

# SYG 1000/2000, INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY

## COURSE DESIGN AND REQUIREMENTS

### COURSE CATALOG DESCRIPTION

In this course, students will gain an understanding of the basic sociological concepts and vocabulary, including the methodological tools, sociological perspectives, and scientific procedures used by social scientists to collect data and conduct research. Topics generally include: society and culture, institutions, socialization, influences, crime, change, groups, sex, race and ethnicity, family, class, and population.

### COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Students will apply multiple sociological perspectives.
2. Students will identify methodological tools used to evaluate sociological research questions.
3. Students will understand dynamics between individual agency and social influences.

### COMPLIANCE WITH FLORIDA STATUTES

This course content, course activities, and all course readings comply with all state education statutes. Of particular relevance, the course design explicitly ensures, as per 1007.25, that this course does *"not distort significant historical events or include a curriculum that teaches identity politics, violates s. 1000.05, or is based on theories that systemic racism, sexism, oppression, and privilege are inherent in the institutions of the United States and were created to maintain social, political, and economic inequities."*

As per requirements for social science courses in the State University and College Systems, this course will contribute to students' understanding of basic social and behavioral science concepts and principles used in the analysis of behavior and past and present social, political, and economic issues.

This course does not violate discrimination against students. Discussions during class will include a variety of course concepts and ideas, which will be provided in an objective manner without endorsement of any specific viewpoints.

To ensure compliance with the Florida statute 1007.25, the following should not be included in any course content:

- Discussions that suggest that unconscious or unintentional institutional discrimination (e.g., systemic racism, institutional sexism, historical discrimination) is a singular cause for patterns of inequality observed today
- Discussions about unconscious or unintentional discrimination as inherent among American citizens
- Discussions that state an intent of institutions today to oppress persons of color
- Discussions that state that heteronormative behaviors are tied to implicit bias, and harmful to children
- Discussions that argue most variations between men and women are learned traits and behaviors
  - Specifically, discussions that argue that gender is socially constructed without acknowledging that gender is not only a social construct
- Discussions that argue that modifying opportunities for persons of color to match opportunities afforded to others regardless of merit is necessary to address historical racism
- Discussions arguing a causal association between institutional sexism and unequal outcomes between men and women
- Discussions that suggest that an entire racial or ethnic group is biased against another racial or ethnic group
- Discussions that describe when, how, or why individuals determine their sexual orientation and/or gender identity

### INSTRUCTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHING COURSE MATERIAL

This course will introduce scientific evidence about how individuals navigate their social environments, and how social environments shape individuals over time. All course content meets rigorous requirements for inclusion.

- Sociological evidence is based on research findings collected using the **scientific method**. The scientific method is a systematic process used to evaluate research findings, form and test hypotheses, analyze data, and draw conclusions

about social phenomena. Students will learn about how sociologists use the scientific method to produce sociological research findings.

- **Scientific theories** are explanations about how and why different variables are related to each other. Scientific theories *are not* opinions or guesses. Theories are explanations drawn from systematic evaluation of the relationships between variables across different scientific studies. Theories must be testable using research studies and can be disproven by new scientific evidence. Students will learn about how sociological theories are developed and how they are used to inform the design of research studies and inform new research findings. Students will learn about a variety of sociological theories and evidence supporting them.
- Concepts that cannot be tested or disproven but are used to organize sociological ideas are defined as **frameworks**, **perspectives**, or **lenses**. Sociological perspectives are introduced in this course for the purpose of helping summarize larger bodies of evidence thematically. Frameworks, perspectives, and lenses may be used to inspire the development of research questions.
- Theories are used to inform and test **scientific hypotheses**. Unlike theories, scientific hypotheses are a “best guess” about what a researcher thinks they will find when they design a study. Hypotheses are formulated by evaluating existing research findings from previous research to inform what they might expect in a new study or a replication of a previous study. Students will learn how to develop scientific hypotheses that can be tested in sociological studies. Students will also learn about the methods that are used to test scientific hypotheses. Students will learn how researchers determine if the relationship between two variables that are hypothesized to be correlated has a statistically significant association and how to interpret that association to inform sociological science.
- Research designed to examine characteristics of a population or a phenomenon is called **descriptive research**. A descriptive study may use qualitative or quantitative data to describe social phenomenon and produce **scientific facts**. For instance, a study may be designed to evaluate if there are more women than men living in the state of Florida, and if the number of males and females in the population has changed over time. Quantitative descriptive studies use statistics and statistical methods to evaluate numeric data. Qualitative descriptive studies use thematic analysis of words or text. This course will include course material based on descriptive research findings for the purpose of presenting scientific facts.

The following research *does not* meet rigorous requirements for inclusion as sociological facts or theories:

- If a study is designed to evaluate associations between variables that have not previously been evaluated and may be based on hypotheses that do not yet meet criterion as a formal theory, it is described as **exploratory research**. Evidence based on exploratory research will be introduced as early-stage research findings. Students will learn about why they should be cautious when evaluating findings drawn from studies that do not meet the rigorous requirements of sociological research. For instance, students will learn that a single observational study identifying, for the first time, a statistically significant *correlation* between two variables in a large population should not be interpreted as offering evidence of a *causal* relationship.

## **A GUIDE TO TEACHING SOCIOLOGICAL PHENOMENA**

This course is designed to introduce sociological phenomena. Sociology is a scientific discipline that focuses on how humans interact with other humans and how they interact with and are influenced by their environments. Sociological scientific research includes research evaluating associations between humans and institutions (e.g., churches, schools, government, businesses), and it explores differences across social groups regarding behaviors, outcomes, and exposures. This introductory course is designed to ensure adherence to the Florida state educational statutes in covering three foundational sociological content areas:

### **1. HISTORICAL FACTS ABOUT ACCESS TO PERSONAL FREEDOM AND ASSOCIATIONS WITH HUMAN BEHAVIORS, RESOURCES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND OUTCOMES**

This course will describe how different groups have lived and interacted over time, and the role of public policies/laws in shaping human behaviors and distributing resources. For example, historical U.S. policies, constitutional amendments, and Supreme Court rulings defined who was and was not afforded certain rights in the U.S. during different phases of history, and who had access to specific resources during different phases of history. These proceedings created a legal framework for influencing access to resources based on race, color, national origin, or sex such as: freedom to educational opportunities (i.e., legal frameworks about who could attend certain schools/types of schools), freedom to buy homes/land in specific geographic areas, freedom to participate in democratic activities (e.g., vote), freedom to access certain employment opportunities, freedom to

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conduct business, and freedom to use and move freely in public places. In this class, students may learn about legal frameworks in place in the past and how they influenced previous generations. Students will also learn about how these legal frameworks changed, and the different freedoms that are available to Americans today. Students will study scientific facts, including the demographic characteristics of individuals who lived during previous generations when specific freedoms were restricted, and changes in these characteristics in association with removal of restrictions on freedoms over time.

### **2. THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIORS AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS**

In this introductory course, students will learn about how individuals interact with different social environments. They will learn about how individuals are influenced by *perceptions* or *observations* of behaviors and beliefs of group members as common and acceptable. The course introduces a wide variety of related research, study designs, and topics. To help students understand these concepts, the course should include research studies that show how these dynamics work in everyday environments. For example, it may be helpful to cite studies such as a recent one that evaluated risky driving behaviors in a representative sample of young car drivers in Germany and the driving risk behaviors (i.e., texting, drinking and driving, and speeding) of their peers. Findings show that young drivers had a statistically higher number of risky behaviors when they *perceived* others to engage in risky driving behaviors, and particularly if the *actual* behaviors of their peers were higher. Or, as the researchers summarized their results: "pro-risk social environments enhance the likelihood of individuals' risk taking" (Baumann, Czerwinski, & Klimmt, 2019).

### **3. THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN SPECIFIC INDIVIDUAL TRAITS AND PATTERNS IN BEHAVIORS AND OUTCOMES**

Finally, students will learn about how certain individual traits shape how people navigate social spaces. Some individual traits have biological relevance and social relevance. For example, biological sex chromosomes determine not only the sexual and reproductive organs an individual is born with, but also how females and males behave. This behavior is also influenced by the social relevance of these traits which is studied by sociologists who study gender differences. So, in teaching this, one might point out that women and men with the same credentials enter different jobs such that certain jobs are occupied primarily by women (i.e., female-dominant) some are occupied primarily by men (i.e., male-dominant) and some have roughly the same number of workers who are female and male (i.e., non-gender-segregated). On the other hand, some individual traits do not necessarily have biological relevance, but they have social relevance. It may be helpful to point out that although the color of one's skin is associated with gene expression in a similar way as eye color or hair color, race is not a genetic trait. Race is defined by societies differently, and not all countries differentiate specific racial groups. For instance, in population census research, countries identify individual traits that are relevant to socially defined personal characteristics that uniquely differentiate people by group in that country – some countries only ask about birth nationality, some ask people to identify their ancestral lineage, while others allow individuals to self-define their race, or do not differentiate people based on a racial category.

## RECOMMENDED COURSE DESIGN

This course leverages open-source textbook materials that have been written to explicitly meet the Florida state statutes. The chapters introduced for each learning unit provide foundational information for students to learn the conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and applied aspects of sociological sciences.

### **UNIT I: UNDERSTANDING SOCIOLOGY: A SCIENTIFIC VIEW OF SOCIETY**

This unit introduces students to sociology as a discipline dedicated to the empirical study of human societies. Students will explore the origins of sociology, how it fits within the broader spectrum of the social sciences, and the methods that set it apart as a field grounded in systematic observation and analysis. The course emphasizes both theoretical understanding and practical application, including insights into professional pathways for sociology graduates.

Potential topics may include:

- The scientific and empirical nature of sociology
- The contributions that sociology makes to understanding science and its limitations
- Exploration of careers in sociology and applied fields
- Core sociological concepts such as social interaction, roles, structure, institutions, context, and societal change
- The way sociologists study human heterogeneity
- Key sociological concepts such as functionalism, conflict perspectives, symbolic interactionism, and exchange theory

#### **Reading:**

*Preface: Introduction to Sociological Sciences*

*Chapter 1: Understanding Sociology*

### **UNIT II. SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH AND METHODS OF INQUIRY**

This module equips students with foundational knowledge of sociological research practices. Emphasis is placed on the formulation, testing, and refinement of hypotheses using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Students are introduced to the scientific method as it applies to the social world, with careful attention to ethical standards, data accuracy, and reproducibility.

Potential topics may include:

- Research design and hypothesis development
- Qualitative tools: interviews, participant observation, content and historical analysis
- Quantitative tools: surveys, statistical analysis, comparative research
- Ethical guidelines and responsible data management
- Bias in sociological research

#### **Reading:**

*Chapter 2: Sociological Research and Methods of Inquiry*

### **UNIT III. CULTURE AND SOCIETY**

This section explores the concept of culture as a shared set of practices, values, symbols, and norms that guide behavior within social groups. Students analyze how culture is formed, transmitted, and modified across different social contexts and time periods.

Potential topics may include:

- Definition and components of culture
- Cultural variation and observable effects on behavior
- Cultural continuity and change
- Cultural differences

**Reading:**

*Chapter 3: Culture & Society*

## **UNIT IV. SOCIALIZATION ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE**

Students examine how individuals acquire societal norms, beliefs, and behaviors through interaction with various socializing agents. This unit focuses on the stages of development and the influence of family, education, peers, media, and other social forces that shape human behavior.

Potential topics may include:

- Primary and secondary agents of socialization
- Lifespan development and transitions
- The role of social environments in shaping humans and their outcomes

**Readings:**

*Chapter 4: Socialization*

## **UNIT V. AGING AND HEALTH ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE**

This unit addresses the factors that influence health and wellbeing as people move through the life course. Students will learn about different life stages and behaviors and the behaviors and resources that modify health trajectories over time. Students will also learn about the influence of healthcare and medicine in treating people at different phases of life.

Potential topics may include:

- Factors that shape health and well-being across the life course
- Healthcare environments supporting acute and chronic conditions
- Factors that shape differences in health and wellbeing outcomes

**Reading:**

*Chapter 5: Healthy Aging*

*Chapter 6: Health, Healthcare, and Medicine*

## **UNIT VI. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND NETWORKS**

This portion of the course introduces students to the frameworks through which societies are organized. It highlights the dual role of agency and structure in shaping social systems, as well as the informal networks that influence behaviors and opportunities.

Potential topics may include:

- Social roles and institutional functions
- Types of organizational structures
- Analysis of formal and informal networks
- Structural features of social influence
- Hierarchical social structures and social order

**Reading:**

*Chapter 7: Groups and Organizations*

## **UNIT VII. DEVIANC E, SOCIAL NORMS, AND SOCIAL CONTROL**

Students explore how societies define and respond to deviant behavior. This unit presents deviance as a socially constructed concept, shaped by cultural norms and institutional responses.

Potential topics may include:

- Definitions of deviance and conformity
- Mechanisms of social control and order
- Patterns in deviant behavior across groups
- Introduction to identification, classification, and rule-making processes

### **Readings:**

*Chapter 8: Deviance and Crime*

## **UNIT VIII. SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS IN COMPARATIVE CONTEXT**

This section provides a structured look at various private and public institutions that shape social life, including family, work, religion, education, and government. Each institution is studied in terms of its structure, roles, and functions.

Potential topics may include:

- Functional analysis of key institutions
- Comparative institutional forms and practices
- Institutional continuity and adaptation over time

### **Readings:**

*Chapter 9: Private Institutions: Family and Work*

*Chapter 10: Public Institutions: Religion, Education, and Government*

## **UNIT IX. PROCESSES OF SOCIAL CHANGE**

In this concluding unit, students examine how societies evolve over time through demographic shifts, technological innovation, cultural transformation, and collective action. The course introduces several historical theories and frameworks and explores their application to real-world contexts.

Potential topics may include:

- Urbanization, globalization, and technological development
- Population trends and trajectories
- Overview of collective behavior
- Historical theories and frameworks: Modernization, World Systems, Dependency Theory

### **Readings:**

*Chapter 11: Population and Urbanization*

*Chapter 12: Social Change and Collective Behaviors*

*REFERENCES*

Geber, S., Baumann, E., Czerwinski, F., & Klimmt, C. (2019). The Effects of Social Norms Among Peer Groups on Risk Behavior: A Multilevel Approach to Differentiate Perceived and Collective Norms. *Communication Research*, 48(3), 319-345. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650218824213> (Original work published 2021)