

SOC 301
University

Meeting time/location: TBA

History of Sociological Theory
Fall 2026

Instructor: Matthew Aguilar-Champeau

Email: matthew@matth.phd

Office: TBA

Office Hours: Monday & Wednesday 1:45–4:45 PM (and by appointment)

Course Description: This course provides rigorous training in the major theoretical traditions that constitute sociological thought, from classical foundations in Marx, Durkheim, and Weber through mid-century developments to contemporary interventions by theorists including Foucault, Bourdieu, and Butler. Students will examine how these thinkers conceptualize social structure, power, inequality, and agency, analyzing both the internal logic of theoretical systems and their explanatory purchase on empirical social phenomena.

The course emphasizes theoretical literacy—the ability to work with complex arguments, trace intellectual genealogies, and deploy theoretical frameworks as analytical tools. We will interrogate how these traditions inform contemporary debates on capitalism, stratification, identity, governance, and social transformation, attending to both continuities and ruptures in theoretical development. Students will learn to evaluate competing theoretical claims, recognize the assumptions underlying different paradigmatic approaches, and apply theoretical concepts to analyze concrete social processes and institutions. The course treats theory not merely as historical artifact but as living intellectual apparatus for making sense of social reality and identifying mechanisms of social change.

Text(s):

Readings will be distributed in a course pack and on Canvas.

Course Objectives:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Analyze theoretical arguments with precision, identifying the logical structure of claims, explicating underlying assumptions, evaluating forms of evidence and argumentation, and tracing theoretical implications across different domains of social inquiry.
2. Deploy sociological theory as an analytical framework, applying conceptual tools from multiple theoretical traditions to interpret contemporary social phenomena, with particular attention to how different paradigms illuminate questions of power, inequality, social organization, and collective action.
3. Produce rigorous theoretical writing that accurately reconstructs complex arguments, synthesizes across theoretical perspectives, and develops original analysis supported by textual evidence and logical argumentation.
4. Contextualize theoretical development, situating key thinkers within broader intellectual genealogies and historical contexts, recognizing how theoretical interventions respond to specific social conditions and prior theoretical debates.

Grade Distribution:

Participation & Attendance	20%
Theoretical Engagement Papers (2)	30%
Theory Debate Exercise	25%
Final Analysis Paper	25%

Major Assignments (details):

Participation and Attendance (20%): Active, prepared participation in discussion, including occasional brief in-class analytical exercises where students practice applying theoretical concepts to cases or texts in real time.

Theoretical Engagement Papers (30%): Two analytical papers (3-4 pages each) demonstrating different modes of theoretical work. Students select which weeks to submit based on the readings that most interest them; at least two must be completed by Week 09. Each paper should do one of the following: (a) reconstruct a theorist's core argument with precision, identifying key concepts and logical structure; (b) compare how two theorists approach a shared problem; or (c) apply a theoretical framework to analyze a contemporary social phenomenon. One additional paper may be submitted for potential grade replacement.

Theory Debate Exercise (25%): A two-part assignment engaging students in theoretical argumentation. First, students write a position paper (4-5 pages) defending a specific theoretical approach to a problem posed by the instructor (e.g., "Which theoretical framework—Marxist, Weberian, or Durkheimian—best explains contemporary labor precarity?"). Due Week 08. Second, students write a critical response (2-3 pages) engaging with a peer's position paper from an opposing theoretical perspective. Due Week 10. This assignment develops skills in inhabiting theoretical positions, constructing arguments, and engaging in scholarly debate.

Final Analysis Paper (25%): An 8-10 page paper applying sociological theory to a topic of the student's choice. This is a scaffolded assignment: brief proposal identifying theoretical framework and empirical focus (5%, due Week 10); draft analysis (10%, due Week 12); final paper with brief revision reflection (10%, due finals period). Students may choose to write a traditional application paper, a theoretical synthesis tracing a concept across multiple traditions, or a comparative analysis examining how different frameworks illuminate a single case.

Letter Grade Distribution:

≥ 93.00	A	73.00 - 76.99	C
90.00 - 92.99	A-	70.00 - 72.99	C-
87.00 - 89.99	B+	67.00 - 69.99	D+
83.00 - 86.99	B	63.00 - 66.99	D
80.00 - 82.99	B-	60.00 - 62.99	D-
77.00 - 79.99	C+	≤ 59.99	F

Course Policies:

- **Submissions:** All assignments must be submitted to Canvas before the start of class as a PDF. Use standard formatting (12-point Times New Roman, double-spaced, 1-inch margins).

Name files using: `lastname_assignmentname.pdf`.

- **Late work:** Late work will be accepted with a 10% grade deduction for each day late, up to 3 days.
- **Principle of charity:** In discussion and writing, interpret arguments in their strongest plausible form before offering critique.

Course Outline:

Week	Content
Week 01	Introduction to Sociology and Methodology Read: <i>The Sociological Imagination</i> (C. Wright Mills); <i>The Structure of Sociological Theory</i> (Jonathan H. Turner)
Week 02	Classical Social Theory – Karl Marx Read: <i>Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right</i> (Marx); <i>Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts</i> (Marx)
Week 03	Classical Social Theory – Emile Durkheim Read: <i>The Division of Labor in Society</i> (Durkheim); <i>Suicide</i> (Durkheim)
Week 04	Classical Social Theory – Max Weber Read: <i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i> (Weber)
Week 05	Conflict and Power Read: <i>The Power Elite</i> (C. Wright Mills); <i>Wage Labour and Capital</i> (Marx)
Week 06	Social Reproduction Read: <i>Distinction</i> (Bourdieu); <i>The Forms of Capital</i> (Bourdieu)
Week 07	Gender, Feminism, and Social Theory Read: <i>The Second Sex</i> (de Beauvoir); <i>Gender Trouble</i> (Butler)
Week 08	Culture and Hegemony Read: <i>The Prison Notebooks</i> (Gramsci); <i>The Problem of Ideology</i> (Hall) <i>Due: Theory Debate Position Paper</i>
Week 09	Foucault and Control Read: <i>Discipline and Punish</i> (Foucault); <i>The New Jim Crow</i> (Alexander)
Week 10	Postmodernism and Social Theory Read: <i>Simulacra and Simulation</i> (Baudrillard); <i>Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism</i> (Jameson) <i>Due: Theory Debate Critical Response; Final Paper Proposal</i>
Week 11	Imperialism Read: <i>Against Empire</i> (Parenti); <i>Discourse on Colonialism</i> (Césaire)
Week 12	The Frankfurt School Read: <i>Dialectic of Enlightenment</i> (Adorno & Horkheimer) <i>Due: Final Paper Draft</i>
Week 13	Critical Race Theory Read: <i>Mapping the Margins</i> (Crenshaw); <i>The Racial Contract</i> (Charles W. Mills)
Week 14	Antiracism and Class Read: <i>White Fragility</i> (DiAngelo); <i>The Wages of Whiteness</i> (Roediger); <i>No Politics but Class Politics</i> (Reed & Benn Michaels)
Week 15	Finals Week <i>Due: Final Analysis Paper</i>