

Introduction to Society – An Integrated Service-Learning Course
SOC 150, Fall 2010

Professor Tricia McTague
Time: TBD
Classroom: TBD

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Course Description

This is an introduction to sociology course. Sociology is the scientific study of human social behavior, but it is also a perspective – a way of looking at your social environment. Using systematic research methods, sociologists are able to learn about a variety of social phenomena. Sociology helps us to more fully understand the “stuff” all around us, much of which we take for granted. You will learn how to develop and use this perspective by studying a wide variety of sociological concepts, theories, research methods, and research findings. You will also learn how to put this knowledge to work in order to better some aspect of society through the semester-long, service-learning Praxis Project (see “Course Assignment Packet for details).

Service-Learning Integrated Course

Integrated Service-Learning (ISL) that incorporates a community service experience with classroom instruction has been integrated into this course to provide a community-based learning experience. Service-Learning addresses the practice of citizenship and promotes an awareness of and participation in public affairs. The Integrated Service-Learning Course requires a minimum of 15 hours of unpaid service to a not-for-profit community organization, government agency or public service provider. The community service placement will relate to the course learning objectives as outlined in this syllabus. Reflection assignments are assigned to help students understand discipline concepts and develop higher order critical thinking skills. Additionally, this course provides students with real world experience that can be included on resumes, offers the ability to test career choices, to apply theories and concepts learned in class and make connections to the real world, and the opportunity to have a positive impact in our community. To assess the integration of the service-learning portion of this course, CASL staff will administer an assessment during the last three weeks of the semester (either online or in person). The evaluation results will assist your instructor in the further development of this course, especially as it relates to the service-learning project. Results are provided to your instructor after the grades are submitted to the Registrar’s Office.

Learning goals: Introduction to Society (SOC 150) is a general education course included on the list of alternatives fulfilling the Culture and Society- Social Science Perspective requirement. This course strives to achieve the following general education goals:

- understanding the unique shared ways of thinking, believing, and acting developed by a people who live together over a long period of time.
- ability to conceptualize and trace the influences of community, institutions, and other constructions such as class, gender, and race.
- understanding the sources and expression of diverse values throughout the world.
- tracing the impact of technology on societies.
- understanding the ways human choices affect communities.

For the complete list of General Education Aims and Goals, visit:

http://www.missouristate.edu/GeneralEducation/Faculty_Senate_Approved_GenEd.htm#A

Course objectives: After taking Introduction to Society (SOC 150) students will:

- understand society as constructed, maintained, and changed through human action.
- understand diversity among societies, as well as diversity within modern society.
- recognize the impact of technology, urbanization, and global interdependence on contemporary issues facing both the United States and other countries.
- apply theoretical perspectives for a critical examination of society with its vast array of groups and organization, power and status arrangements, and social institutions.
- understand scientific methods of inquiry into society, including data collection and the interpretation of research findings.
- apply knowledge of societal structures and processes in critically examining problems facing various social institutions (i.e. family, education, religion, economy, government, criminal justice, etc.)
- apply knowledge of societal structure and processes to critically examine issues posed by social inequality (i.e. class, gender, age, race/ethnicity).
- appreciate the social complexities involved in maintaining a balance between individual freedom and social order, as well as social change and stability, at the interpersonal, community and societal levels.

Student learning outcomes: This course is designed to provide you with an engaging learning experience rooted in service-learning and inquiry-guided learning techniques. It will help you to take responsibility for your own learning, and improve your critical thinking about complex issues with multiple interpretations. By the end of the semester you should be able to:

- Move from learning facts to making critically reasoned judgments grounded in the academic content of the course.
- Read, write, research, think, and work like a sociologist.
- Identify and explain various fundamental sociological concepts.
- Apply sociological knowledge to better understand and explain social patterns and problems.
- Question the taken for granted assumptions of social life.
- See and understand how social issues are often connected to other social issues in complex ways.
- Use the sociological perspective in the classroom, at your service-learning site, and in your everyday life.
- Put research to work in order to better some aspect of society through service-learning.

Willingness to try on new lenses: This sociology course will require you to take on a range of perspectives in thinking about the social world. Many of these ways of thinking may be new to you. They may even clash with some ideas that you have held your entire lives. Therefore, an open mind is an essential tool for this course, especially for the development of your sociological perspective. **Service-learning, discussion, group activities, and writing will be fundamental to how we learn.** It should be our goal to create and maintain a critical learning community. It is a requirement of this course that you are willing to “try on new lenses.” If you are not receiving any tools for looking at the world differently in your college career, then you are not receiving a quality education. Whether or not you choose to adopt a sociological perspective at the end of the semester (or when you walk out of the classroom) is entirely up to you. I hope I can convince you of the value of such a perspective.

Responsibilities: As your teacher, my responsibility is to be prepared for class, return your grading within a reasonable timeframe, and to be available for questions, concerns, and conversations related to this course. The most important responsibility you have is to ask questions—this can't be emphasized enough. I believe each of you will have something to contribute to the course. I will do some lecturing,

but much of the learning will take place in the form of class discussion. Active participation on your part will make the class much more interesting for all of us.

What I expect from you:

- Show up everyday
- Be genuinely engaged and talk in class.
- Be respectful to me, your classmates, members in society, and yourself.
- Take on the challenge of learning. Do not be a passive student.
- Take responsibility for your own learning.
- Think like a sociologist.
- Be prepared for class—read, think, and write about each reading.
- See college as an opportunity to learn a lot of fascinating things you will take with you for life – not just a place you have to go to get a degree.

Active learning: Being an active learner includes attending every class ready to learn, equipped with your notes and other materials, as well as with an open mind and a willingness to discuss subject matter. Active learners also come prepared with questions. You are expected to read all the assigned readings before class and be ready to contribute to the conversation. If you are having trouble with any of the material, assignments, etc. do not hesitate to ask me for help. Sooner is better than later. The quality and depth of our learning community is contingent upon the amount of effort all members put forth. Class participation is a large part of learning sociology (and your grade). Participation by EVERYONE is essential to creating a successful and fruitful learning community. This is not the type of class where you can sit in the back and take it all in. You MUST be engaged actively. Your knowledge and your grade depend on this.

Emergency response statement: Students who require assistance during an emergency evacuation must discuss their needs with their professors and Disability Services. If you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible. For additional information students should contact the [Office of Disability Services](#), 836-4192 (PSU 405), or Larry Combs, Interim Assistant Director of [Public Safety and Transportation](#) at 836-6576. For further information on Missouri State University's Emergency Response Plan, please refer to the following web site:
<http://www.missouristate.edu/safetran/erp.htm>

Classroom environment: In order for learning to occur, we must exist in an environment where all of us feel safe and respected. Some of the material that we will be discussing may be difficult to talk about. Some of the issues may be personally sensitive and may make you feel uncomfortable. Some emotional engagement or discomfort is to be expected, even encouraged, when thinking and talking sociologically about the social world. Such things challenge us – they make us take responsibility for our thoughts, beliefs, and actions. However, at no time should the classroom become a hostile environment. Personal attacks, disrespectful comments, or harassment of any kind (racial, sexual, etc.) will not be tolerated.

Statement of nondiscrimination: Missouri State University is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution, and maintains a grievance procedure available to any person who believes he or she has been discriminated against. At all times, it is your right to address inquiries or concerns about possible discrimination to the [Office for Equity and Diversity](#), Park Central Office Building, 117 Park Central Square, Suite 111, (417) 836-4252. Other types of concerns (i.e., concerns of an academic nature) should be discussed directly with your instructor and can also be brought to the attention of your instructor's Department Head. Please visit the OED website at www.missouristate.edu/equity/.

Statement on disability accommodation: To request academic accommodations for a disability, contact

the Director of [Disability Services](#), Plaster Student Union, Suite 405, (417) 836-4192 or (417) 836-6792 (TTY), www.missouristate.edu/disability. Students are required to provide documentation of disability to Disability Services prior to receiving accommodations. Disability Services refers some types of accommodation requests to the [Learning Diagnostic Clinic](#), which also provides diagnostic testing for learning and psychological disabilities. For information about testing, contact the Director of the [Learning Diagnostic Clinic](#), (417) 836-4787, <http://psychology.missouristate.edu/ldc>.

Academic dishonesty: Missouri State University is a community of scholars committed to developing educated persons who accept the responsibility to practice personal and academic integrity. You are responsible for knowing and following the university's student honor code, *Student Academic Integrity Policies and Procedures*, available at: www.missouristate.edu/assets/provost/AcademicIntegrityPolicyRev-1-08.pdf and is also available at the Reserves Desk in Meyer Library. Any student participating in any form of academic dishonesty will be subject to sanctions as described in this policy.

Attendance policy: Regular attendance is expected of all students. Simply put, those who don't attend usually don't do well in this course. Many important skills that you will develop and practice in this course require class attendance. The assigned summary and discussion question (i.e. ticket to class) must be done before class. Tickets to class will also serve as a record of attendance. During the last two weeks of class you will be teaching your peers about a social problem (see Praxis Project in Course Assignments). For each unexcused absence during the Peer Teaching period, your final Praxis Project grade will drop 5 points. *You are allowed two unexcused absences* in case something weird happens in your life. An absence is *excused* when it results from: 1) participation in University-sanctioned activities and programs; 2) personal illness; or 3) family and/or other compelling circumstances. All of these excused absences require documentation of some kind. Excessive absence, lateness, or leaving early will result in point deduction. The University's attendance policy can be found in the *2008-2009 Undergraduate Catalog* at: www.missouristate.edu/registrar/attendan.html.

Incomplete Work and Late Assignments: Tickets to class will not be accepted late. Other assignments will be accepted late with proper written documentation of an *excused* absence. Late papers or projects not accompanied by written documentation of excused absences will be accepted if they are turned in within 1 week of the due date with a loss of 10 percentage points for each day. For example, if an assignment is due on Tuesday and is handed in on Friday of the same week, 30 percentage points will be deducted from the grade. If the assignment is handed in past one week from the day it was due, it will not be accepted and the assignment will receive a grade of zero. Do not plan travel or other engagements on assignment due dates. If you intend to submit an assignment via email, please see the email policy below.

Email policy: You may contact me via email at TriciaMcTague@missouristate.edu. Do not send me any assignments over email unless we have talked about it. Do not assume that I have received any communication from you unless you receive a return confirmation email from me. I do not check email on Saturday or Sunday.

Dropping a class: It is your responsibility to understand the University's procedure for dropping a class. If you stop attending this class but do not follow proper procedure for dropping the class, you will receive a failing grade and will also be financially obligated to pay for the class. For information about dropping a class or withdrawing from the university, contact the [Office of the Registrar](#) at 836-5520. See Academic Calendars (www.missouristate.edu/registrar/acad_cal.html) for deadlines.

Cell phone policy: As a member of the learning community, each student has a responsibility to other students who are members of the community. When cell phones or pagers ring and students respond in class or leave class to respond, it disrupts the class. Therefore, the [Office of the Provost](#) prohibits the use

by students of cell phones, pagers, PDAs, or similar communication devices during scheduled classes. All such devices must be turned off or put in a silent (vibrate) mode and ordinarily should not be taken out during class. Given the fact that these same communication devices are an integral part of the University's emergency notification system, an exception to this policy would occur when numerous devices activate simultaneously. When this occurs, students may consult their devices to determine if a university emergency exists. If that is not the case, the devices should be immediately returned to silent mode and put away.

Required text:

Schwalbe, Michael. 2008. *The Sociologically Examined Life: Pieces of the Conversation*. 4th edition. McGraw Hill.

Blackboard Required Readings: Various articles available at the Blackboard class website. If you are unfamiliar with Blackboard, you can acquaint yourself with this program through various online tutorials found there. If you are still having trouble, call 836-6111 or 888-767-8444 or email blackboard@missouristate.edu. **You are responsible for accessing readings two days prior to the day we are scheduled to discuss them.** Blackboard accounts are created when a Missouri State Active Directory Account is created. If you do not already have an account, please see me for instructions. It is best to use Firefox when accessing Blackboard.

Films

- Understanding Race
- Killing Us Softly
- Made in LA
- Super Size Me

Course assignments: See "Course Assignment Packet"

Grading policy: In order to give students appropriate credit for their work, grades will be reported with plusses and minuses at the end of the semester. Your overall numerical score in the class will be converted to a letter grade on the basis of the following chart.

- 90 – 100 = A
- 80 – 89 = B
- 70 – 79 = C
- 60 – 69 = D

Note- the university does not allow the reporting of D- or of A+ grades.

Grading	Percent
Tickets to class	20
Praxis Project	40
Two Exams (20% each)	40
	100

Praxis Project¹

Praxis = Critical Reflection + Social Action

Praxis is “action and reflection upon the world in order to change it...to link awareness with practice”

(bell hooks on Thich Nhat Hanh and Paulo Freire)

Learning Objectives:

- To gain knowledge about the process of sociological research through engaging in it and to put that research to use by implementing action toward justice.
- To cultivate “habits of mind” (Dewey 1929) or ways of being sensitive to the world that enable discovery and sharpen citizenship skills.
- To take responsibility for your own learning by formulating your own questions, identifying problems, and devising solutions.
- To develop critical thinking skills through mindful skepticism of data sources, community engagement, and by reflecting on service experiences.
- To facilitate cultural competency through direct interaction with people who are different from you in some way.
- To encourage ethical leadership, by gathering and reflecting on relevant evidence and experience in order to articulate your own informed set of values and morals.

Assignment Synopsis:

Each group (2-4 members) will choose an issue or feature of society that they find problematic and unjust. Throughout the semester, the group will research the topic, reflect upon it, and design some sort of social action – or series of actions – to address it. Your *first step* will be to come to understand the sociological features of the problem by asking a series of questions (see below) and then seeking answers to them by identifying reliable data sources. The *second step* will be to use your knowledge and the resources available to you (pre-existing organizations, data, etc.) to design some sort of action to ameliorate the inequality or problematic social issue. The *third step* will be to reflect on the action taken and to teach your peers about the social problem, what your group did to alleviate it, and what your peers can do to help solve it.

Limitations:

1. You must be able to state clearly how the issue is problematic and for whom. The topic and proposed action must be in line with sociological thinking. To be sure, you must have a *sociological* understanding of the issue in order for the project to be viable. Therefore, you must rely on sociology to shape and guide your actions of choice rather than relying on other sources of knowledge such as psychology or religion, for example.
2. You may NOT use or promote violence, do anything that is illegal (if you aren't sure, look it up or ask), or that will cause harm to anyone.

¹ This project was inspired by Catherine Fobes, Alma College, Critical Pedagogy Workshop ASA August 2007, New York, NY. Journal questions were amended from Service-Learning Reflection Journal, Citizenship and Service-Learning, Missouri State University.

Instructions and Stages of the Project:

1. As a class, we will create a list of social problems, work together to narrow the list, discuss the sociological relevance of the topic, and brainstorm about potential social actions that can be taken to alleviate the problem. These can be campus, local, state, national, or global problems.

2. Next, we will form groups based on your interest in the social problems we identified in step 1. You will choose from this list of social problems that merit social action.

3. *Letter to myself:* Write a letter to yourself describing your expectations and assumptions. What are the people like at your site? What do you expect to learn from them? What do you see as the root of this social problem?

4. Once we have formed groups, you will need to research the social problem. I have scheduled a visit to the library to help you learn how to identify reliable data sources that address the problem. Start your research by addressing the following questions:

- What is the current state of affairs? What is the nature of the problem?
- What is the historical background of the issue?
- Who are the actors and agents? Who is involved?
- Who is affected (positively and/or negatively) by the current situation?
- What are the different explanations for why the problem exists?
- What kinds of actions/interventions are already targeting the issue? Identify local social change organizations working to fix the problem at its root.
- What action is your group considering? Why?
- Other appropriate questions?

5. *Proposal:* As a group, you will write a short summary that answers these questions to paint a picture of what your group is investigating and working to improve or do away with altogether. those affected, etc. You must also describe the action you are considering and how you plan to carry it out. You may choose your format for this, but 1-2 pages should be enough space. Each group will submit this summary highlighting the nature and severity of the problem,

6. *Taking Action:* **The most important aspect of this project is action.** Your participation must total 15 hours by the end of the semester. All forms of action must be on behalf or in conjunction with an approved community partner and also must be approved by the instructor and/or the Citizenship And Service Learning (CASL) office. For example a group that chooses to organize or attend a rally on affordable housing should also volunteer for some portion of the time at Habitat for Humanity. Action can take many forms: writing letters, volunteering time, staging a boycott, attending or organizing a rally, starting a new campus organization, joining a pre-existing action group or organization, educating others on campus or in the community, etc. This is not an exhaustive list – what else can you do?

7. *Reflective Journaling:* **Each group member** should submit three reflective journal entries during the course of the semester. For each entry, choose one question to reflect on:

- Describe an observation of privilege or inequality at your site. How has this challenged your own perceptions, beliefs, and assumptions?
- Describe an observation or experience at the site that contradicted or reinforced class material.
- Identify a person, group or community that you have gotten to know at the site, who is significantly “other” for you. What are the challenges facing them that particularly got to you? What is one way in which you allowed yourself to be changed as a result of knowing these folks?
- Have you taken any risks at your service site (not physical risks, but stepping out of your comfort zone)? What did you do and what were the results?
- How does your service work relate to your long-term goals (i.e., career, learning, and citizenship goals)? What is the relationship between the two areas? There may be a direct or indirect relationship—explain what you are experiencing.
- Describe an example of deviant behavior (or evidence from such behavior) that you notice either during or en route to your site. Do you believe your example is a common occurrence or a more rare phenomenon? What social factors might contribute to this deviant behavior?
- Would you categorize this organization as a social service or social change agency? If you were president of the United States, what kind of program would you devise to solve the problem?

Entries will be graded on a 10-point scale:

0 = Student did not submit entry

5 = Student submitted entry, but did not provide critical reflection

10 = Student submitted a thoughtful, reflective entry

8. Analysis and Critical Reflection Essay: Each group member should turn in his/her own analysis and critical reflection essay. Begin by briefly describing the social problem. Then, define and apply two sociological concepts. How does sociology help you make sense of this problem? Next, after reviewing your initial “letter to myself” and journal entries, reflect on your feelings about doing the project, why you chose the topic, how you have been influenced by studying the topic, and how this influence might shape your future actions, if at all.

9. Peer Teaching: During the last two weeks of classes, each group will teach their peers about the social problem for 15-20 minutes, allotting at least 5 minutes for questions. While the focus should be primarily on the action your group engaged in and the impact it had, you should also provide a snapshot of the problem, your sociological analysis of the problem, and your reflections about how the topic relates to your lives and/or how it has shaped how you think, act, and feel about the situation. Also, discuss what further actions might be taken given more time and resources. To provide a solid analysis, connect this issue to course material by applying two course concepts. Create a 1-2 page handout (given only to me) that shows the nuts and bolts of what you will discuss in the presentation. You should also have some visual aid for your

presentation (photographs, short video clips, charts and graphs, etc.). Details for this are negotiable and will ultimately fall into place. If you're not sure, just ask.

For each unexcused absence during the Peer Teaching period, your final Praxis Project grade will drop 5 points.

10. *Peer Evaluation*: Lastly, each student will evaluate the contributions of his/her peers to the project. Evaluations will comprise 10% of the final project grade. Please be honest – these are confidential.

Grading Breakdown:

(40% of your total course grade)

Proposal:	10%
Letter to self:	5
Action Taken:	30
Mid-semester journaling:	20
Final critical reflection essay:	20
Peer Teaching :	15
Peer Evaluation:	<u>10</u>
	100%