

SAMPLE course outline only

Course contents will vary if taught by different teachers.

Please refer to the course teacher for the actual course content offered in each term.

## **Advanced Sociological Theory**

### **SOCI6001 – Fall 2020**

#### **Prof. Mark COHEN**

Mondays 11:30 - 14:15  
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### **Course Description**

One of the few constants of anglophone sociology is the first year graduate sociological theory seminar. It is taken by every graduate student in a department, usually together as a cohort. Thus, if there is a shared intellectual legacy for this diverse discipline, it is handed down to each new generation of scholars in courses like this one. The core of this legacy continues, despite myriad projects to revise the “canon” over the years, to be the work of Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim. Any given version of this course (or even of an undergraduate-level Classical Theory lecture) will include other authors as well, but the “others” are considerably more variable than the core trinity.

This is, considering the contemporary discipline as a whole, an admittedly odd situation. The questions pursued, methods used, and positions advanced by these three thinkers can seem quite far removed from most of the work done by sociologists today. Yet, there is a reason for these authors’ position and for the expectation that every student of sociology should be familiar with their work. What they all produced classics *of* were accounts of the profound historical changes that their societies had undergone in the preceding century and were still undergoing in their time. That is to say, they were all, in different ways, theorists of modernity. Today, only a minority of sociologists directly take on “modernity” as a subject of study, but we recognize that the processes that are sometimes called modernization — including capitalist economic development, urbanization, bureaucratization, individualization, secularization, as well as reactions and countermovements to each — are an unavoidable historical background to the particular social settings and phenomena that we do study.

The primary purpose of this course is to introduce students to the classic, and some more contemporary, interpretations of this background. Students will read and discuss major works by Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, supplemented with texts by other authors. Secondly, students will, through a series of exercises leading up to a final paper, gain practice in the essential skill of “reading and writing with theories.”

## **Class Sessions**

### *Reading and Preparation*

This is a graduate-level seminar and as such is reading-intensive. In order to participate in the seminar discussion, it is essential that you read the assigned texts before each meeting. All readings will be made available electronically. However, I would strongly advise you to purchase the major works we will be covering, though whether it makes more sense to acquire Chinese rather than English translations, I will leave up to your own judgement. At some point in your career, you will probably teach them.

### *Seminar Attendance and Participation*

Each session will include a short lecture on key ideas or background, but the rest of the time will be open for discussion, largely centered on the questions and concerns you bring to class, as well as more structured activities I will organize.

Attendance is required and participation in discussion is expected. The purpose of a seminar is to not merely *be informed* about a particular set of ideas but instead to *get practice* actually mobilizing those ideas in arguments. I recognize that for various reasons, people have different levels of comfort engaging in seminar discussions. Nonetheless, I strongly encourage you to push yourself to contribute. I believe you will find it to be easier than you might think.

Exceptionally proactive or unsatisfactory participation in discussion will be considered as a factor in the final grade, potentially bumping it up or down by a fraction of a letter grade.

My strong preference is to hold in-person class meetings, if and when the situation allows it. Nonetheless, even once the university allows in-person classes, if any student cannot attend the course meetings because of personal circumstances related to the pandemic, simultaneous Zoom sessions will be arranged.

In the event that we need to hold remote meetings by Zoom, you are still expected to participate over the audio link. Furthermore, to facilitate interaction, you are required to be able turn on your video. If you face extraordinary circumstances that make you unable to turn on your video and audio, you need to email me to explain and receive an excusal.

For in-person meetings, I will provide handouts with outlines and some important notes and will jot other points up on the board. For Zoom meetings, I will use a shared-screen google doc.

## **Assignments**

The course grade will be calculated as the weighted average of a final paper (75%) and a series of exercises (25%).

### *Final Paper*

The major graded assignment for this course is an essay of roughly 15 to 20 pages. You are free to write on any topic related to the sociological theories we cover in class. A classic term

paper for a theory seminar would involve picking some question that concerns different theorists considered in the course — and one or two who are not, if one wishes — then critically analyzing what they have to say about it, and to each other, and in the process trying to say something of one's own on the question.

However, given the accelerated pace of the research graduate programs at CUHK, I suspect most of you will not feel you have the time to spend on purely theoretical questions unrelated to your research projects. So, as an alternative I encourage you to write a review of the *theoretical* literature relevant to a research project you are working on.

In general, a literature review offers an answer to the following two questions: First, what are the major theoretical perspectives in the subfield you seek to contribute to and on what do they disagree? Second, what “gap” or “puzzle” exists among those perspectives that your research will contribute to resolving? So, in the first place, your paper should address these questions, but because this is a term paper rather than just a literature section of an article, I also want you to address a couple of broader questions. How do these positions relate to the broader currents of sociological theory, classical and contemporary, covered in this course? What are some of the implications of resolving the specific empirical puzzle you will be tackling for the more general theoretical questions that have interested sociologists?

You can think of this as a combination of a first draft of the “theory chapter” of a potential future thesis and practice for writing those parts of a research proposal that entail sketching the theoretical significance of your project.

The final paper will be due by the end of the day on 18 December, uploaded to the course website. See below for formatting guidelines and submission procedures. The papers will be assigned a letter grade according to the following rubric:

- A The paper fully achieves at least **three** of the following criteria, and demonstrates a significant engagement with the remaining **one**:
  1. Clearly identifying its question, convincingly locating its specific connection with the broader theoretical problems of sociology
  2. Cogently and charitably presenting existing approaches to that question in terms of specifications, methods, and conclusions, as well how the different approaches disagree and what points and counterpoints are made amongst them
  3. Setting out an open gap or puzzle within the debate among existing approaches.
  4. Linking the debates within this subfield or topic to the wider theoretical questions in sociology, as seen in the readings for this course
- A- The paper fully achieves at least **two** of the criteria listed for an A paper, displays significant progress towards at least **one** other, and demonstrates a serious attempt at the remaining **one**.
- B+ The paper fully achieves at least **one** of the criteria listed for an A paper, displays significant progress towards at least **one** other, and demonstrates a serious attempt at the remaining **two**.

- B The paper demonstrates either significant progress towards or a serious attempt at **all** the criteria listed for an A paper.
- B- The paper demonstrates either significant progress towards or a serious attempt at **three** of the criteria listed for an A paper.
- C+ The paper demonstrates familiarity with a representative slice of a subfield within sociology, without succeeding in providing much analytical organization to the studies cited or conveying their intellectual significance.
- C The paper reflects the student's having read a substantial number of studies in a particular subfield.
- C- The paper reflects the student's having undertaken a minimally satisfactory amount of reading during the semester.

Note that a B+ is considered a passing grade for PhD students in the Department of Sociology. Mathematically, using CUHK's standard letter/score conversion and assuming an excellent grade on the exercises, the absolute minimum grade on the paper consistent with this passing grade is a B-.

The paper should be submitted electronically through the Blackboard site, in either Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) or OpenDocument (.odt) format. Please also keep in mind the university's policy on academic honesty ([bit.ly/2vRlsyb](http://bit.ly/2vRlsyb)). Following that policy, the final paper should be **separately** submitted to VeriGuide ([bit.ly/2Mrt6Zh](http://bit.ly/2Mrt6Zh)).

All quotations and references to outside sources must be properly cited, using parenthetical citations in ASA style. Guides can be found online (a basic one: [bit.ly/2KTAxB9](http://bit.ly/2KTAxB9)). As an aside, I would recommend that you invest the time in setting up a citation manager to take care of this automatically (see here: [bit.ly/2BcOXzv](http://bit.ly/2BcOXzv)). I've created a shared Zotero library for the major readings in the course ([bit.ly/2P4kuWk](http://bit.ly/2P4kuWk)) though it can easily be exported to another program.

The text should be formatted according to the following guidelines:

- A4 size, 2.5 cm margins on all sides
- Name and title at the top of the first page
- Page numbers included after the first page
- Double spaced: this means that the white space between each line of text is about the same height as the characters themselves. Note that when set up for Chinese, Microsoft Word often has the setting "snap to grid" enabled, which results in spacing *much* wider than what it should be. It is your responsibility to make sure the text is *actually* double spaced
- Times New Roman font, 12 point size

### *Exercises on Reading and Writing with Theories*

Most sociologists are not "theorists." Instead, they engage with theories insofar as they represent the organizing principles of an existing literature, i.e. as partially competing and partially complementary attempts to explain phenomena and answer core questions within a particular social domain. To some extent, sociologists in different specialties engage with the

same, or at least linked, theories (such as the “functionalism” or “conflict theory” perhaps familiar from your undergraduate courses). Often, though, each subfield has its own theoretical schools and debates between them, and even the shared theories take on a specific form and color in each particular domain.

So, professional sociologists are expected to some extent to be familiar with the “big” theories of the discipline, but they are most responsible for being able to speak and write cogently about the theoretical terrain in their particular specialization. This is, however, easier said than done. It requires certain skills of thought and writing that are not usually taught explicitly. Instead, especially in the context of North American PhD programs that often involve three full years of courses, students are expected to just absorb them through observation and practice.

However, rather than three years to endlessly read and discuss and write seminar papers, RPg students in Hong Kong are expected to be finished with a full thesis in three or four years for a PhD, two for an MPhil. As such, I have attempted to formulate a series of exercises that will introduce you to some of the core skills involved in “reading and writing with theories” as is required to review and situate your own research within a literature.

These exercises can be briefly summarized as follows:

1. Close reading of the questions, thesis, and methods of individual texts
2. Summary of a piece of research in different formats appropriate for different contexts
3. Logical presentation of a set of texts as competing perspectives on a shared question

A full description of these exercises is available at [bit.ly/3ghMdzR](http://bit.ly/3ghMdzR).

## Schedule and Reading List

All required readings are available for download. If you print out the readings, PLEASE minimize paper use by printing double-sided, and with 2 pages per side if the PDF pages are small enough (i.e. roughly A5 size or less, 5.8 x 8.3 in / 148 x 210 mm). An annotated list of additional readings on the various topics can be found here: [bit.ly/3hoo3lR](http://bit.ly/3hoo3lR) (NB: this is a work in progress).

7 September            Introduction

### *Part I – The Individual and Society*

14 September            Cooperation and Exchange

- Adam SMITH, *The Wealth of Nations: A Selected Edition* (Oxford University Press, ed. Kathryn Sutherland)
  - Introduction
  - Book I: Chs. 1-3, 7 and 9, and selections of Ch. 10
  - Book II: Ch. 3
  - Book V, Ch. 1 parts I-III

21 September            Social Solidarity and the Division of Labor

- Emile **DURKHEIM**, *Division of Labor in Society*,
  - Introduction
  - Book I
    - Ch. I
    - Ch. II sections I and IV
    - Ch. III sections I and IV
    - Ch. V sections I-II and V
    - Ch. VI sections I and II
    - Ch. VII

28 September                      Social Change, Social Functions, and Their Dysfunction

- Karl **MARX** and Friedrich **ENGELS**, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Section I (pp. 473-91)
- Emile **DURKHEIM**, *Division of Labor in Society*,
  - Prefaces
  - Book II
    - Ch. I (skip section III)
    - Ch. II
  - Book III (entire)
  - Conclusion

5 October                              The Individual against Society

- Alexis de **TOCQUEVILLE**, *Democracy in America*, Vol. II, Book 4, Chs. 6-8  
[bit.ly/2ZiZNYD](http://bit.ly/2ZiZNYD) (google books link; text files also available at Project Gutenberg)
- Karl **MARX**, “Alienation,” from the 1844 Manuscripts (*Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 70-81)
- George **SIMMEL**, “The Metropolis and Mental Life”
- Emile **DURKHEIM**, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Ch. 5 section IV
- Herbert **BLUMER**, “The Sociological Implications of the Thought of George Herbert Mead” (Ch 2 in *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*)

*Part II – The Critical Tradition*

12 October                              Social Power

- Max **WEBER**, *Economy and Society* (edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, University of California Press, 1978), Vol. I, Ch. I section 16 and Ch. III sections 1-2
- Steven **LUKES**, *Power: A Radical View* (2nd Edition, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), Ch. 1

19 October                              Class Society

- Ellen Miexsins **WOOD**, “The Separation of the Economic and the Political in Capitalism” (*New Left Review Series 1*, no. 127, 1981)
- Fred **BLOCK**, “The Ruling Class Does Not Rule” (pp. 51-68 in *Revising State Theory*, Temple University Press, 1987)
- Erik Olin **WRIGHT**, “Understanding Class” (*New Left Review Series 2*, no. 60, 2009)

26 October                              NO CLASS: Public Holiday

## 2 November           The Subjectivity of Social Structure

- Pierre **BOURDIEU**
  - *Practical Reason* (Stanford University Press, 1998), Chs. 1 and 4
  - “The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups” (*Theory and Society* Vol. 14, No. 6, 1985) [doi.org/10.1007/BF00174048](https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00174048)
- William H. **SEWELL, Jr.**, “A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation” (*American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 98, No. 1, 1992) [doi.org/10.1086/229967](https://doi.org/10.1086/229967)
- Vivek **CHIBBER**, “Rescuing Class from the Cultural Turn” (*Catalyst* Vol. 1, No. 1, 2017)

## 9 November           Intersecting Relations of Domination

- Christine **DELPHY**, “The Main Enemy” (in English translation, *Feminist Issues* Vol. 1, No. 1, 1980) [doi.org/10.1007/BF02685557](https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02685557)
- Heidi **HARTMANN**, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism” (*Capital & Class* Vol. 3, No. 2, 1979)
- Susan **FERGUSON**, “Intersectionalist and Social-Reproduction Feminisms” (*Historical Materialism* Vol. 24, No. 2, 2016)

## 16 November        The State as Actor, Field, and Filter

- Max **WEBER**, *Economy and Society* (edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, University of California Press, 1978)
  - Vol. I, Ch. I section 17 and Ch. III sections 3-5
  - Vol. II, Ch. XI sections 1, 4-6, and 8-11
- Pierre **BOURDIEU**, “Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field” (translated in *Sociological Theory* Vol. 12, No. 1, 1994) [www.jstor.org/stable/202032](http://www.jstor.org/stable/202032)
- Claus **OFFE** and Helmut **WIESENTHAL**, “Two Logics of Collective Action: Theoretical Notes on Social Class and Organizational Form” (*Political Power and Social Theory* Vol. 1, 1980)

*Part III — The Problem of a Science of Society*

## 23 November        Are Social Facts “Things”?

- Karl **MARX** and Friedrich **ENGELS**, selections from *The German Ideology* (in *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 149-58 and 172-6)
- Emile **DURKHEIM**, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Introduction, and Chs. 1-2 and 5 (section II only)
- Max **WEBER**
  - Selections from “Objectivity in Social Science” (in *Methodology of the Social Sciences*), pp. 89-93, 101-3, and 106-112
  - *Economy and Society*, Vol. I, Part 1, Ch. I, Section 1: intro paragraph; A, paragraphs 3, 5, 7-9 (through p. 15), 10-11; and B
- Claudio E. **BENZECRY** and Daniel **WINCHESTER**, “Varieties of Microsociology” (pp. 42-74 in *Social Theory Now*, ed. Claudio E. Benzecry, Monika Krause, and Isaac Ariail Reed, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017). **Focus on pp. 42-53 and 66-68**

## 30 November        Sociology, Interests, and Values

- Max **WEBER**, “Science as a Vocation” (pp. 129-56 in *From Max Weber*)
- Emile **DURKHEIM**
  - *Rules of Sociological Method*, Prefaces and Conclusion
  - *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Conclusion, Section II
- C. Wright **MILLS**, *The Sociological Imagination* (Oxford University Press, 1959/2000), Chs. 1 and 6

7 December                      TBA [make-up for Chung Yeung]

- TBA