

SOCY 227: Theorizing Contemporary Society  
Winter 2023

Timetabled: Fridays 8:30 am – 10:30 am, Chernoff Auditorium

**Instructor Information**

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**Course Outline**

The aim of this course is to provide students with a foundational understanding of key contemporary theories and frameworks used in sociology. The course will cover topics such as capitalism and economy; globalization and post-colonialism; identity, politics, and social movements; science, technology, and environmentalism; and consumerism and digital life. The course will be taught using a combination of lectures and tutorials. The lectures will delve into the context and content of each theoretical approach, and will focus on identifying concepts and frameworks. The tutorials will have a participatory approach, which will focus on unpacking and discussing the weekly readings assigned. The course readings will consist of primary readings by contemporary theorists.

**Student Outcomes**

***Knowledge***

By the end of this course, students will have an appreciation and understanding of:

- The internal connections between classical and contemporary approaches to social theory.
- The similarities and differences between a plurality of approaches in contemporary social theory.
- The key theoretical debates about social transformations in the 21st Century.

***Skills***

- By the end of this course, students will be able to:
- Evaluate theoretical arguments and evidence.
- Use abstract sociological concepts with confidence.
- Apply theoretical knowledge to an appropriate sociological question.
- Clearly communicate the meaning of abstract theoretical concepts verbally and in writing
- Demonstrate the ability to evaluate and synthesize information obtained from a variety of written sources, and communicate relevant information in different ways.

**Textbooks/Readings**

**There is no physical textbook for this course.** Instead, I have designed the course to be a close reading of primary texts in sociological theory, supplemented by secondary sources. All of the material is available via the course OnQ page.

## Grading Scheme

- Tutorial participation (assessed weekly) – 20%
- Film assignment (5 pages) – 20%
- Paper outline and bibliography (5 pages)– 20%
- Term paper (8 pages) – 40%

## Assignments

Tutorial participation – At the end of each tutorial, the TA will pose a question to the present students to be replied to in written form. Each written submission is worth two marks. Emailed submissions will be accepted, if written and received during the tutorial time. With one exception: **no more than twice per semester** student can contact their TA via email to receive the question on the day of that week's tutorial. Past this, all submissions must be received by the TA (physically or electronically) before the end of the tutorial, in the tutorial. Students can miss two tutorial classes without a grade penalty.

These small submissions are **not** graded extensively, but are intended to reward tutorial attendance. The aim is to get students to think through an individual concept per-week, in no less than 100 words, and give their TA an understanding of their familiarity with the material. The questions posed during tutorial are designed to get students to make connections between the theories discussed during lecture and the applied discussions during tutorial. Participation is worth 20% of your grade.

Film assignment (due Feb. 15<sup>th</sup>) – The film assignment will require you to select a film of your choice and identify and apply a theoretical lens to the themes of the film, as a means of challenging you to interpret and explain social phenomena. The film assignment is worth 20% of your grade, and is designed to help you make connections between sociological theory and social life.

Paper outline and bibliography (due March 15<sup>th</sup>) – this assignment is designed to get you to start thinking about your term paper. You will need to provide a paper structure in point form, drawing from three peer-reviewed sources, one of which from the course readings. The paper structure will include the argument, topic, theoretical background, discussion and conclusion. In addition, you will provide an annotated bibliography of the three sources you have picked. This assignment is worth 20% of your grade.

Term paper (due April 12<sup>th</sup>) – The term paper assignment is your opportunity to theorize any aspect of contemporary society, so long as you incorporate one of the course readings. I will provide a list of tentative topics before the paper outline is due, but it is your job to come up with a sociological argument that you will pursue in the paper. The paper should be 8 pages, not including a cover page, double spaced, in 12-point font. The term paper is worth 40% of your grade.

### **Grading Method**

All components of this course will receive numerical percentage marks. The final grade you receive for the course will be derived by converting your numerical course average to a letter grade according to Queen's Official Grade Conversion Scale:

#### ***Queen's Official Grade Conversion Scale***

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Numerical Course Average (Range)</b>
A+	90-100
A	85-89
A-	80-84
B+	77-79
B	73-76
B-	70-72
C+	67-69
C	63-66
C-	60-62
D+	57-59
D	53-56
D-	50-52
F	49 and below

### **Email Policy**

Please email your TAs **first** with questions about course content, your grades, or any other course-related concerns. The TAs are the first point of contact for any question, and you may email me if you need further information. I will respond to all emails within 24 hours during the week (Monday-Friday).

### **Accommodations for Disabilities**

Queen's University is committed to achieving full accessibility for people with disabilities. Part of this commitment includes arranging academic accommodations for students with disabilities to ensure they have an equitable opportunity to participate in all their academic activities. The Senate Policy for Accommodations for Students with Disabilities was approved at [Senate in November 2016](#). If you are a student with a disability and think you may need academic accommodations, you are strongly encouraged to contact the **Queen's Student Accessibility Services (QSAS)** and register as early as possible. For more information, including important deadlines, please visit the [QSAS website](#).

### **Academic Consideration for Students in Extenuating Circumstances**

Academic consideration is a process for the university community to provide a compassionate response to assist students experiencing unforeseen, short-term extenuating circumstances that may impact or impede a student's ability to complete their academics. This may include but is not limited to:

- Short-term physical or mental health issues (e.g., stomach flu, pneumonia, COVID diagnosis, vaccination, etc.)
- Responses to traumatic events (e.g., Death of a loved one, divorce, sexual assault, social injustice, etc.)
- Requirements by law or public health authorities (e.g., court date, isolation due to COVID exposure, etc.)

Queen's University is committed to providing academic consideration to students experiencing extenuating circumstances. For more information, please see the [Senate Policy on Academic Consideration for Students in Extenuating Circumstances](#).

Each Faculty has developed a protocol to provide a consistent and equitable approach in dealing with requests for academic consideration for students facing extenuating circumstances. Arts and Science undergraduate students can find the Faculty of Arts and Science protocol and the [portal where a request can be submitted](#). Students in other Faculties and Schools who are enrolled in this course should refer to the protocol for their home Faculty.

For guidance on **submitting requests**, please see refer to the Resource Guides available on the [Academic Consideration website](#) under "Applying for Academic Consideration."

**N.B:** The COVID-19 pandemic is an evolving situation. If you have symptoms or are deemed a close contact of someone with COVID, please access our **COVID-Related Absence Reference Guide** on the [Academic Consideration website](#). This guide will provide you with information on applying for consideration, the types of documentation (including non-medical documentation) you can use to support your request, as well as insight into how the Faculty office will assess these requests.

Students are encouraged to submit requests as soon as the need becomes apparent and to contact their Professors/Course Coordinators as soon as possible once Consideration has been verified. Any delay in contact may limit the Consideration options available.

**Please follow up with the instructor via email within 1 day of receiving verification of your Consideration request.**

For more information on the Academic Consideration process, what is and is not an extenuating circumstance, and to submit an Academic Consideration request, [please see our website](#).

### **Academic Integrity**

Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the regulations concerning academic integrity and for ensuring that their assignments conform to the principles of academic integrity. Information on academic integrity is available in the Arts and Science Calendar (see Academic Regulation 1 <http://www.queensu.ca/artsci/academic-calendars/regulations/academic-regulations/regulation-1>), on the Arts and Science website (see <http://www.queensu.ca/artsci/academics/undergraduate/academic-integrity>), and from the instructor of this course. Departures from academic integrity include plagiarism, use of unauthorized materials, facilitation, forgery and falsification, and are antithetical to the development of an academic community at Queen's. Given the seriousness of these matters, actions which contravene the regulation on academic integrity carry sanctions that can range from a warning or the loss of grades on an assignment to the failure of a course to a requirement to withdraw from the university.

### **Copyright of Course Materials**

Unless otherwise stated, the material on the course website is copyrighted and is for the sole use of students registered in SOCY 227. The material on the website may be downloaded for a registered student's personal use but shall not be distributed or disseminated to anyone other than students registered in this course.

### Course Timeline

Week	Topics and Important Dates	Readings
Week 1 – January 9 <sup>th</sup>	Introduction	Syllabus
Week 2 – January 16 <sup>th</sup>	What is contemporary sociological theory?	<p>Mills, C. W. (1999). The Promise. In <i>The Sociological Imagination</i> (40th Anniversary edition, pp. 3–23). Oxford University Press.</p> <p><i>Secondary Readings:</i>  Harrington, A. (Ed.). (2005). Introduction: What is Social Theory? In <i>Modern Social Theory: An Introduction</i> (1st edition, pp. 1–12). Oxford University Press.</p>
Week 3 – January 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Capitalism and political economy	<p>Harvey, D. (2007). Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction. <i>The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science</i>, 610, 22–44.</p> <p><i>Secondary Readings:</i>  Brown, W. (2015). Undoing Democracy: Neoliberalism’s Remaking of State and Subject. In <i>Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution</i> (pp. 14–45). Zone Books.</p>
Week 4 – January 30 <sup>th</sup>	Structuring and embodying class	<p>Bourdieu, P. (1986). The Forms of Capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), <i>Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education</i> (pp. 241–258). Greenwood.</p> <p><i>Secondary Readings:</i>  Bourdieu, P. (1990). Structures, <i>Habitus</i>, Practices. In R. Nice (Trans.), <i>The Logic of Practice</i> (pp. 52–65). Stanford University Press.</p>
Week 5 – February 6 <sup>th</sup>	Theories of racism and racialization	<p>Bonilla-Silva, E. (2015). The Structure of Racism in Color-Blind, “Post-Racial” America. <i>American Behavioral Scientist</i>, 59(11), 1358–1376.  <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764215586826">https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764215586826</a></p> <p><i>Secondary Readings:</i>  Elias, S., &amp; Feagin, J. R. (2016). Systemic Racism Theory. In <i>Racial Theories in Social Science: A Systemic Racism Critique</i> (pp. 248–279). Routledge.  <a href="https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315628288">https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315628288</a></p>
Week 6 – February 13 <sup>th</sup>	Post-colonial theories	<p>Go, J. (2018). Postcolonial Possibilities for the Sociology of Race. <i>Sociology of Race and Ethnicity</i>,</p>

	<b>*Film Assignment Due Feb. 15<sup>th</sup></b>	<p>4(4), 439–451.  <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649218793982">https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649218793982</a></p> <p><i>Secondary Readings:</i>  Subjects of Empire. (2014). In <i>Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition</i> (1st ed., pp. 1–24). University Of Minnesota Press.</p>
Week 7 – February 20 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Reading Week – No Class</b>	
Week 8 – February 27 <sup>th</sup>	Feminist Political Movements	<p>Smith, D. E. (1989). A Peculiar Eclipsing: Women's Exclusion from Man's Culture. In <i>The Everyday World As Problematic: A Feminist Sociology</i> (First Edition, pp. 17–43). Northeastern.</p> <p><i>Secondary Readings:</i>  hooks, b. (1999). Racism and Feminism: The Issue of Accountability. In <i>Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism</i> (pp. 119–158). South End Press.</p> <p>Mohanty, C. (1988). Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses. <i>Feminist Review</i>, 30(1), 61–88. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1988.42">https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1988.42</a></p>
Week 9 – March 6 <sup>th</sup>	Queer theories	<p>Butler, J. (2004). Gender Regulations. In <i>Undoing Gender</i> (1st edition, pp. 40–56). Routledge.</p> <p><i>Secondary Readings:</i>  Butler, J. (2011). Critically Queer. In <i>Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex</i> (1st edition, pp. 223–242). Routledge.</p>
Week 10 – March 13 <sup>th</sup>	Theories of science and knowledge <b>Paper Outline and Bibliography Due March 15<sup>th</sup></b>	<p>Latour, B. (1996). On actor-network theory: A few clarifications. <i>Soziale Welt</i>, 47(4), 369–381.</p> <p><i>Secondary Readings:</i>  Law, J. (2008). Actor Network Theory and Material Semiotics. In B. Turner (Ed.), <i>The New Blackwell Companion to Social Theory</i> (pp. 141–158). John Wiley &amp; Sons, Ltd.  <a href="https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444304992.ch7">https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444304992.ch7</a></p>
Week 11 – March 20 <sup>th</sup>	Environmentalism and justice	<p>Pellow, D. N., &amp; Nyseth Brehm, H. (2013). An Environmental Sociology for the Twenty-First Century. <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i>, 39(1), 229–250.  <a href="https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-071312-145558">https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-071312-145558</a></p>

		<p><i>Secondary Readings:</i>  Mohai, P., Pellow, D., &amp; Roberts, J. T. (2009). Environmental Justice. <i>Annual Review of Environment and Resources</i>, 34(1), 405–430.  <a href="https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-082508-094348">https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-082508-094348</a></p>
Week 12 – March 27 <sup>th</sup>	Theorizing the digital: big data, platforms and society	<p>Couldry, N., &amp; Mejias, U. (2019). The Coloniality of Data Relations. In <i>The Costs of Connection: How Data Is Colonizing Human Life and Appropriating It for Capitalism</i> (pp. 83–114). Stanford University Press.</p> <p><i>Secondary Readings:</i>  Srnicek, N. (2016). Platform Capitalism. In <i>Platform Capitalism</i> (pp. 44–95). Polity.</p>
Week 13 – April 3 <sup>rd</sup>	<b>Easter – No Class</b>	
Week 14 – April 10 <sup>th</sup>	<b>No Class – Term Paper Due April 12<sup>th</sup></b>	