

SOCI 101

Social Perspectives

General Description

Introduction

This sociological perspectives course is designed to introduce you to the sociological study of the United States and American society. Because you are living in the United States, you already have a head start on mastering this subject. Even without realizing it, you have accumulated an enormous body of knowledge from observing and analyzing social situations and human behavior in our culture. This knowledge and experience will be useful to you in this course. But sociology is about far more than common sense; in fact, sociologists have a reputation for “debunking” people’s common-sense views of the world. With the help of Michael Schwalbe and the other sociologists I have chosen for you to read, I will encourage you to sharpen your skills at debunking and to develop “sociological mindfulness,” a way to think critically about the world. I hope that by the end of the course you will have a new appreciation for the ways in which social forces shape you and the world in which you live.

Sociology is the scientific study of social groups and human behavior. As a sociologist-in-training, you will learn to go beyond common-sense views of the world around you. You will learn new ways of looking at things that you will carry with you well beyond this course. As C. Wright Mills states in the reading for Lesson 1, what he calls a “sociological imagination” is a rare and valuable quality of mind, especially for us here in the United States, where we are particularly prone to viewing things from an individualistic point of view. Of course, individualism is an important bedrock of our culture; our emphasis on individual rights, for example, has led to constitutional protections from discrimination against minority groups, as well as various

freedoms of expression. But individualism has limits. If we think of patterns in our own lives or ones we observe in society as only rooted in individuals, we miss much of what's really going on. For example, in Lesson 1 we will use sociological mindfulness to analyze the rise of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), which has been accompanied by increased prescriptions of the drug Ritalin. Typically when people think of ADHD, they think of an individual's problems with concentration or hyperactivity. But a need for Ritalin is not only an innate health problem, it is a socially constructed one. We can see this when we consider social patterns, which show that Ritalin use varies by race and social class. Why might Ritalin be more commonly prescribed to white and upper-middle class children than to others?

Following Michael Schwalbe's emphasis in *The Sociologically Examined Life*, much of this course deals with the study of social inequality. That is, we will pay close attention to how power relations, both at the *macro* level of social institutions and at the *micro* level of social interaction, shape human experience and life-chances. It is my hope that you will not only develop a knack for sociological ways of thinking, but that you will put these insights into practice in your daily life.

Plan of Study

Each lesson is based on a chapter of *The Sociologically Examined Life*, coupled with an article from social theory or sociological research that demonstrates or extends the concepts Schwalbe discusses. Each lesson is designed to encourage you to apply some of the sociological tools you have read about to situations in everyday life.

The discussion sections assume that you have done the readings carefully. Typically, I will not review concepts addressed in the book unless they are complicated and require further explanation. Instead, I put the issues discussed in a broader context of sociological theory and research. In completing the written work as well as the final exam, you are responsible for all material in the readings and in the discussion sections.

The written work is designed to get you to apply and extend the major themes and concepts of the lesson. For the essays, there

are generally no right or wrong answers, but there *are* good and bad arguments. Take the necessary time to read the questions carefully and link your answers to the themes and concepts of that particular lesson and the course in general. Always organize and present your thoughts coherently and concisely. Be sure to answer ALL the questions I ask in the written work so that you do not lose any credit, and please edit your work for grammar and spelling.

You should know that the course gets more demanding and time-consuming the further you get. The number of pages you will have to read varies quite a bit. Please be aware that Lessons 1, 2, and 3 should take you no longer than a few hours to complete, while you might spend a few hours just doing the readings for Lessons 7, 10, and 12. Please keep this in mind as you budget your time.

Required Texts

Two books are required for this course. The first is *The Sociologically Examined Life* by Michael Schwalbe, fourth edition, 2008. The second is a coursepack of additional readings. You can purchase both texts from the Higher Grounds bookstore at The Friday Center using the book order form in this manual, or online at <https://s4.its.unc.edu/HigherGrounds/>.

Grading and Final Exam

Your final exam will cover the same types of essay questions as the written work in each lesson, and I encourage you to use your returned assignments to study for the final exam. The exam will also include definition and multiple-choice questions.

There are twelve written assignments in the course, each of which is worth 100 points. I will drop the lowest score from your assignments and average the remaining eleven together. The written work will account for 60 percent of your grade, and the final exam will account for 40 percent. You must pass the final exam to receive credit for this course. Good luck!