

# SOCI-3411-WA Contemporary Sociological Theory

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**Classes (days/times):** January 4, 2016 – April 4, 2016; Tuesday & Thursday, 11:30 AM-1:00 PM

**Location:** RB-2024

**Instructor:** Dr. Dalibor Mišina

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**office hours:** Tuesday and Thursday, 1:15 PM-2:15 PM, or by appointment

**Course website:** <http://misina.ca/sociology> (file password: sociology)

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## 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 basic 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 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 original theoretical texts and consider the ideas of actual social theorists rather than their secondary interpretations. Your willingness to engage with layered, complex and — more often than not — obscure writings is an absolute prerequisite for this course.

The primary methods of instruction in SOCI 3411 will be 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 objective of dialogical encounters is to explore, through discussion and/or debate, the actual theoretical ideas discussed in the primary resources. As the course in large measure 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.

## 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* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.), edited by Peter Kivisto. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. ISBN-10: 0199937125 | ISBN-13: 978-0199937127.

As the course in great measure relies on your active interest and participation, you are expected to have read your reading assignments *before* coming to class.

All additional course resources will be available at: <http://misina.ca/sociology>.

## METHOD OF EVALUATION

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

### OPTION 1

**Midterm Exam** (25%)  
**Final Exam** (30%)  
**Reflective Commentaries** (25%)  
**Presentation** (10%)  
**Class Participation** (10%)

### OPTION 2

**Midterm Exam** (25%)  
**Final Exam** (30%)  
**Reflective Commentaries** (25%)  
**Class Participation** (20%)

Both **exams** will be take-home. The midterm will be handed out on Thursday, February 11 and will be due on Tuesday, February 23. The final will be handed out on Thursday, March 31 (our last class) and will be due on the following Thursday, April 7. The exams will test not simply your mastery of theoretical facts and concepts but also — and more importantly — your ability to synthesize our course material and to construct an argument concisely. The exams will be based on the course readings, lectures, and anything else presented during our class time. **Late submissions will absolutely not be accepted.**

**Reflective commentary** is a written reflection on the weekly readings. With the exception of Week 1 and Week 7 (when you do not have to submit it), the commentary **is due at the beginning of every Tuesday class** (this is **not negotiable**). The purpose of the commentary is to (1) offer your own thoughts about sociological claims presented in the theoretical readings, (2) examine connections/relationships between the 'roots' and the 'branches' reading sets, and (2) 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 explain their importance in terms of the key issues, problems and/or questions within a particular theoretical perspective. Please keep in mind that **reflective commentaries are not about summarizing the articles** but about offering your own sociological take on the main points raised in the theoretical 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. Please corner-staple your assignments and do not use paper clips, plastic covers or binders. In the interest of environmental responsibility, avoid using a cover page for your assignments and put your name and your student ID number in the top left corner of page 1.

The purpose of a **presentation** (for **Option 1**) is to provide a brief summary of the theoretical readings, isolate their most important points/arguments, and offer critical reflections on their principal lines of argument. We will use the presentation as a jumping off point for our class discussion/debates. The presenter should be able to situate the ideas in the articles within the corresponding theoretical perspective and also be prepared to engage other students' questions and comments during our class discussion. The presentation should not exceed 15-20 min. in length: no more than 5 min. should be spent on a brief summary of the articles' main points and arguments; additional 10-15 min. should be used for the critical assessment of the readings.

**Important:** The purpose of the presentation is not to regurgitate uncritically the contents of the articles but to initiate a distinctive kind of learning process through dialogue and exchange of ideas with your classmates. Thus, the focus should be not on presenting a summary of absolutely everything mentioned in the articles but on discussing — in your own terms and the level you feel comfortable at — the readings' most pertinent and thought-provoking aspects. A very good presentation may not necessarily be the one that is most pedantic but the one that is most successful in generating constructive discussion and eliciting the reaction from your audience. Also, the presentation that is not read but, as it were, narrated is generally more engaging. Strive to communicate with rather than read to your audience. If you must read, remember that reading a page of text requires about 3 minutes. Finally, keep in mind that presentations are *not* designed to substitute for other students reading the articles. Thus in preparing your exposition you should presume that other students are familiar with the readings and their main arguments.

We will make our class time as interactive and dialogical as possible. Informed **participation** is therefore highly encouraged. In order to be able to take part in the class dialogue you should be well prepared for each of our class sessions by doing the assigned readings and writing your commentary, and by being willing to share your comments and questions with other students. Participation mark will thus reflect your *active and meaningful* input in our class discussions. *Passive classroom presence does not warrant any participation marks.*

## 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 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 2015-2016 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 exam marks* have been posted.

## 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.

## GENERAL POLICIES

**Academic Statement:** Each student is asked to submit a brief statement about his or her academic background as it relates to the Sociology program in general and this course in particular. The statement should be accompanied by either your recent photograph or a photocopy of your Lakehead University student ID card.

**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).

## COURSE AGREEMENT

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

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**Disclaimer:** The information in this Course Outline is subject to change; any changes will be announced in class.

**COURSE SCHEDULE** (subject to change; any changes will be announced in class)

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| <p><b>Week 1</b><br/>(January 4-8)</p>   | <p style="text-align: center;"><i>COURSE INTRODUCTION &amp; SYLLABUS WALKTHROUGH</i></p> <p><b>READINGS: CLASSICAL FOUNDATIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Social Theory: Classical Foundation and Contemporary Developments” (pp. xxi-xxxiii)</li> <li>• “The German Ideology”, by Karl Marx (with Friedrich Engels) (pp. 11-14)</li> <li>• “What is a Social Fact”, by Emile Durkheim (pp. 44-49)</li> <li>• “‘Objectivity’ in Social Science and Social Policy”, by Max Weber (68-73)</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Week 2</b><br/>(January 11-15)</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><i>SYMBOLIC INTERACTION, PHENOMENOLOGY, AND ETHNOMETHODOLOGY</i></p> <p><b>READINGS: ROOTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Social and Individual Aspects of Mind”, by Charles Horton Cooley (pp. 165-169)</li> <li>• “The Fusion of the “I” and the “Me” in Social Activities”, by George Herbert Mead (pp. 190-194)</li> </ul> <p><b>READINGS: BRANCHES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section IX (pp. 250-280)</li> </ul>                            |
| <p><b>Week 3</b><br/>(January 18-22)</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><i>EXCHANGE THEORY AND RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY</i></p> <p><b>READINGS: ROOTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority”, by Max Weber (pp. 91-97)</li> <li>• “What Pragmatism Means”, by William James (pp. 173-178)</li> </ul> <p><b>READINGS: BRANCHES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section X (pp. 281-327)</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Week 4</b><br/>(January 25-29)</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><i>FUNCTIONALISM AND SYSTEMS THEORY</i></p> <p><b>READINGS: ROOTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “On Mechanical and Organic Solidarity”, by Emile Durkheim (pp. 39-43)</li> <li>• “The Stranger”, by Georg Simmel (pp. 125-128)</li> </ul> <p><b>READINGS: BRANCHES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section VII (pp. 197-220)</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Week 5</b><br/>(February 1-5)</p>  | <p style="text-align: center;"><i>CONFLICT THEORIES</i></p> <p><b>READINGS: ROOTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Manifesto of the Communist Party”, by Karl Marx (pp. 15-22)</li> <li>• “Class, Status, Party”, by Max Weber (pp. 98-103)</li> </ul> <p><b>READINGS: BRANCHES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section VIII (pp. 221-249)</li> </ul>   |

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| <p><b>Week 6</b><br/>(February 8-12)</p>  | <p style="text-align: center;"><i>CRITICAL THEORY</i></p> <p><b>READINGS: ROOTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Alienate Labor”, by Karl Marx (pp. 3-10)</li> <li>• “Bureaucracy”, by Max Weber (pp. 85-90)</li> <li>• “Conspicuous Consumption”, by Thorstein Veblen (pp. 155-158)</li> <li>• “The Eclipse of the Public”, by John Dewey (pp. 179-182)</li> </ul> <p><b>READINGS: BRANCHES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section XIII (pp. 434-463)</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Week 7</b><br/>(February 15-19)</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>FAMILY DAY/FEBRUARY BREAK: NO CLASSES</b></p>  |
| <p><b>Week 8</b><br/>(February 22-26)</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><i>FEMINIST THEORIES</i></p> <p><b>READINGS: ROOTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “On Marriage”, by Harriet Martineau (pp. 136-140)</li> <li>• “The Dependence of Women”, by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (pp. 151-154)</li> <li>• “Utilization of Women in City Government”, by Jane Addams (pp. 159-164)</li> </ul> <p><b>READINGS: BRANCHES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section XI (pp. 328-379)</li> </ul>                     |
| <p><b>Week 9</b><br/>(Feb 29-March 4)</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><i>THEORIES OF RACE, ETHNICITY AND NATIONALISM</i></p> <p><b>READINGS: ROOTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The Adventurer”, by Georg Simmel (110-115)</li> <li>• “The Conservation of Races”, by W. E. B. Du Bois (pp. 146-150)</li> </ul> <p><b>READINGS: BRANCHES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section XII (pp. 380-433)</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Week 10</b><br/>(March 7-11)</p>    | <p style="text-align: center;"><i>WORLD SYSTEMS AND GLOBALIZATION THEORY</i></p> <p><b>READINGS: ROOTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Note on the Notion of Civilization”, by Emile Durkheim (with Marcel Mauss) (pp. 57-59)</li> <li>• “Civilization and Its Discontents”, by Sigmund Freud (pp. 183-189)</li> </ul> <p><b>READINGS: BRANCHES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section XVI (pp. 532-577)</li> </ul>  |

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| <p><b>Week 11</b><br/>(March 14-18)</p>      | <p style="text-align: center;"><i>CONTEMPORARY THEORIES OF MODERNITY</i></p> <p><b>READINGS: ROOTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The Spirit of Capitalism”, by Max Weber (74-84)</li> <li>• “The Metropolis and Mental Life”, by Georg Simmel (pp. 116-124)</li> </ul> <p><b>READINGS: BRANCHES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section XIV (pp. 464-493)</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Week 12</b><br/>(March 21-25)</p>      | <p style="text-align: center;"><i>STRUCTURALISM, POSTSTRUCTURALISM, AND POSTMODERNITY</i></p> <p><b>READINGS: ROOTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Fashion”, by Georg Simmel (pp. 104-109)</li> <li>• “The Madman”, by Friedrich Nietzsche (pp. 170-172)</li> </ul> <p><b>READINGS: BRANCHES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section XV (pp. 494-531)</li> </ul>      |
| <p><b>Week 13</b><br/>(March 28-April 1)</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><i>FURTHER NEW DIRECTIONS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL THEORY</i></p> <p><b>READINGS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section XVII (pp. 578-645)</li> </ul>  |