

American Society: how it really works

Sociology 125 – Fall 2020 – University of Wisconsin, Department of Sociology

Professor Joseph Conti
jconti@ssc.wisc.edu

Office hours: email for an appointment
Canvas URL: <https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/214946>

Course Description. What kind of country do we live in? This course provides an extended answer to the question of what kind of a country we live in. It also explores the implications of that answer for understanding, and making progress in solving, some of the social problems that confront America today.

To approach the question of what kind of country we live in, this class will be organized around three key values that most Americans believe our society should realize:

- *Efficiency* – the idea that the economy allocates scarce resources in ways that reflect social values, is driven by “free choice” among consumers, and uses inputs to maximum advantage
- *Fairness* – the idea that we live in a land of equal opportunity and justice, without unfair privileges and disadvantages.
- *Democracy* – the idea that our public decisions reflect the collective will of equal citizens rather than those of powerful elites

Our basic question is: *To what degree does contemporary American society realize these values, and how might it do a better job?* A second but important question for us is: *How do social scientists go about answering such questions?*

The course is organized into three large sections corresponding to each of the three values. Within each section we will examine what the value means and how it is expressed in contemporary American society. The goal of this course is to provide you with “tools” for thinking about contemporary American society that will help you think through the complexity and make sense of what is important.

This is a three-credit honors course. We will have two 75-minute synchronous class periods (either in-person or online) each week over the fall semester and carries the standard expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, studying, watching videos etc.) for about three hours out of classroom for every class period.

Reading. There is one required book for the course:

- *American Society: How it Really Works*, by Erik Olin Wright and Joel Rogers (2nd edition. W.W. Norton, 2015). It is important to obtain the second edition. It is available at the University Bookstore.

A reserve copy of *American Society* will be available at the Helen C. White Library.

Students are expected to have completed the readings and watched the videos prior to class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to participate in every class having completed the readings. If you have a problem with *any* kind with attendance, let me know.

Masks and social distancing are required during in-person meetings.
Please keep informed and follow [Dane County public health requirements](#).

Policy Brief. Students will craft a policy brief that identifies and describes an issue of public concern and then proposes a set of policies designed to remedy the problem. Identification and description of the problem, including the mechanisms involved in or reasons for the problem, should be well researched, drawing on class materials as well as other high-quality sources. Proposed policies should be “reasonable,” by which I mean policies that could be enacted in theory even if in the current political climate, it seems unlikely. Briefs should also provide a “policy analysis,” which considers the likely effectiveness of the proposed solutions, any possible negative repercussions or side-effects, and what kind of political/cultural/economic conditions that would have to prevail for the policy to be effective. You may wish to think about what it would take to create the right conditions.

Evaluation will be based on the following criteria:

- A clearly defined, well-researched problem, including an analysis of the mechanisms through which the problem is created.
- Use of appropriate evidence.
- Persuasive connection between the problem and proposed policy.
- Clarity and organization of writing.
- “Details:” citations, proofreading, evidence of effort and care, etc.

The policy brief will be 8 pages, double-spaced, normal fonts and margins. Don’t game the document set-up. This assignment is worth 15% of your final grade and will be due the last day of class.

Exams. There will be two mid-terms and one final. The exams will be a combination of short-answer and short essay questions. The exams are *not* cumulative. Each exam is worth 15% of your final grade. All will be online.

Attendance, Participation. Discussion is a core part of this class. Students are required to attend class (online and off) having read the assigned material for the day. If you have difficulty with speaking (and sometimes chatting) in discussions, please arrange to speak with me.

There will be other activities included in your participation grade, including worksheets, discussion posts and homework assignments. These won’t be terribly onerous tasks; they are designed to foster discussion and peer-to-peer learning.

Quizzes Occasional short online quizzes will be given to assess reading comprehension. If you have read, you will find these quizzes easy. They are *due prior to class time* on the day that they are assigned. Quizzes are worth 10% of your final grade.

Grading. Your grade will be determined by performance on the exams, final paper, and attendance and participation.

Exams: 45% (15% each)

Policy Brief: 15%

Participation and attendance: 30%

Quizzes: 10%

This is the grading scale employed in the class:

A = 94%-100%, AB = 88%-93%, B = 83%-87%, BC = 78%-82%, C = 70%-77%,

D = 60%-69%, F = 59% or below.

LECTURE AND READING SCHEDULE FOR SOCIOLOGY 125

IP= In-person, OL=online

SEPTEMBER 3 INTRODUCTION (IP)

- W/R, Chapter 1

SEPTEMBER 8 WHAT KIND OF A COUNTRY IS THIS? (IP)

- W/R, Chapter 2
- C. Wright Mills – excerpt from *The Sociological Imagination*

PART I. CAPITALISM

SEPTEMBER 10 THE MARKET: HOW IT IS SUPPOSED TO WORK (IP)

- W/R Chapter 3
- Friedman, Milton and Rose Friedman. 1980. “The Power of the Market” pp-9-37 in *Free to Chose: a Personal Statement*. San Diego: Harvest Books.
- Excerpt from Ayn Rand: “From Roark’s Speech”
- Quiz

SEPTEMBER 15 THE MARKET: HOW IT ACTUALLY WORKS (IP)

- W/R, Chapter 4
- Watch: Two public service announcements

SEPTEMBER 17 THE ENVIRONMENT (IP)

- W/R, Chapter 5

SEPTEMBER 22 TRANSPORTATION (OL)

- W/R, Chapter 6
- Watch: The Price of Gas
- Watch: Judge Doom’s Highway Proposal
- Quiz

SEPTEMBER 24 CONSUMERISM (OL)

- W/R, Chapter 7
- Twitchell – “Two Cheers for Materialism”

- Watch: “Hungry Planet”

SEPTEMBER 29 HEALTH CARE (OL)

- W/R, Chapter 8
- Steven Brill, “Hate Obamacare, Love Obamacare”
- Watch” “ACA and AHCA Compared”
- Quiz

OCTOBER 1 FINANCE (OL)

- W/R: Chapter 9
- Quiz

OCTOBER 6 HIGH ROAD CAPITALISM (IP)

- W/R, Chapter 10
- Optional: “Building a High Road Agenda: Examples from Wisconsin” (read pages: 1-6, 16-33). *The point of this reading is to describe efforts to implement the more abstract discussion of high road capitalism found in the Wright and Rogers text. The key questions have to do with feasibility: is it really possible to build a high road economy? What are the real obstacles? Use this reading to reflect on the claims made in the W/R text.*

PART II. INEQUALITY

OCTOBER 8 THINKING ABOUT FAIRNESS (OL)

- W/R, Chapter 11
- Hochschild – “Strangers in their Own Land.” Chapter 9**

** The PDF includes chapter 1, which describes the motivation, methods, and field site for the study. It is not required but may provide helpful background information on Hochschild and her study.

MIDTERM #1: FRIDAY, OCTOBER 9 AT 8AM AND CLOSES MONDAY, OCTOBER 12 AT 12PM

OCTOBER 13 CLASS INEQUALITY (IP)

- W/R, Chapter 12
- Lareau: “Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life”

OCTOBER 15 PERSISTENT POVERTY (OL)

- W/R, Chapter 13

OCTOBER 20 ECONOMIC INEQUALITY: WHAT CAN BE DONE? (OL)

- W/R, Chapter 14
- “Guaranteed Income’s Moment in the Sun”

- Watch: CNBC Report on Basic Income
- Quiz

OCTOBER 22 RACIAL INEQUALITY (IP)

- W/R, Chapter 15
- Quiz

OCTOBER 27 RACIAL INEQUALITY, CONTINUED (OL)

- Kramer et al. – Black Lives and Police Tactics Matter
- De Bruin – Trends in Militarized policing
- Fields – Police Need Liability Insurance
- North - How racist policing took over American cities, explained by a historian.
- Explore: <https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/cities>

OCTOBER 29 RACIAL INEQUALITY, CONTINUED (OL)

- Massey and Denton -- *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass. Chapter 2.*
- Explore the maps here: <https://demographics.coopercenter.org/racial-dot-map>

NOVEMBER 3 GENDER INEQUALITY (IP)

- W/R, Chapter 16

NOVEMBER 5 GENDER INEQUALITY, CONTINUED (OL)

- Charles - "What Gender is Science?"
- Wade - "What's so Cultural about Hookup Culture?"
- Hochschild - "Second Shift"
- Quiz

NOVEMBER 10 NO CLASS

MIDTERM #2:

OPENS SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7 (9AM) AND CLOSES TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10 (9PM)

PART III. DEMOCRACY

NOVEMBER 12 CAPITALIST DEMOCRACY: HOW IT WORKS (IP)

- W/R, Chapter 17
- Putnam – “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital”

NOVEMBER 17 VOTING, PARTIES, ELECTORAL RULES, CAMPAIGN FINANCE (OL)

- W/R, CHAPTER 18

NOVEMBER 19 DEMOCRACY AND TAXATION (OL)

- W/R, Chapter 19
- Quiz

NOVEMBER 24 DEMOCRACY AND CORPORATE MEDIA (OL)

- W/R, Chapter 20
- Watch: “Jon Stewart Interviews Jim Cramer” (3 parts)

*****THANKSGIVING BREAK *****

DECEMBER 1 MILITARISM & EMPIRE (OL)

- W/R, Chapter 21
- Watch: “Eisenhower’s Farewell Address”

DECEMBER 3 UNIONS AND DEMOCRACY (OL)

- W/R, Chapter 22
- Watch: Madison’s Union Cab
- Quiz

DECEMBER 8 DEMOCRACY FROM BELOW (OL) ---POLICY BRIEF DUE IN CANVAS BY 11:59PM

- W/R, Chapter 23
- Watch: “Chicago Participatory Budgeting,” update on “Dudley Street initiative”

DECEMBER 10 CONCLUSION (OL)

- W/R, Chapter 24

FINAL EXAM: Exam opens Tuesday, December 15 at 9am and closes Friday December 18 at 4:45PM

OTHER COURSE BUSINESS

Departmental Learning Objectives. Beyond the specific content I will cover in this course, I have designed this course to achieve the following instructional objectives designated as priorities by the Department of sociology:

- *Critically Evaluate Published Research.* Sociology graduates will be able to read and evaluate published research as it appears in academic journals and popular or policy publications.
- *Communicate Skillfully:* Sociology majors write papers and make oral presentations that build arguments and assess evidence in a clear and effective manner.
- *Critical Thinking about Society and Social Processes:* Sociology graduates can look beyond the surface of issues to discover the "why" and "how" of social order and structure and consider the underlying social mechanisms that may be creating a situation, identify evidence that may adjudicate between alternate explanations for phenomena, and develop proposed policies or action plans in light of theory and data.
- *See Things from a Global Perspective:* Sociologists learn about different cultures, groups, and societies across both time and place. They are aware of the diversity of backgrounds and experiences among residents of the United States. They understand the ways events and processes in one country are linked to those in other countries.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform me of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. I will work either directly with the you or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA. (See: [McBurney Disability Resource Center](#))

Religious Observances If you wish to request a scheduling accommodation for religious observances, send an email by the end of the second week of the course stating the specific date(s) for which you request accommodation; campus policy requires that religious observances be accommodated if you make a timely request early in the term. See the university's [web page](#) for details: <https://kb.wisc.edu/page.php?id=21698>

Exam Proctoring. Instructors have the authority to decide whether to proctor their tests, quizzes or other course assessments whether the courses is offered in-person or remotely. Failure to use the proctoring service assigned will result in a zero on the exam/assignment.

Privacy of Student Information and Digital Proctoring The privacy and security of faculty, staff and students' personal information is a top priority for UW-Madison. The university carefully reviews and vets all campus-supported teaching and learning tools, including proctoring tools and takes necessary steps to ensure that tool providers prioritize proper handling of sensitive data in alignment with FERPA, industry standards and best practices.

Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA – which protects the privacy of student education records), student consent is not required for the university to share with Honorlock those student education records necessary for carrying out the proctoring service. 34 CFR 99.31(a)(1)(i)(B). FERPA specifically allows universities to treat vendors as school officials and to share student education records with them where they perform services for the university and are subject to FERPA requirements governing the use and redisclosure of personally identifiable information from education records. Honorlock is FERPA compliant and is bound by the terms of its agreement with the university to comply with FERPA's restrictions on the use of student education records.

Academic Integrity By virtue of enrollment, each student agrees to uphold the high academic standards of the University of Wisconsin-Madison; academic misconduct is behavior that negatively impacts the integrity of the institution. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these previously listed acts are examples of misconduct which may result in disciplinary action. Examples of disciplinary action include, but is not limited to, failure on the assignment/course, written reprimand, disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion. For a complete description of behaviors that violate the University's standards as well the disciplinary penalties and procedures, please see the Dean of Students [website](#): <https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/>. If you have questions about the rules for any of the assignments or exams, please ask your instructor.

Institutional statement on diversity: [Diversity](#) is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.

COURSE EVALUATIONS Students will be provided with an opportunity to evaluate this course and your learning experience. Student participation is an integral component of this course, and your feedback is important to me. I strongly encourage you to participate in the course evaluation.

UW-Madison now uses an online course evaluation survey tool, [AEFIS](#). In most instances, you will receive an official email two weeks prior to the end of the semester when your course evaluation is available. You will receive a link to log into the course evaluation with your NetID where you can complete the evaluation and submit it, anonymously. Your participation is an integral component of this course, and your feedback is important to me. I strongly encourage you to participate in the course evaluation.

Departmental notice of grievance and appeal rights. The Department of Sociology regularly conducts student evaluations of all professors and teaching assistants near the end of the semester. Students who have more immediate concerns about this course should report them to the instructor or to the Chair of the Department of Sociology, 8128 Social Science (cschwart@ssc.wisc.edu).

Intellectual Property. Lecture materials and recordings for Sociology 125 are protected intellectual property at UW-Madison. Students in this course may use the materials and recordings for their personal use related to participation in this class. Students may also take notes solely for their personal use. If a lecture is not already recorded, you are not authorized to record my lectures without my permission unless you are considered by the university to be a qualified student with a disability requiring accommodation. [Regent Policy Document 4-1] Students may not copy or share lecture materials and recordings outside of class, including posting on internet sites or selling to commercial entities. Students are also prohibited from providing or selling their personal notes to anyone else or being paid for taking notes by any person or commercial firm without the instructor's express written permission. Unauthorized use of these copyrighted lecture materials and recordings constitute copyright infringement and may be addressed under the university's policies, UWS Chapters 14 and 17, governing student academic and non-academic misconduct.

COVID-19 Policies

STUDENTS' RULES, [RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES](#)

During the global COVID-19 pandemic, we must prioritize our collective health and safety to keep ourselves, our campus, and our community safe. As a university community, we must work together to prevent the spread of the virus and to promote the collective health and welfare of our campus and surrounding community.

Take the UW-MADISON [BADGER PLEDGE](#)

UW-MADISON [FACE COVERING GUIDELINES](#)

While on campus all employees and students are required to [wear appropriate and properly fitting](#) face coverings while present in any campus building unless working alone in a laboratory or office space.

Face Coverings During In-person Instruction (COVID-19) Individuals are expected to wear a face covering while inside any university building. Face coverings must be [worn correctly](#) (i.e., covering both your mouth and nose) in the building if you are attending class in person. If any student is unable to wear a face-covering, an accommodation may be provided due to disability, medical condition, or other legitimate reason.

Students with disabilities or medical conditions who are unable to wear a face covering should contact the [McBurney Disability Resource Center](#) or their Access Consultant if they are already affiliated. Students requesting an accommodation unrelated to disability or medical condition, should contact the Dean of Students Office.

Students who choose not to wear a face covering may not attend in-person classes, unless they are approved for an accommodation or exemption. All other students not wearing a face covering will be asked to put one on or leave the classroom. Students who refuse to wear face coverings appropriately or adhere to other stated requirements will be reported to the [Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards](#) and will not be allowed to return to the classroom until they agree to comply with the face covering policy. An instructor may cancel or suspend a course in-person meeting if a person is in the classroom without an approved face covering in position over their nose and mouth and refuses to immediately comply.

QUARANTINE OR ISOLATION DUE TO COVID-19

Student should continually monitor themselves for COVID-19 [symptoms](#) and get [tested](#) for the virus if they have symptoms or have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19. Student should reach out to instructors as soon as possible if they become ill or need to isolate or quarantine, in order to make alternate plans for how to proceed with the course. Students are strongly encouraged to communicate with their instructor concerning their illness and the anticipated extent of their absence from the course (either in-person or remote). The instructor will work with the student to provide alternative ways to complete the course work.