

**SOC251H1S**  
**Contemporary Sociological Theory**  
**University of Toronto**  
**Class hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 6-9 (on-line)**

**Instructor:** Sébastien Parker

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**Office Hours:** Fridays between 1 and 2:30 p.m. on BB Collaborate

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**Office Hours:** Posted periodically on Quercus

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### **Course Description**

A selective introduction to major contemporary thinkers and approaches whose ideas have achieved wide influence, as well as an on-going inquiry into the nature and role of sociological analysis. Restricted to sociology majors and specialists.

### **Prerequisites**

The prerequisite to take SOC251H1S is SOC201H. Students without the prerequisite can be removed at any time discovered, and without notice.

### **Course set-up and material**

This course will be taught as a hybrid, i.e., both synchronous and asynchronous. All lecture content (PowerPoints with voice over) will be posted before July 7. You will then be able to download and listen to any lecture at your convenience. All course readings will also be made available as PDF on the course Quercus page.

The first lecture (introductions and expectations) as well as all tutorials will be held live (see Course Schedule for specific dates and time). Finally, all office hours (Instructor and T.A.) will be held on BB Collaborate.

### **Learning Objectives**

There are 5 learning objectives in this course:

- 1) Evaluate and discuss a number of approaches central to contemporary sociological theory.
- 2) Identify and assess key theoretical concepts and arguments.
- 3) Write analytically and critically about contemporary theory.
- 4) Forward an academic argument and support this argument through the use of evidence, both in discussion and in writing.
- 5) Draw connections between contemporary theory and current events.

**Evaluation Components**

Type	Due Dates	Weight
Discussion Posts	July 16 & July 28	10%
Part 1 Paper	July 21	30%
Part 2 Paper	August 4	30%
Summative Reflection	August 13	30%

**Grading Description**

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**Discussion Posts**

Twice during the term, students will have to submit discussion posts (worth 5% each). The expected length is ½ to 1 page double-spaced.

For the first post, students have to use a reading from either Session 2, 3 or 4 and answer: *What do you find most important about your chosen reading to understand society today?*

For the second post, students will have to use a reading from either Session 6, 7 or 8 and compare it to the reading chosen for the first post. Students will specifically have to answer: *Taken together, how do the two readings help us better understand society today?*

**Part 1 and Part 2 Written Assignments**

For Part 1 and Part 2 papers (see schedule), students are offered a choice. In either case, the paper has to forward an argument (expected length: 2-3 pages, double-spaced).

The *first option* is a position paper with an assigned topic. You will need to forward an argument that provides an answer to the assigned question. You will also need to use the ideas of two thinkers. The *second option* is a position paper with your own chosen focus. Students will need to use the ideas of one thinker and assess their relevance based on a chosen contemporary event or phenomenon.

Please note that you can do either options for Part 1 or Part 2 (i.e., if you choose Option 1 for Part 1, you do not have to do Option 1 again for Part 2). More details will be provided during the first lecture. There will also be a document posted with guidelines and expectations by the first lecture.

**Summative Reflection**

For the final written assignment, students will have to offer summative reflections on either structural or agentic explanations. Students will also have to use one reading from Part 1, Part 2 **and** Part 3 while forwarding their own position. The expected length is 3-4 pages, double-spaced. More details will be provided during the first lecture.

**\*Please note\***

In total, there are *five* written assignments. Please note that you **cannot use and discuss the same thinker twice** for any of the written assignment. That means, if you decide to talk about

Mills in your first discussion post, then you cannot use Mills for *any other assignment*. For each assignment using a thinker for a second time, students will receive a 0.

## **Late and Missed Test Policies**

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### **Handing in assignments**

All assignments must be submitted electronically via Quercus. The instructor and TA will not accept electronic copies of assignments via email.

### **Deadlines**

The assignments are due by 6:00 p.m. for the stated date. Please refer to the Due Date stated on page 2 of the Syllabus. Late work will not be accepted without proper documentation (the Declaration of Absence on ACORN).

### **Accessibility**

If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, please visit <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility> as soon as possible.

If you miss a test or a paper deadline, do not contact the instructor or a TA unless you have followed the steps described here.

In case of illness, you must supply a completed the Declaration of Absence on ACORN. If you are registered with Accessibility Services, your counselor will need to send an email message on your behalf (a one-week extension being the norm).

## **Student Responsibilities and Expectations**

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This class is completely online. All lectures will be provided to students via Quercus' BB Collaborate function asynchronously, so you can download lectures at your convenience.

### **Email Policy**

I will respond to your email within two business days (48 hours, except weekends and holidays). In an email exchanges, you must use your official University of Toronto email. Please also include the course code (e.g. SOC251) in the subject line and your full name and student number in your message. Please do not send a repeat email (e.g., "did you get my email?").

In general, please treat emails as you would any other professional communication. You should be respectful in the way you address the instructor and the TA. Email is most suitable for questions that are clear, concise, and easily answerable. If you need help on course material, I strongly encourage you to attend office hours or make an appointment. For all general inquiries, please refer to the course syllabus.

### **Help from your Teaching Assistant**

Your T.A. will hold scheduled office hours and respond to your emails. Please be judicious in your use of email. Use it only for questions that are brief and specific. Before sending a question by email, be sure to check the course outline to see if an answer is already available. Emails should not be seen as an alternative to doing the assigned reading or attending lectures. Expect to

receive a response from your T.A. within two working days. For more in-depth discussions of the lectures, readings, tests and position papers, take advantage of your T.A.'s office hours.

### **Grade Appeals**

The instructor and teaching assistants do their best to mark work fairly, consistently, and accurately. Nevertheless, one of us may unintentionally err in our marking duties. For basic mathematical errors, simply alert the TA of the error. In the case of more substantive appeals, you must wait at least 24 hours after receiving your mark. If you wish to appeal, please submit a thorough written explanation to your Instructor of why you think your mark should be altered. If your appeal is deemed appropriate, the entirety of your test/assignment will be re-graded. Please note that upon re-grade your mark may go down, stay the same, or go up. You have 14 days after receiving a mark to appeal it.

### **Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is fundamental to learning and scholarship at the University of Toronto. Participating honestly, respectfully, responsibly, and fairly in this academic community ensures that the U of T degree that you earn will be valued as a true indication of your individual academic achievement and will continue to receive the respect and recognition it deserves.

Familiarize yourself with the University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>). It is the rule book for academic behaviour at the U of T, and you are expected to know the rules.

The University of Toronto treats cases of academic misconduct very seriously. All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following the procedures outlined in the Code. The consequences for academic misconduct can be severe, including a failure in the course and a notation on your transcript. If you have any questions about what is or is not permitted in this course, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you have questions about appropriate research and citation methods, seek out additional information from me, or from other available campus resources like the [U of T Writing Website](#). If you are experiencing personal challenges that are having an impact on your academic work, please speak to me or seek the advice of your college registrar.

## **Course Schedule**

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### **Required readings**

All course readings are accessible electronically. Unless otherwise noted, course readings will be uploaded on Quercus. Please refer to the proper week in the Modules tab.

### **Session 1 (July 7) – *Outline of the course and expectations***

***Live lecture at 6:00 p.m.***

**Part 1: Sociology after Parsons**

**Session 2 (July 9) – *Parsons and his critics***

Excerpt readings from:

Talcott Parsons (1937), *The Structure of Social Action*.

C. Wright Mills (1959), *The Sociological Imagination*.

***Live tutorial at 6:00 p.m.: Writing strong papers***

**Session 3 (July 14) – *Structural developments post-Parsons***

Excerpt readings from:

Peter Blau (1964), *Exchange and Power in Social Life*.

Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan (1967), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments*.

**Session 4 (July 16) – *Agentic developments post-Parsons***

Excerpt readings from:

Erving Goffman (1956), *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

Harold Garfinkel (1967), *Studies in Ethnomethodology*.

***Discussion post 1 due at 6:00 p.m.***

**Session 5 (July 21) – *First paper due***

***Part 1 Paper due by 6:00 p.m.***

**Part 2: Fundamental perspectives on historical and contemporary trends**

**Session 6 (July 23) – *Power and Publics***

Excerpt readings from:

Jürgen Habermas (1962), *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

Michel Foucault (1975), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.

***Live tutorial at 6:00 p.m.: Improving on your first papers***

**Session 7 (July 28) – *Culture and Class***

Excerpt readings from:

Daniel Bell (1976), *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*.

Pierre Bourdieu (1979), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*.

**Session 8 (July 30) – *Identity and Modernity***

Excerpt readings from:

Anthony Giddens (1990), *The Consequences of Modernity*.

Margaret Somers (1994), “The Narrative Constitution of Identity.”

***Discussion post II due by 6:00 p.m.***

**Session 9 (August 4) – *Second paper due***

***Part 2 Paper due by 6:00 p.m.***

**Part 3: Old and new debates in sociology**

**Session 10 (August 6) – *Intersectional and Standpoint***

Excerpt readings from:

Dorothy Smith (1990), *The Conceptual Practices of Power*.

Patricia Hill Collins (1990), *Black Feminist Thought*.

***Live tutorial at 6:00 p.m.: Reflections and focused writing***

**Session 11 (August 11) – *Creativity and Functionality***

Excerpt readings from:

Hans Joas (1996), *The Creativity of Action*.

Jeffrey Alexander (2006), *The Civil Sphere*.

**Session 12 (August 13) – *Reflecting on Structure and Agency***

***Summative reflection due by 6:00 p.m.***