SOCG01 UNDERSTANDING SOCIETIES

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Office hours: By appointment

Class Schedules:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Seminar Session</th>
<th>Seminar Venue</th>
<th>Prerequisites/Preclusions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Term 2, AY2014/2015</td>
<td>G3</td>
<td>Weekly Monday, 08:15-11:30</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>None</td>
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Exam Date/Time: 13/4/2015, Monday, 8:30:00 AM

COURSE DESCRIPTION

‘Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both.’ – C. Wright Mills

This course introduces students to the fascinating discipline of sociology. A broad overview of the discipline is provided by structuring the course around five fundamental questions to draw attention to sociology as a distinctive field within the social sciences. The five key questions that will be addressed in the course, with the aim of providing students with a foundational understanding of the sociology discipline, are:

- What are the characteristics of thinking sociologically, about substantive issues?
- How does thinking sociologically differ from the frameworks of thought proposed by other disciplines in the social sciences?
- Who are the major thinkers who have historically advanced sociology as a discipline in the social sciences?
- Which theoretical perspectives have been most influential in the discipline of sociology and how have they been interpreted in relation to substantive issues across contexts?
- What are the basic concepts and tools by which sociologists launch their research of social problems, covering the areas of research of problem definition, research design, measurement, and data collection, processing, and analysis?

To address these questions, students will be taught the
1. socio-economic circumstances confronting the founding fathers in sociology and which gave birth to the discipline,
2. techniques of analysing social problem through the framework of the sociological imagination,
3. three major theoretical perspectives in the discipline namely Functionalism, Social Interactionism and Conflict Theory,
4. application of sociological imagination and theoretical perspectives to substantive issues across cultural contexts, and
5. social research methods employed by sociologists.

Sociology lends itself to the use of a ‘sociological imagination’ to understand the relationship between our everyday experiences and larger social phenomena. Students are expected to participate in class discussions and engage in critical thought on the social world to understand and develop their sociological imagination. Students will also be expected to apply the concepts examined during the course to interpret their everyday experiences and connect them to the social world. In so doing, the discipline broadens social insights, fosters critical thinking, trains students in methods of gathering and analysing data, and helps students develop their writing skills.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Upon successful completion of this course students will be able to:
- Sharpen their foundational grasp of the sociological imagination;
- Systematically contextualise the immediacy of personal circumstances against larger social, economic and political structures, policies, forces and vice versa;
- Critically examine three major theoretical perspectives in Sociology – Symbolic Interactionism, Functionalism and Conflict Theory – and be able to apply them in the analysis of various substantive issues across contexts;
- Discuss the development of Sociology as a distinct discipline within the social sciences;
- Differentiate between qualitative and quantitative research processes and data analysis techniques;

**COURSE ASSESSMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of Assessment</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class Attendance and Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 In-Class Quizzes</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term Paper</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-Class Presentation of Term Paper Project</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Examination</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
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- **Class Attendance & Participation** (15% of total grade)
  Students are expected to read the required readings before class to participate in the discussion. Class participation will be assessed based on the quality of participation in the class, with higher marks given to students who relate inputs to the course readings and express individual ideas articulately and succinctly. Throughout the course, a classroom environment of acceptance, respect and tolerance for diversity of views is expected and will be reinforced.

- **5 In-class Quizzes** (25% of total grade)
  There will be 5 in-class quizzes. These quizzes will include multiple choice and short answer questions.

- **Term Paper** (15% of total grade)
  For the term paper, students are expected to follow the following basic steps:
  1) Identify a topic of interest from a prepared list provided by the lecturer or through their own selection,
  2) Draft a research question and prepare a 1-2 page outline to identify their analytical approach, data resources, and available academic literature,
  3) Get approval of the research question, approach and outline from the course lecturer,
  4) Proceed with primary data collection or secondary data analysis, and
  5) Prepare a **maximum** 2000 word essay detailing the sociological analysis of the primary or secondary sources.

Students **must** work in groups of 5 people each. Each group can do either primary or secondary research on one of the seminar topics taught in the course. Students interested in doing primary research and talking to human subjects can undertake quantitative survey or qualitative interviews with their informants. Secondary research (also known as desk research) on the other hand involves the summary, collation and/or synthesis of existing research. Following their research, students will write and submit a **maximum** 2000 word essay (excluding footnotes, graphs, figures and charts) with full bibliographic citations. In the beginning of term, the lecturer will review different guidelines for research and help familiarise students with the techniques needed for research paper preparation.

- **Class Presentation of Term Paper Project** (15% of the total grade)
  In addition to submitting a term paper, each group will be asked to give a presentation of their research topic, methodology and findings to the seminar. The last two weeks of the term will be used for presentations of papers, and each student will be assigned to a time slot during this time. The presentation will typically be a verbal reworking of the term paper. The primary purpose of the presentations is to share the work that you have been doing with one another. The audience for these presentations will be the instructor and the other students of this course. This means that you can assume that your listeners have an understanding of the language, concepts, and readings that we have used and studied over the term. Each group timeslot will be approximately 30 minutes. The presenters should speak for 20 minutes and leave 10 minutes for questions and answers.

- **Final Examination** (30% of total grade)
  Students will be required to sit for a final two-hour, closed book examination at the end of term. The final exam will consist of two sections. In Section A, all students must attempt the compulsory question given. In Section B, students will choose to answer one question from a list of four possible questions. Each section will be weighed at 15% of the exam.
Exam Date/Time: 13/4/2015, Monday, 8:30:00 AM

COURSE TEXTBOOK


WEEKLY SEMINAR SCHEDULE

**WEEK 1**

**SEMINAR SESSION 1:**

**COURSE BRIEFING AND PANORAMA OF SOCIOLOGY**

Sociology is a discipline that belongs to what is conventionally called the social science. The discipline plays a leading role in the social sciences. The term *sociology* literally means the science of society; for the term itself in its direct sense denotes that. Sociology as an academic discipline arose in the first half of 19th century as a special science dedicated to unravel the fundamental laws governing the societal phenomena and human social relationship with primary interest in analysing the problems and societies of the modern, western world.

This seminar (1) analyses sociology as the study of social facts and society, (2) addresses a brief exploration of sociological imagination, (3) traces the evolution of Sociology into a professional discipline and (4) differentiates sociology from other disciplines.

**COMPULSORY READING LIST:**


Read Chapter 1- Sociology: A Panorama

**WEEK 2**

**SEMINAR SESSION 2:**

**THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION**

This seminar provides students with a foundational understanding of the concept of *sociological imagination*. What are the main ideas underlying the sociological imagination? The sociological imagination outlines and distinguishes what it means to think sociologically. A proper understanding of the sociological imagination serves as the foundation for critically analysing substantive issues of significance in subsequent seminars.

**COMPULSORY READING LIST:**


Read Chapter 1- The Sociological Imagination

Read Chapter 4- Social Structure
SEMINAR SESSION 3: DURKHEIM, MARX, WEBER: CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

The seminar will concentrate on three major theoretical perspectives: the functionalist perspective (Durkheim), the conflict perspective (Marx), and the rationalization essay (Weber). Each perspective offers a variety of explanations about the social world and human behaviour. Theories in sociology provide us with different perspectives with which to view our social world. A theory is a set of interrelated propositions or principles designed to answer a question or explain a particular phenomenon; it provides us with a perspective. Sociological theories help us to explain and predict the social world in which we live.

COMPULSORY READING LIST:
Read Chapter 3- Classical Western Sociology

SUPPLEMENTARY READING LIST:

SEMINAR SESSION 4: IN-CLASS QUIZ

SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH METHODS
This seminar explores sociology as a form of practice. ‘Doing sociological research’ sketches the ways in which professional sociologists go about planning and doing research and presenting their findings to a wide audience. Sociology, then, always needs to be understood as a special form of practice, of actively using the sociological imagination to engage with the social world. Crucially, sociology is about going ‘out there’, observing, talking to people, learning about their lives and the communities in which these lives take place, and using the resulting understanding to offer fresh insights about the contemporary world, its origins, and its possible futures.

COMPULSORY READING LIST:
Read Chapter 2: Studying the Social World


Sociological Research

WEEK 5
2 FEB 2015

SEMINAR SESSION 5:
IN-CLASS QUIZ

RACE AND ETHNIC RELATIONS
In this seminar, the concepts of race and ethnicity and theories/models of inter-group relations provide the tools for understanding and analysing race/ethnic relations and ethnicity in selected societies.

COMPULSORY READING LIST:
Read Chapter 10: Race and Ethnicity


Class Experiment: $5 Challenge (Read More on elearn)

WEEK 6
9 FEB 2015

SEMINAR SESSION 6:
IN-CLASS QUIZ

Verbal Discussion of Class Experiment: $5 Challenge

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION, INEQUALITY, AND POVERTY
Stratification is a fundamental dimension of social life. It is deeply involved in many of the most vital questions of modern politics and social policy. A good grasp of the character of social stratification can facilitate our understanding of the key social and political issues confronting a society. This seminar examine the relationship between class position and social orientations towards opportunity, political culture, ethnic relations and identify problem areas, economic and social consequences associated with class position in various contexts.

COMPULSORY READING LIST:
Read Chapter 8: Social Stratification, Inequality, and Poverty

Tan, Meng Wah (2012) ‘Singapore’s Rising Income Inequality and a

WEEK 7 16 FEB 2015

SEMINAR SESSION 7:
SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION
This course seeks to introduce undergraduate students to the nature and functions of religious beliefs and institutions in modern societies. The importance of religion in social life cannot be over estimated. Any serious student of social life must give religion considerable attention. Likewise, any serious student of religion must consider the social context in which the various aspects of religion are embedded. This seminar discusses how states actively delineate the “proper” domain for religion in society, and to harness religious forces for nation-building purposes. The state’s regulation of religious affairs is often rationalised in terms of maintaining ethnic and religious harmony. The active responses of religious groups in terms of their adaptive strategies in negotiating, accommodating or resisting the state’s efforts in surveillance and regulation will be addressed.

COMPULSORY READING LIST:
Read Chapter 14: Sociology of Religion


Newspaper Articles:
2010 – ‘Govt stresses need to maintain clear line between politics & religion’
COMPULSORY READING LIST:

Read Chapter 15: Education


WEEK 10 SEMINAR SESSION 10:
9 MAR 2015 CRIME AND DEVIANCE
This seminar introduces students to the sociological study of criminality, deviance and social control, distinguishing it as a field of research from biological and psychological explanations of deviance. This seminar examines and provides a critical evaluation of the major sociological explanations of crime and deviance. These sociological perspectives are applied to explain specific forms of criminal and deviant behaviour such as prostitution, homosexuality, drug use, youth deviance, commercial crime, and political deviance.

COMPULSORY READING LIST:

Read Chapter 11: Crime and Deviance

WEEK 11 SEMINAR SESSION 11:
16 MAR 2015 SOCIOLOGY OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY
Understanding gender and sexuality provides a foundation to analyse social structures (power and inequality), social institutions (family, kinship, education, economy, the state, health) and cultural issues (science, emotions, popular culture). The meaning of gender and sexuality categories is examined in relation to difference, exchange, reproduction, knowledge and social change. A blend of sociological and ethnographic analysis of gender and sexuality issues provides students with an exercise in interdisciplinary thinking.

COMPULSORY READING LIST:

Read Chapter 11: Gender and Sexuality

Sun, Shirley Hsiao-Li, Wen Ee Chong, and Si Hui Lim (2014) ‘Gender and Divorce in Singapore’ Journal of Comparative Family Studies 44(2): 127-

**WEEK 12**  
**23 Mar 2015**  
**SEMINAR SESSION 12:**  
**IN-CLASS GROUP PRESENTATIONS OF TERM PAPER**  
The last two weeks of the term will be used for presentations of papers, and each student will be assigned to a time slot during this time. Each group will be asked to give a presentation of their research topic and findings to the seminar.

**WEEK 13**  
**30 Mar 2015**  
**SEMINAR SESSION 13:**  
**IN-CLASS QUIZ**  
**IN-CLASS GROUP PRESENTATIONS OF TERM PAPER AND CONCLUSION**  
This seminar recaps the sociological concepts and theories that have been introduced throughout the course and which have served in analysing cross-context socio-economic and political structure and culture. Students are also expected to seek clarification on any aspect of the course.