

SOCI-3411-FA Contemporary Social Thought

Course duration: September 2–December 2, 2025 | Monday & Wednesday 04:00PM–05:30PM

Location: RB-1021

Course D2L website: <https://lakeheadu.desire2learn.com/d2l/login>

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office hours: Monday & Wednesday 02:45PM–03:45PM

COURSE DESCRIPTION/OBJECTIVES

SOCI 3411 is designed as a bridge between an introductory-level course in sociological theory and advanced explorations of specific theoretical issues, problems and debates. Thus, an understanding of foundational theoretical categories and principles is assumed, as well as the competency in classical sociological thought. Students registered in this class should have SOCI 1100, SOCI 2111 and/or SOCI 3410 (or equivalents from other departments) successfully completed.

Building on the theoretical foundations established in SOC 2111 and SOCI 3410, the overall aim of SOC 3411 is to engage students in a closer examination of contemporary theoretical issues and debates, and explore the ways in which modern sociological thought deals with the complexities of, and interrelations between, 'social agency' and 'social structure'—that is to say, people as they exist within their immediate and larger social *milieu*. As well, SOCI 3411 aims to further a theoretical dialogue established in SOCI 2111 and SOCI 3410, and explore the extent to which the contemporary streams of sociological theory constitute a continuation, reworking, and/or critical transcendence of the foundational theoretical insights. To these ends, we will rely on the original theoretical texts and consider the ideas of actual social theorists rather than their secondary interpretations. Your willingness to engage with layered, complex and—at times—obscure writings is an absolute prerequisite for this course.

Our explorations of contemporary sociological theory are grounded in two key assumptions: (1) that social thought and theorizing do not arise in a historical and societal vacuum, and that the best way to understand them is to examine them in the context of the times and age of their making; (2) that the history of sociological theory is a continuous and ever-evolving dialogue between different streams and forms of thinking and theorizing, and that the best way to understand any kind of sociological theory is to situate it and examine its contributions within the context of this dialogue. These two assumptions will inform and guide all aspects of the course.

The primary methods of instruction in SOCI 3411 are formal lectures and 'dialogical encounters' between instructor and students. The main purpose of class lectures is to offer a necessary historical, philosophical and conceptual background for situating and understanding particular contemporary theoretical traditions, while the principal goal of dialogical encounters is to explore, through discussion and/or debate, the actual theoretical ideas discussed in the primary resources. As the course to a significant degree relies on class dialogue and joint clarifications of ideas/issues raised in the original theoretical texts, your willingness to read, think and talk is indispensable for the overall success of the course and for how much you get out of it.

Please note: By signing up for the course, you are committing yourself to following the course schedule and the pace of required work, as well as to keeping up with all course deadlines. There will be no extensions given (other than for exceptional reasons supported by proper official documentation), and you will not be able to hand in your work past the specified time/date.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The objective of the course is to provide students with a comprehensive survey understanding of the principal streams of contemporary sociological theory. By the end of the course, the diligent student will possess a competence in assessing, comparing, and evaluating a broad range of contemporary theoretical perspectives, and be fully prepared to take up the more advanced explorations of specific theoretical issues, problems and debates.

COURSE READINGS

We will be using the following required textbook:

Social Theory: Roots & Branches (6th ed.), edited by Peter Kivisto. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. ISBN: 9780190060398.

Note: the title is also available as an eBook.

All other course materials, information and resources will be posted on our **D2L** course platform.

STUDYING & LEARNING STRATEGY

In addition to your textbook, the on-line course environment contains several aids to help you master the course material and get the most out of your learning experience. You should embrace the following as your studying and learning strategy:

I

- On **Week 1**, you should take time to thoroughly familiarize yourself with the course outline, the D2L course website, and the course textbook. To ease into the course material, you should also do all Week 1 readings indicated in the Course Schedule section (please see below). In addition, you should do a mock Reflective Commentary based on the introductory readings. You will not be handing in this Commentary, but it will be a good practice that will prepare you for doing the 'real' Commentaries.

II

- On **non-exam weeks**, you should start by working through assigned readings from **Roots** section of the textbook (indicated as **Readings: Roots** in the syllabus' Course Schedule) Most of the readings should be familiar from SOCI 2111 and SOCI 3410. Once you are done with the Roots readings, you should proceed with working through assigned readings from **Branches** section of the textbook (indicated as **Readings: Branches** in the syllabus' Course Schedule)
 - Think of the Roots readings as jumping-off points for understanding conceptual foundations of particular contemporary theoretical perspectives and establishing continuity between the 'old' and the 'new' theoretical ideas. Having command over the Roots readings, therefore, will help you with gaining a deeper insight into and having a more nuanced understanding of the specifics of a corresponding contemporary theoretical perspective.
 - Before working through the Branches readings, read 'food-for-thought' questions listed at the end of theory section (to be found under **Section ...** (followed by a corresponding section

number). They will help you get a sense of the material and what you should be focusing on while reading it.

- When you are done with the Branches readings, test your comprehension of the material by going back to the 'food-for-thought' questions and thinking through (and, if you wish, answering) them. If you can imagine yourself providing a 5-10 min. oral answer for each question, you have mastered the core ideas/themes from the Branches readings and are ready to write the commentary.
- If you run into difficulties with the textbook material, you have a couple of tools to help you deal with this: on-line **Discussion Forum**, and **email**.
 - If you are unclear about specific points and/or particular ideas the chapter is discussing, use the on-line **Discussion Forum** to seek help from your classmates. Start a thread in the relevant Topic-Specific Course Issues section of the Forum, and you will most likely get a clarification from another student (**please note**: Do not expect others to provide you with full answers to all of your questions and do your homework for you. Use the Forum after you have made a genuine attempt to understand the material on your own). *Think of the Discussion Forum as an on-line substitute for in-class discussions and use it accordingly.* The Forum will be semi-monitored, and I will make occasional posts when/if I see it fit.
 - Finally, if all else fails, you can **email** me with your specific questions. Please send your emails through Lakehead University account, as all other messages will be ignored. Restrict your questions to specific issues/concerns for which you cannot get help through the Forum. If you have general course questions, post them on the Forum, under General Course Issues, and the replies will be provided there. **Please note**: Do not expect immediate response to your email inquiries. Treat emailing as an on-line equivalent to in-office consultations. If you need urgent response, post your question on the Forum and discuss it with your classmates first.
- Once you are comfortable with the chapter's themes and ideas, proceed with writing your Reflective Commentary (for Commentary details, please see Method of Evaluation section below). Think of the Commentary as a 'proof' that you understand the course material, and that you can engage with it on your own terms through critical reflections. You can also think of it as a self-assessment tool, helping you evaluate your material comprehension. Finally, you should think of the Commentary as your weekly 'building blocks' for getting ready for the exams.

III

- On **exam weeks**, you should start by rereading your study notes and reviewing your Reflective Commentaries. This will get you ready for writing the exam. After the exam is made available on-line, you should read it carefully to make sure that you understand what you are being asked to discuss. You can answer the questions in any order you wish, for as long as you indicate clearly what definition or essay you are answering. A good strategy is to first answer what you feel most comfortable with and then work your way through more challenging questions. You should approach the exam as if you were writing it in-class: do all of your preparation work beforehand and, when you start working on it, focus on the exam without getting distracted by doing/thinking about something else. **Please note**: You will have limited time to complete the exam, so make sure to pace yourself appropriately. Exam submission is time-sensitive, and you will not be allowed to hand in your work past the deadline: *failing to make a timely submission is equivalent to missing an in-class exam.*

METHOD OF EVALUATION

Your performance in the course will be evaluated on the basis of the following:

Midterm Exam (30%): Wednesday, October 8, by 10:00PM

Final Exam (30%): Friday, December 5, by 10:00PM

Reflective Commentaries (40%): due Weekly every Monday, by 04:00PM
(except Week 1, Week 6, Week 7, Week 14)

Both **exams** are a combination of definitions and essay answers. 'Definitions' are paragraph-long explanations of the key theoretical concepts, while 'essays' are longer-form several paragraphs-long discussions of the main ideas and/or themes from the course readings. **Please note:** *There will not be any multiple choice or true/false questions.* There will be some choice regarding the range of possible answers. The material for the exams will be sourced from the course textbook. Exam questions will be made available on the day the exam is due. You will have an assigned length of time (120 min.) to work on and submit your answers through our D2L course website. The final exam is non-cumulative. **Exam submissions are time sensitive and late submissions will not be accepted. Both exams are closed book and students are expected to act in good faith.**

Reflective commentaries are written reflections *on the weekly textbook readings*. The commentaries are due every week on Monday, by 04:00 PM (except Week 1, Week 6, Week 7, and Week 14, when you do not have to hand them in). All commentaries are to be submitted *via* Dropbox, through our D2L course website, as either PDF or Word files. **All submissions are time sensitive and late submissions will not be accepted.** Absolutely no make-up commentaries will be allowed. Under extraordinary circumstances (for which you need to provide appropriate documentation), you can make a *prior* arrangement for submitting the commentary before the due date.

The purpose of the commentary is not to summarize the weekly readings. Rather, it is to (1) offer your own sociological thoughts about the claims presented in the theoretical readings, (2) examine connections/relationships between the Roots and the Branches reading sets, and (3) formulate three discussion questions about what you find to be the most constructive, or problematic, aspects of the claims/points made in the readings. In formulating your questions, you have to provide sociologically relevant rationales for posing them and explain the questions' importance in terms of the key issues, problems and/or questions within a particular theoretical perspective. The best commentaries are usually those that are more analytical than descriptive, that offer your own sociological take on the main issues/themes in the theoretical readings, and that raise some interesting points and questions that can spark a good discussion/debate. **Please note:** Although you are expected to reflect on the Roots readings to the extent necessary to establish connections/relationships to the concepts/ideas in the Branches readings, *the focus of the commentary should be on reflecting on, and posing discussion questions about, the Branches readings.*

The **length of each commentary** should not exceed three pages of typed text, using 1.5 line spacing and 12 pt Times New Roman font. Any external sources used for completing your commentaries need to be referenced using ASA style.

Assignment/Exam Integrity: I understand and agree that:

1. Unless otherwise allowed by the course instructor, I must complete the assignments in this course without the assistance of anyone else.
2. Unless otherwise allowed by the course instructor, I must not access any sources or materials (in print, online, or in any other way) to complete any course exam.

I further understand and agree that, if I violate either of these two rules, or if I provide any false or misleading information about my completion of course assignments or exams, I may be prosecuted under the *Lakehead University Student Code of Conduct – Academic Integrity*, which requires students to act ethically and with integrity in academic matters and to demonstrate behaviours that support the University's academic values.

Please note: the penalty for violating Assignment/Exam Integrity policy on a reflective commentary is failing the commentary in question; the penalty for violating Assignment/Exam Integrity policy on an exam is failing the course. For more details, please see **A Note on Plagiarism** below.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The following grading scale will be applied in evaluating your course work:

90-100% (A+)

Outstanding Performance: superb mastery of the principles and materials treated in the course; exceptional fluency in communicating that mastery and a high degree of originality and independence in applying material and principles.

80-89% (A)

Excellent Performance: comprehensive in-depth knowledge of the principles and materials treated in the course; fluency in communicating that knowledge and originality and independence in applying material and principles.

70-79% (B)

Good Performance: thorough understanding of the breadth of materials and principles treated in the course and ability to apply and communicate that understanding effectively.

60-69% (C)

Satisfactory Performance: basic understanding of the breadth of principles and material treated in the course and an ability to apply and communicate that understanding competently.

50-59% (D)

Marginal Performance: adequate understanding of most principles and material treated in the course, but significant weakness in some areas and in the ability to apply and communicate that understanding.

40-49% (E)

Failure: inadequate or fragmentary knowledge of the principles and material treated in the in the course, or failure to complete the work required in the course.

1-39% (F)

Failure: inadequate or fragmentary knowledge of the principles and material treated in the in the course, or failure to complete the work required in the course.

0% (F)

Academic Dishonesty: demonstrable violation of the academic rules of conduct as defined by Lakehead University academic standards.

Your grade is a reflection of your performance in the course, which is the only criterion for your final course mark. *There will be no rescaling of grades at the end of the course*, and no adjustments except for legitimate clerical errors. Please take note of that.

According to Lakehead University defined standards, grade 0-49% constitutes unsatisfactory academic performance and means failing the course; 50-59% is a minimally accepted level of performance for passing the course, while 90-100% constitutes outstanding performance. For details on evaluation and grading see your Lakehead *University 2025-2026 Academic Calendar*, section University Regulations (V Standing).

If you wish to review your course work, you can do so within *one week from the day your mark* has been posted.

A Note on Plagiarism: Lakehead University defines plagiarism as follows:

1. Plagiarism of ideas as where an idea of an author or speaker is incorporated into the body of an assignment as though it were the writer's idea, i.e. no credit is given the person through referencing or footnoting or end noting.
2. Plagiarism of words occurs when phrases, sentences, tables or illustrations of an author or speaker are incorporated into the body of a writer's own, i.e. no quotations or indentations (depending on the format followed) are present but referencing or footnoting or end noting is given.
3. Plagiarism of ideas and words as where words and an idea(s) of an author or speaker are incorporated into the body of a written assignment as though they were the writer's own words and ideas, i.e. no quotations or indentations (depending on format followed) are present and no referencing or footnoting or end noting is given.

Penalties for plagiarism are strictly enforced and are as follows:

1. The minimum penalty for a candidate found guilty of plagiarism, or of cheating on any part of a course, will be a zero for the work concerned
2. A candidate found guilty of cheating on a formal examination or a test, or of serious or repeated plagiarism, or of unofficially obtaining a copy of an examination paper before the examination is scheduled to be written, will receive zero for the course and may be expelled from the University.

For more details, see your Lakehead *University 2025-2026 Academic Calendar*, section University Regulations (IX Academic Misconduct). Also, see "Student Code of Conduct – Academic Integrity".

GENERAL POLICIES

Email: Emailing is to be regarded as an official form of communication. Only emails sent through Lakehead University account will be read and replied to. All other email messages will be ignored.

Cell phones: Cell phones are to be turned off during lectures (except under exceptional circumstances in which approval has been granted by the instructor).

Notebooks/portables: Use of notebook computers and/or portable devices during lectures is **not allowed** (except under exceptional circumstances in which approval has been granted by the instructor).

Audio/video devices: Use of audio/video recording devices during lectures is **not allowed** (except under exceptional circumstances in which approval has been granted by the instructor).

Discussion Forum: This is an on-line extension of an in-class interaction and should be treated as such. Please use appropriate language and tone when participating. Crude, disrespectful, inflammatory, offensive and/or confrontational Forum participation will not be tolerated and will result in the ban from the Forum.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Class attendance is not mandatory but is highly recommended. If you decide to attend, you are expected to arrive on time and be respectful to other students in class. Disruptive and otherwise inappropriate behaviour in the classroom will not be tolerated. Students engaged in such behaviour will be dealt with accordingly.

DISCLAIMERS

Disclaimer I: The information in this syllabus is subject to change. Any changes will be communicated through D2L course website, in the Announcements & News section.

Disclaimer II: By taking SOCI 3411 you acknowledge that you have read and understood—and are in agreement with—the course contents and policies, as outlined and explained in this syllabus.

COURSE SCHEDULE

(subject to change; any changes will be announced through D2L website)

Week 1 (Sept. 2-5)	<i>COURSE INTRODUCTION</i> READINGS: CLASSICAL FOUNDATIONS • “Social Theory: Classical Foundation and Contemporary Developments” (pp. xxiii-xxxv) • “The German Ideology”, by Karl Marx (with Friedrich Engels) (pp. 10-13) • “What is a Social Fact”, by Emile Durkheim (pp. 32-37)
Week 2 (Sept. 8-12)	<i>SYMBOLIC INTERACTION, PHENOMENOLOGY, AND ETHNOMETHODOLOGY</i> READINGS: ROOTS • “Social and Individual Aspects of Mind”, by Charles Horton Cooley (pp. 124-127) • “The Fusion of the “I” and the “Me” in Social Activities”, by George Herbert Mead (pp. 138-142) READINGS: BRANCHES • Section VII (pp. 169-209)
Week 3 (Sept. 15-19)	<i>EXCHANGE THEORY AND RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY</i> READINGS: ROOTS • “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority”, by Max Weber (pp. 71-77) • “What Pragmatism Means”, by William James (pp. 128-133) READINGS: BRANCHES • Section VIII (pp. 210-240)
Week 4 (Sept. 22-26)	<i>FUNCTIONALISM, STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONALISM, SYSTEMS THEORY</i> READINGS: ROOTS • “On Mechanical and Organic Solidarity”, by Emile Durkheim (pp. 28-31) • “The Stranger”, by Georg Simmel (pp. 98-101) READINGS: BRANCHES • Section VI (pp. 145-168)
Week 5 (Sept. 29 - Oct. 3)	<i>THEORIES OF THE STATE, ECONOMY, AND CIVIL SOCIETY</i> READINGS: ROOTS • “Manifesto of the Communist Party”, by Karl Marx (pp. 14-21) • “Class, Status, Party”, by Max Weber (pp. 78-83) • “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority”, by Max Weber ((pp. 71-77) READINGS: BRANCHES • Section XII (pp. 359-412)

Week 6 (Oct. 6-10)	MIDTERM EXAM: WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 8
Week 7 (Oct. 13-17)	FALL STUDY BREAK: NO CLASSES
Week 8 (Oct. 20-24)	<i>CRITICAL THEORY</i> READINGS: ROOTS • “Alienate Labor”, by Karl Marx (pp. 4-9) • “Bureaucracy”, by Max Weber (pp. 65-69) • “Conspicuous Consumption”, by Thorstein Veblen (pp. 120-123) • “Democracy and Human Nature”, by John Dewey (pp. 134-136) READINGS: BRANCHES • Section X (pp. 290-315)
Week 9 (Oct. 27-31)	<i>FEMINIST/GENDER THEORIES</i> READINGS: ROOTS • “On Marriage”, by Harriet Martineau (pp. 103-105) • “The Dependence of Women”, by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (pp. 116-118) READINGS: BRANCHES • Section IX (pp. 241-289)
Week 10 (Nov. 3-7)	<i>THEORIES OF RACE, ETHNICITY AND NATIONALISM</i> READINGS: ROOTS • “Of Our Spiritual Strivings”, by W. E. B. Du Bois (pp. 112-114) READINGS: BRANCHES • Section XI (pp. 316-357)
Week 11 (Nov. 10-14)	<i>WORLD SYSTEMS AND GLOBALIZATION THEORIES</i> READINGS: ROOTS • “Note on the Notion of Civilization”, by Emile Durkheim (with Marcel Mauss) (available on D2L) • “Civilization and Its Discontents”, by Sigmund Freud (available on D2L) READINGS: BRANCHES • Section XV (pp. 502-536)

Week 12 (Nov. 17-21)	<i>THEORIES OF MODERNITY</i> READINGS: ROOTS • “The Spirit of Capitalism”, by Max Weber (55-64) • “The Metropolis and Mental Life”, by Georg Simmel (pp. 90-97) • “Anomic Suicide”, by Émile Durkheim (pp. 38-44) READINGS: BRANCHES • Section XIII (pp. 413-461)
Week 13 (Nov. 24-28)	<i>FRENCH CRITICAL THEORY: STRUCTURALISM AND POSTSTRUCTURALISM</i> READINGS: ROOTS • “The Spirit of Capitalism”, by Max Weber (55-64) • “Fashion”, by Georg Simmel (pp. 85-89) READINGS: BRANCHES • Section XIV (pp. 462-501)
Week 14 (Dec. 1-5)	FINAL EXAM: FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5