



COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES¹
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
SOC*6070 Sociological Theory²
Fall 2023

Instructor: Prof. Tuğçe Ellialtı-Köse (*she/her*)

Time: Mondays, 11:30 am – 2:20 pm

Location: MCKN 059 in person, and
online via Zoom on select dates

Email: tugce@uoguelph.ca*

Office: MCKN 642

Office Hours: 10 – 11 am on
Tuesdays, or by appointment

* The easiest way to reach me – besides in class and during office hours – is via email at tugce@uoguelph.ca. I typically respond to emails within 24 hours (except on weekends and university holidays). I would appreciate it if you would put the name or number of the course in the subject line of your email; this helps me identify and respond to your emails more quickly.

Course Description

This graduate seminar introduces students to key concepts, questions, and debates in sociological (and social) theory. Throughout the semester, we will engage with the original writings of a range of classical sociologists (and other scholars who have become influential in the discipline and/or whose work speaks to central sociological concerns) and insightful and critical commentaries on major theoretical works. This course is designed to achieve the following student learning outcomes: a) to understand scholars' theoretical engagements with their social and intellectual contexts (and thus the interplay between history and sociological theory); b) to unpack and critically evaluate their theories, methodologies, and their contributions to our understanding of major sociological concepts such as social structure, power, ideology, culture, and inequality; c) to examine and compare the various conceptions of theory, method, and object of investigation; and d) to unpack how these theories are relevant and useful to contemporary societies and our understandings of them.

Theory can be viewed as a toolkit from which sociologists (and others) use ideas and concepts to try to make sense of the world around them. Therefore, among our main goals are ensuring familiarity with the issues and concerns that intrigued classical

¹ The University of Guelph is located within the Between the Lakes Purchase (Treaty 3) – the treaty lands and territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit. Reconciliation, reparation, and institutional reforms are a collective responsibility and an ongoing process.

² This draft outline is for informational purposes only and may change at the instructor's discretion. A complete syllabus will be shared with the students during the first class. In the meanwhile, if you have any questions about the course, please email me at tugce@uoguelph.ca.

sociological theorists and that still inform sociological practice, identifying the important problems that these thinkers were grappling with and their most influential ideas, as well as developing a deeper understanding of sociological theories and how to apply them to diverse social phenomena. In this sense, this course goes beyond reading—and thinking—*about* theory and aims to provide students with the tools and resources that will allow them to think *with* and *alongside* theory. To this end, students will be asked to read carefully and critically different theoretical texts, make connections between readings, and experiment with ideas, applications, and arguments. In addition to in-depth reading and thoughtful writing, the course will also require students to use their “sociological imagination” to critically engage with social theorists in different times and places and explore sociological issues that sit at the heart of today’s social world. By the end of the course, students will gain a deeper appreciation for how sociological theory continues to illuminate the world around us nearly a quarter century into the 21st century.

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this course, students will be able:

- to understand the connections between the rise of modern societies and the development of sociology as a discipline.
- to critically read and assess theoretical writing in sociology and related areas.
- to demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of key figures, texts, and concepts in the development of sociological thought, and identify and contextualize key theoretical concepts, issues, and debates in the field.
- to develop an understanding of the major theoretical frameworks and conceptual tools, as well as their application in sociological research and analysis.
- to identify points of continuity and divergence between theoretical approaches and schools of thought.
- to establish their own theoretical toolkit and voice/perspective and to practice applying theory to their everyday life, experiences, and contemporary events (i.e., to learn how to use theory to make sense of particular social/empirical problems).
- to refine academic communication skills through writing and discussion (i.e., to clearly articulate, in both speaking and writing, their comprehension of major theories, key concepts, and debates).

Format and Requirements

As a seminar, this is a reading-intensive, interactive, and discussion-driven class. Our learning environment will be centered on principles of curiosity, participation, and inclusivity/belonging; the successful realization of these principles requires a commitment to dialogue and reflection from everyone in the course as well as meaningful engagement in class. Students are asked to come to class well prepared (i.e., having completed the assigned readings) and ready to contribute and participate in class activities that allow us to work through ideas and apply course material. Please note that both individually and collectively, the success of this seminar will depend on adequate preparation and active participation in discussions. So, it is absolutely

important that everyone is familiar with the assigned readings for each week and is ready to grapple with them in a constructive fashion during class.

In each class, I will deliver what I call “agenda setting” lectures to provide a little overview and background for each theorist. The bulk of each meeting, however, will consist of collaborative and largely open-ended discussion of the work assigned for that week. Two students will serve as discussion leaders for each class. Students’ participation in each of the meetings is the most important component for an effective graduate seminar so please come to each class fully prepared to engage closely and carefully with the material we are covering and do not rely solely on the discussion leaders, or me, to provide comprehensive learning material.

I hope that you can find some comfort in the idea that your engagement does not require you to be correct at all times. In fact, learning involves making mistakes, which is essential for critical thinking, and I am a big believer that asking “good” questions is as important and valuable as answering them and/or finding solutions. So, rather than worrying about whether you are missing a point in your comment or whether your question makes sense or not, I suggest that you do the readings closely and then be curious and exploratory in your intellectual and analytical endeavors. Remember that the best way of learning theory almost always includes deliberate efforts to bring it to life with relevant examples and reflections from our lives.

Sometimes reading theory can be challenging and tough to absorb, so don’t hesitate to ask questions or seek out help from the class. This seminar aims to be responsive to the needs and interests of the class and students will be given flexibility in designing their final papers. Students are always welcome to share what is on their mind/express their opinions and encouraged to bring current events or media examples to class for collective discussion.

Requirements/Evaluation Components

This course has different evaluation components, including active participation (i.e., engagement in class discussions), reading memos, presentations, and a final paper. Details about each of these components will be discussed in the first class of the term and be posted on CourseLink.

Restrictions: Restricted to Sociology and CCJP students

Department(s): Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Requisites: None

Textbooks and Other Materials

No book is required for this course. All readings will be available through the Course Reserve (ARES) system on CourseLink and/or via the library catalogue. Other course content will be provided via websites and as multimedia (e.g., PowerPoint slides, documentaries, podcast, etc.).