise if you miss the class period in which the assignment is given or due you will not receive credit for it. Authorized make- ups must be completed no later than the following class period.**

As one of the mini-assignments you will serve as a **consultant** during a class period to bring to us biographical information, real-world applications or critiques of the theorist or tradition being studied. Other students will bring to class discussion questions on a reading from the Kivisto book.

At the end of the course I rank students on a **class participation** scale. Your grade
will either stay the same or be raised from 1 to 3 total points depending upon your extent and quality of class participation. “Class participation” includes active involvement in whole-class and paired or small-group discussions as well as discussions about course material, course resources or related topics that you have with me before or after the class period or during office hours.

Grade Calculation: I will use the gradebook available at D2L. To compute your grade simply multiply the grade that you earned on a particular requirement by the percentage of the grade that it is worth. For example, if you earned an 80 on the first exam you multiply it by .10 which becomes a 8. A 75 on your “Theory Application” paper which is worth .14 becomes a 10.5. 8 plus 10.5 equals 18.5. Do the same for all your other course requirements and add them up and you will have a number that is a percentage of 100. Put in hypothetical values for remaining requirements to reach the 100 total possible points to get a sense of where you stand. I do not give extra credit opportunities.

Policy on Attendance: Regular attendance is necessary for the course to have a sense of continuity and integration across class periods. After two class absences your grade will be negatively affected. Please note that this policy applies to both excused (athletic commitments, health issues, family issues) and unexcused absences, so use your absences carefully. Also, attendance is required on days we have student presentations (journal articles, role plays) unless you contact me in advance with an excused absence. You are responsible for signing the attendance sheet that is distributed around the class.

If you have more than four absences, for any reason, you will not pass the class. Also, chronic lateness counts as missed classes. Do see me early on if you have exceptional circumstances related to family issues, medical problems or personal difficulties that affect your class attendance and course work.

Policy on Make-up Work: Unless otherwise indicated, all assignments are due at the beginning of the class period on the specified due date. Assignments submitted before 4:00 on that same day will be docked 5 points, with 10 points subtracted for each day later thereafter. Normally the only acceptable excuses for turning assignments in late without this penalty, or for taking a make-up exam, are medical excuses and family emergencies, for which you need to provide documentation. See the Undergraduate Catalog for further discussion of academic policies on these matters.

Submission Guidelines for Written Work: You are required to type, print and bring to class ALL written assignments, which are due at the beginning of the class period. Your theory application paper should be submitted as hard copy in class but ALSO electronically to the designated D2L folder. You are allowed to submit ONE mini-assignment electronically but there will be penalties for additional electronic submissions. All assignments should use size 12 font, have numbered pages and be stapled. Assignments should generally have a professional presentation.
Points may be deducted for not meeting these criteria.

**A NOTE ON READINGS:** The course readings, in books or at D2L, are a critical part of the course. You should bring these readings or materials to class, in printed or digital form, so you can consult them at that time. Make sure you bring them in a form where you can read and process them… cell phone access can be challenging in this regard.

Judicious use of email: Many of us, myself included, can feel swamped by the barrage of email in our mailboxes. Sifting through messages takes up my time that is better spent preparing for classes and meeting with students. Thus I ask that you communicate with me via email only for urgent matters that cannot be addressed in person before or after the class period or during office hours. Also, I only read and respond to email during regular work hours on weekdays.

Class Cancellation Policy: If I must unexpectedly cancel class, due to illness of myself or a family member, bad weather or another emergency, please check your email for announcements for the next class period. Sometimes you will be given an assignment to complete using the D2Lcourse page.

Technology Policy: I expect you to come to class with the intention of learning. This means that distracting activities including text messaging, replying to emails and listening to music should be put aside at the classroom door. All digital devices must be completely switched off once class begins and remain off for the entire period. If you are found using a digital device for purposes not related to class (e.g. NOT for taking class notes or pulling up the day’s readings on a tablet, which IS allowed) you will be penalized by that class period’s being designated as an unexcused absence for you. Repeated violations of this policy will lower your course grade.

Audio or video recording of class sessions is prohibited.

Inclusion Policy: Westminster College actively strives for the full inclusion of all our students. Students with disabilities who require access solutions for environmental or curricular barriers should contact Ms. Faith Craig, Director of Disability Support Services in 209 Thompson Clark Hall, at 724-946-7192 or at craigfa@westminster.edu.

Academic Integrity: Central to the purpose and pursuit of any academic community is academic integrity. All members of the Westminster community, including students, faculty, staff and administrators, are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity, in keeping with the philosophy and mission of the College. All members of the Westminster community are expected to be familiar with and to abide by the College policy and procedures described in the Undergraduate Catalog.
Academic dishonesty is a profound violation of this code of behavior. It can takes several forms, including, but not limited to, plagiarism, cheating, misconduct, and providing false information. Academic dishonesty breaks the sense of trust that is central to a vital, educational community like Westminster. Dishonesty in any of these forms will not be tolerated. Students who engage in academic dishonesty face the penalties outlined in the College policy. **In addition, work that you submit in this class may be submitted to Turnitin.com, a plagiarism prevention service that also provides educational information on how to practice honesty in the conduct of research and writing of papers.**

For the purposes of this course, I expect you to do your own work unless collaboration with others is required, allowed or encouraged for a particular assignment. I also expect you to do original work for this course. This means that you may not submit papers used for another course for the purpose of fulfilling requirements in this course, unless specific arrangements are made with me and you also have the permission of the other instructor. Behaving with academic integrity also means that you put forth your fair share of effort into group discussions and projects undertaken in the course.

See me if you are unclear about the meaning of any elements of this code.

**Grading Scale:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94 – 100</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>&quot;Outstanding&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90 – 93</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88 - 89</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>&quot;Superior&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84 - 87</td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 – 83</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78 - 79</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>&quot;Satisfactory&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74 - 77</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 – 73</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68 - 69</td>
<td>D+</td>
<td>&quot;Passing but Inferior&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 – 67</td>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 60</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>&quot;Failure&quot;</td>
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**Readings:** These are available at the College bookstore:


ASA Style Guide (5th edition) for SOC, CJS and IS/Global Development majors (about $13 for paper copy from Administrative Assistant Mary Pitman, or go to ASA website to download Nook, Kindle or IPad/IPhone versions)

Additional readings are at the D2L coursepage.

**Tentative Course Outline**

*Readings are due on the day for which they are listed.

**Key:** CST = Ritzer's *Contemporary Sociological Theory*; ISL = Kivisto's *Illuminating Social Life*; D2L = available at course D2L page.

**T Aug 29**
Introduction to course  
What is theory, and how do sociologists use it?  
Questions to ask when analyzing and comparing theories

**Macrosociological Theories**

**R 31**
Classical Theory: The Socio-Historical Context  
Early, Overlooked Sociologists  

**Readings:** CST, Ch. 1; CST pp. 65-69. ISL pp. 1-4. DuBois “The Conservation of Races”  
(D2L) (study questions to guide)

**T 5**
Durkheim’s Contributions: Types of Solidarity, The Social Fact, Suicide  

**Readings:** CST, pp. 15-21. Hornsby, in ISL, pp. 68-73 and 83-86. Turner, Beeghley and Powers “Durkheim on Suicide” (D2L)

**R 7**
Durkheim’s Contributions  
Contemporary Application: The Internet as Community?

**Video clips** from *The Shawshank Redemption* and *The Dead Poets’ Society*  

**Readings:** Rest of Hornsby in ISL (skim pp. 54-68; read theoretical applications more closely)

**T 12**
Contemporary Functionalism: Robert Merton

**Submit Miniassignment #1 on application of suicide theory.** Write a 1-2 page, typed, double-spaced essay that applies one or more of Durkheim’s suicide types to a real-life example or a fictitious example that you make up. Identify the suicide type(s) and why you think it fits. You may also conclude that Durkheim’s types do not explain your example; explain what factors might operate instead. **Bring 1 named and 1 anonymous copy to class.**

**Readings:** CST, pp. 88-93

**R 14**
Critiques of Functionalism
Durkheim’s Suicide Theory Applied

Readings: Torgler, Benno and Christopher Schaltegger, 2014. “Suicide and Religion: New Evidence on the Differences between Protestantism and Catholicism” (D2L)

Mon Sept 18: Out-of-class review session for Exam 1: Place, Time TBA

T 19       EXAM 1

R 21       Conflict Theories
            Classical Roots and General Tenets
            Marx’s Contributions: Historical Materialism, Class Struggle and
            the
            Dialectic


**RP performers submit annotated sources to D2L by class time today. See me to schedule a consultation next week

Functionalism papers due to D2L by 4 pm Monday Sept. 25

T 26       Conflict Theories
            Marx’s Contributions: Superstructure and Substructure,
            Alienation, Religion

Readings: Read Boyle “Introduction,” “Context and Creators” to Communist Manifesto (D2L).

Complete Miniassignment #2 on Boyle readings: Bring your typed answers to these questions to class.

1. Describe the historical, political, economic and social context for the CM (mostly French Revolution and Industrial Revolution, esp. in Britain).

2. What strains of socialism or communism existed at the time? What kinds of internal and external relationships characterized members of these groups? How did M and E respond to them?

3. How were the attempts of communists to organize in Europe at this time responded to, and by whom?

4. Describe the relationship between Marx and Engels.

5. Why was the Manifesto written, and describe the process.

6. What was the immediate impact of the Manifesto?

R 28       Conflict Theories
            Marx’s Contributions: Theory of Capitalist Development, Socialism, Communism

Video clip: “Matewan”

Readings: Class handouts with selections from the Communist Manifesto. Also “The Manifesto’s Legacy” and “Aftermath” from Boyle (D2L).
Submit in class Miniassignment #3 outline (about 2 pages, single-spaced, in outline format) of “The Manifesto’s Legacy and “Aftermath”

T Oct 3  Marxist Theory catch-up

Readings: Begin reading for Thursday

R 5  Conflict Theories
Marx Applied to Today’s Workplace
Readings: Walsh and Zacharias-Walsh on Marx in today’s workplaces (D2L). Skim pp. 12-19, read remainder more carefully.

T 10  Conflict Theories
Role Plays of contemporary socialist leaders and activists
“Six Thinking Hats” in-class exercise on Marxist theory
Readings: CST pp. 293-97; 117-121. Read short entries on role play leaders and activists at D2L

RP students: by class time, post your presentation script and/or Powerpoint presentation to D2L in the named folder. Students will access these to study your characters

R 12  Conflict Theories

Video: “The Insider” (in class)

T 17  Conflict Theories
Continuation of video
In-class work on analyzing video

Role Play papers due to D2L folder by class time

R 19  Analyses of The Insider
Critical Race Theory
Readings: CST p. 66. Hartmann and Bell in ISL (use study questions to guide; do not submit)

Miniassignment #4: Bring to class 1-page with bullet points analyzing film relative to conflict theory (not just Marxist theory, but broader conflict theory. Not summary, not your notes on the film, but application and analysis)

NO CLASS SAT OCT 21 THROUGH TUES OCT 24--- ENJOY YOUR FALL BREAK!!!

R 26  Conflict Theories
Feminist and Intersectional Theories

Readings: CST Ch. 8

T 31  Conflict Theories
Feminist and Intersectional Theories
Student presentations on Feminist/Intersectional Theories


Out-of-class review session for exam on Wed. Nov 1: Place, Time TBA

R Nov 2 EXAM 2

T 7 Conflict Theories
Weber’s Contributions: Class, Status and Party and Types of Authority
Readings: “Weber on Class, Status, Party” (D2L)

R 9 Weber, Rationalization and Disenchantment
Ritzer and the McDonaldization of Society
Readings: Ritzer in ISL.

Feminist journal article reports due by 4 pm on Fri Nov 10

T 14 Weber and the Protestant Ethic Thesis
Reading: CST pp. 35-8; “Cuzzort King Protestant Ethic” (D2L)

R 16 Postmodern Theories
Readings: CST pp. 246-62. Also Fox Gotham, pp. 319-325, in ISL

T 21 Postmodern Theories
Mardi Gras: Modern or Postmodern?
Readings: Rest of Fox Gotham in ISL (use study questions to guide)

NO CLASSES THUR NOV 22 THROUGH SUN NOV 26---ENJOY YOUR THANKSGIVING BREAK

Microsociological Theories

T 28 Symbolic Interactionism
Classical Roots
Weber and “Verstehen”
Cooley and Meads’ Contributions

Readings: CST pp. 139-143; 57-64. ISL pp. 277-284. Begin reading for Thursday’s class
Symbolic Interactionism
Contemporary Applications:
   Socially Constructed Bodies
   Door-to-door Sales

Readings: Lorber and Yancey Martin in ISL. Shweingruber and Berns pp. 284-94 in ISL.

T 5
*Wear a t-shirt or sweatshirt to class, if you like :)*
Symbolic Interactionism
   SI in citizen/police encounters
   Goffman on Dramaturgy

Student presentations on Symbolic Interactionist Theories

R 7
Wrap-up of symbolic interactionism
   Dramaturgy in sales and service work

Student presentations on Symbolic Interactionist Theories

Course evaluations in McGill Computer Lab
Review for final exam


Miniassignment #5: Attend Sociology Capstone poster presentations on Friday, Dec. 8 from 4-6 pm, Witherspoon Rooms. Plan to be there for at least 45 minutes.

Focus in on three Sociology or Criminal Justice Studies projects that most interest you and that also have some theoretical discussion within them. You can summarize the information below; it need not be presented in paragraph format.

For each project in which theory is applied:
   a. Name and summarize the theory that is used in the project.
   b. How is the theory applied to (deductively) or derived from (inductively) the topic being studied? Be specific.
   c. How do the findings relate back to the theory? Explain.
OR, if theory is not applied:

a. What research question(s) are being addressed?
b. What research methods were used to address those questions? Be specific (administered a survey, analyzed an existing dataset, etc.)
c. What were the study’s major findings?

**Bring your typed report to class by exam time, that is, 8 am on Wednesday, Dec. 13.**

**Final Exam is from 8-10:30 on Wed. Dec. 13. You will receive the questions in advance, and are allowed to bring some notes to the exam.**

**Symbolic Interactionist papers are due to D2L folder no later than 4 pm on Friday, Dec. 15.**