

Sociology 3410FDE: Social Thought
Fall, 2026

Pre-requisites: Soc 1100 and Soc 2111

Class Location: Zoom meetings

Class Time: Mon/Wed 11:30am-1:00pm

Sociology Website: <http://sociology.lakeheadu.ca>

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It is important to understand the key theoretical ideas of classical sociology in order to understand the intellectual foundations of the contemporary discipline. In this course, we will encounter those who are regarded to be the most important classical theorists in sociology, by reading original excerpts from some of their most important works. We begin reading the work of a number of intellectual precursors to the tradition, such as Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Adam Smith, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Harriet Martineau. We then shift our focus to the famous “big three” theorists of our tradition, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim. We emphasize careful reading of short pieces of original sources, while working collaboratively to draw out the most important themes and ask analytical questions.

GOALS OF THE COURSE

The goals of the course can be broken into four major emphases: (1) to gain a strong familiarity with classical sociological ideas by reading the arguments in their original form; (2) analyze, compare, and critically evaluate abstract theoretical ideas; and (3) accurately articulate and present these ideas in both presentations and written form.

With these goals in mind, you will be evaluated on the following:

(1) Group Assignments (best 5)	(25%)
(2) Seminar Participation	(10%)
(3) Professional Correspondence	(5%)
(4) Writing Assignment (article review or generative AI)	(10%)
(5) Theoretical Contributions Paper	(40%)
(6) Theoretical Contributions Presentation	(10%)
Final = (100%)	

REQUIRED READINGS

(1) *Classical Sociological Theory, 4th Edition* (Edited by Craig Calhoun, Joseph Gerteis, James Moody, Steven Pfaff, and Indermohan Virk). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing. 2022. This is available to purchase at the university bookstore, or \$58.95+tax at Amazon.ca.

EXPLANATION OF EVALUATIONS:

(1) Group Assignments (25%)

Once every few classes, I will pose a theoretical question after the lecture, for you to work on as a group of 3-4 people. After debating the issues, you will appoint a secretary to write down your answers. There are no specific dates set aside for these assignments, so it pays to attend regularly, and keep up with the readings, to prepare. If you miss a group assignment, there is no way to make it up, but I will only count your best 5 assignments from the term.

(2) Seminar Participation (10%)

With the advent of new technologies, it is all the more important that students develop their reading comprehension skills. You should thus come to class prepared by having done the reading and being able to discuss the key ideas and themes. Try to contribute at least one question, answer, or comment in each class in order to earn top marks here. Quality is more important than quantity, to encourage more constructive and less tangential dialogues.

(3) Professional Correspondence: (5%)

Part of university is about learning to develop a more professional sense of self, and to gain confidence communicating in a professional manner. As such, your written correspondence with me through email and D2L should be crafted professionally (i.e. avoid beginning sentences with “Hey” etc, avoid slang, and keep sentences grammatically correct and to the point).

(4) Writing Assignment (10%) – DUE October 7

Please choose ONE of the following:

Option 1: Article Review

Choose an article from *The American Journal of Sociology* that was published prior to 1930. Provide a 2-page summary and critical review of your chosen article, including some reflections of how this argument might be in part a product of the time and place that it was written. You are expected to cite the article (including page numbers to reference specific ideas / quotes) and include it in the references section. Times new roman 12 point font, double-spaced format, using ASA citation style.

Option 2: Generative AI assignment

Classical theory is still read and used today in part because it still offers rich ideas for use in the study of contemporary society. Use google gemini to do a mock interview with a relevant major theorist discussed in this course, about what their thoughts are about the rapid expansion of generative AI throughout our modern economy and society. Provide the full interview transcript. You might start with the broad question, and then proceed with up to ten follow-ups and probing questions, depending on the answers. Using this transcript as your data source, write a thematic 2-page summary of the discussion, highlighting the main arguments presented and key questions this theorist would ask about generative AI, and a critical reflection of how successful this exercise was in generating ideas and if some theoretical possibilities were missed. There is no need for references (other than citing gemini), but strong writing and a good logical structure are expected. Please use times new roman 12 point font, double-spaced.

(5) Theoretical Contributions Paper (40%) – DUE December 10

Write an essay on the major contributions of an important classical theorist (writing prior to 1950), which has not been covered in the course. The scope of the contributions are up to you (an abstract idea, broad area of inquiry, specific topic of interest, etc). Just make sure to choose a scope that allows for an 8 page essay + references. Please use times new roman 12 point font, double-spaced format, using ASA citation style. It pays to clear your topic with me before you get started.

(6) Theoretical Contributions Presentation (10%)

You will be expected to provide a short presentation based on your essay in the final weeks of class. The presentation should run for no more than 10 minutes, to allow a few minutes for questions from the class, and to enable the next presentation to be readied. We will assign people to presentation dates as soon as feasible. Powerpoint is encouraged to help with a zoom-based presentation format. The idea is for students to “test out” their paper in presentation format, and receive feedback that might help revise their paper before final submission.

IMPORTANT NOTE ON GENERATIVE AI USE

Generative AI can be a powerful research tool, and I do not discourage its use in the learning process and in our research workflows. Indeed, AI can be useful as a tutor to bounce ideas off and explore possibilities, to seek out sources and data, generate synopses and track ideas through time, and draw up handy concept maps, etc. However, it is important to use AI ethically (i.e. do not let it do your thinking and writing composition for you, which is plagiarism). For every assignment you submit, you must also submit a form that (a) details how, if at all, you made use of AI in developing the assignment; and (b) checking a box that promises no unethical use of AI in the submission. *If I am able to detect any unethical generative AI use, it will result in a zero grade for that assignment.*

Generative artificial intelligence systems are capable of generating text, images, or other media in response to prompts. GenAI tools can provide valuable assistance and support in academic work. However, it is essential to use them responsibly and ethically. The following information and guidelines apply to the use of AI-based tools in this course:

- a. **Student Responsibility** – It is the responsibility of the student to understand the limitations of AI-based tools. While these tools can provide suggestions and insights, final decisions and critical thinking should come from the student's own understanding and effort. Before submitting, review your work with this in mind. If you don't understand what type of GenAI usage is appropriate, ask the course instructor for clarification.
- b. **Formative Usage** – In this class, you may use GenAI for formative, but not summative, work. That means it can be used as a “possibility engine” (brainstorm tool), a “study buddy,” a “collaboration coach,” a “guide on the side,” a “personal tutor,” a “co-designer,” etc. to help you learn course content, but it cannot be used as the primary vehicle for any work that is submitted for marks or evaluation.

- c. **Plagiarism** – Since [writing and critical thinking ability] are learning outcomes of this course, all work submitted for evaluation must be the student's original work. Using the work of others (including content curated/generated by AI) without proper citation is considered plagiarism.
- d. **Citation of Sources** – If you use material generated by an AI program for an assignment in this course, it must be cited like any other source (with due consideration for the quality of the source, which may be judged as poor). Failure to do so will be considered a violation of academic integrity. [See Student Code of Conduct – Academic Integrity.](#)

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

September 9

Welcome to the Class

September 14

Thomas Hobbes “Of the Natural Condition and the Commonwealth”

September 16

Jean-Jacques Rousseau “Of the Social Contract”

September 21

Adam Smith “The Wealth of Nations”

September 23

No class / Free day (research and develop writing assignment)

September 28

Harriett Martineau “Society in America”

September 30

No class (Truth and Reconciliation Day)

October 5

Karl Marx “The German Ideology,” and “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844”

October 7

Karl Marx “Manifesto of the Communist Party”

**** Writing Assignment Due!! ****

October 12-14

***** **READING WEEK** *****

October 19

Karl Marx “Wage Labour and Capital”

October 21

Karl Marx “Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret thereof” and “The General Formula for Capital”

October 26

Max Weber “Objectivity in Social Science,” and “Basic Sociological Terms”

October 28

Max Weber “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism”

November 2

Max Weber “The Distribution of Power within the Political Community” and “The Types of Legitimate Domination”

November 4

Max Weber “Bureaucracy”

November 9

Emile Durkheim “The Division of Labor in Society”

November 11

Emile Durkheim “Rules of Sociological Method”

November 16

Emile Durkheim “Suicide”

November 18

Emile Durkheim “The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life”

November 23

Final Assignment Presentations

November 25

Final Assignment Presentations

November 30

Final Assignment Presentations

December 2

Final Assignment Presentations

December 4

Final Assignment Presentations

December 7

Final Assignment Presentations

December 10 – ** Final Essay Due!! **

THANK YOU! HAVE A NICE WINTER BREAK!