

**Department of Sociology
Dartmouth College
Winter 2026**

Constructing Social Theory (Sociology 16)

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Course Description:

This course offers an introduction to the sociological theories developed in the late twentieth century. Focusing on the works of Erving Goffman, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michele Foucault, as well as critical race theory, postcolonial theory, intersectionality, gender/queer theory, and political sociology of fascism, this course traces how sociology as a discipline produced concepts and frameworks to account for crucial issues of our time. Through these theories, we will examine micro-interaction and impression management; culture and reproduction of inequality; discipline and power over bodies; the question of voice and positionality; and the rise and fall of fascism. Rather than treating social theory as a set of abstractions removed from reality, this course presents them as products of social construction and situates them firmly within their contexts of development as well as the biographies of theorists. By taking this course, students will learn a) what contemporary social theory entails; b) how to read and critically engage with theoretical texts; and c) how to apply abstract concepts across different contexts. This course fulfills the theory requirement for majors in the Department of Sociology.

*Addendum: over the years, the students in this course have consistently asked me why we should read and care about the so-called “dead, old, white, European, and male” theorists who take up the major portion of this syllabus. I think we should, but I also believe that this line of questioning is a valid and serious engagement with the existing body of knowledge known as theory. To address this concern, I framed the entire course content around the challenges posed by postcolonial theories. In addition to the three learning objectives described above, the students should be able to d) understand the fact that our future attempts at theorizing cannot avoid facing the legacies of the past, whether we like it or not.

Course Requirements and Grading:

NO SCREEN POLICY: Except for exams and other special occasions, I will not allow use of any personal devices with screen during class. The personal devices include laptops, tablets, and smartphones. You are welcome to take notes with pen and paper, but it is not necessary as my lecture slides will be provided through the Canvas page and there is nothing to memorize in this

course. If you want to bring assigned readings with your notes to lectures, I advise you to print them out. This may be inconvenient, but I believe it is essential for us to have time to *think* and *engage*.

READINGS, READINGS, READINGS: This is the most important part of this class. **YOU SHOULD READ ALL OF THE ASSIGNED TEXTS BEFORE ATTENDING THE LECTURES.** “ALL” means every single page. For instance, before attending the lectures for week 2, you should have read Goffman. More than any other course, this course focuses on reading and understanding difficult, abstract texts, and you will have a hard time processing the meaning of the social theories you are encountering for the first time. You may have to read the assigned texts more than once, and sometimes things will become clear only after you read them multiple times. You are welcome to ask me any questions about the readings either through e-mail (brief questions only) or during class. All the better if you decide to discuss what you have read with your classmates. All materials are available through the Canvas page.

Note that some weeks are heavy on readings (more than 200 pages) while others are not. It is advised that you take advantage of the lighter weeks to read the material assigned for other weeks.

A note on cold calling: I will call upon students without warning any time during class to answer questions about the assigned reading. Failing to answer will not result in point deduction, but you should always be prepared to answer questions about the readings.

Grading:

Attendance (10%): Missing a class session will result in reduction of 1 percentage point of the overall course grade.

Reading Responses (35%):

Weekly quotes: each week, you are invited to submit a quote (a sentence or longer, but no more than three sentences) from the assigned reading of the following week, along with your reason for choosing the quote (no less than 500 words).

For example, for the first assignment (due on April 6th) you should read either *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* or *Asylum* or *Stigma* by Erving Goffman and submit a quote from these books. You should also discuss why the particular quote is meaningful to you. Be sure to list the author and source (article or book) as well as the page number. You are more than welcome to submit a passage that was hard for you to understand, but you should articulate why it was hard to understand and narrate how you tried your best to decipher its possible meaning. A good submission would look something like the following:

Erving Goffman, *Asylum: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (1961), xiii

“A total institution may be defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life.”

This passage is obviously a very important one, since Goffman is defining the main topic of his book. By establishing a new concept, total institution, Goffman cuts through commonly established social divide between different institutions and shows us what connects different organizations such as schools, psychiatric wards, prisons, and military barracks. The first component of his definition is space (“place of residence”) and its relation to other spaces (“cut off from the wider society”). Then he discusses what exists in the space (“a large number of like-situated individuals”), followed by what they do (“residence” and “work”). Lastly, he clarifies how the space and people meet—by being “enclosed” and “formally administered.” In a sense a total institution is an example of how power manifests itself as a *real* thing: power becomes real in the form of an institution, with a formally designated space and bodies filling it...[continues; no less than 500 words]

As shown above, a good submission will not only focus on the particular quote but also address the content of the text in a comprehensive manner. You should try to demonstrate the fact that you have read all assigned pages of the material and thought seriously about its subject matter.

The quotes are due 8 PM on every Sunday. You will upload them in Canvas (“assignments”) in the MS WORD file format (NO PDF or other formats). Your submission will be graded pass or fail. You will receive 5 points for each “pass.”

If you submit later than 8PM, one point will be deducted with additional point for each 24 hours thereafter. If an assignment does not meet my standard, I will send it back for a re-write. You will not lose points when you finish the re-write in 48 hours but will start to lose points thereafter.

If you read all the assigned readings and submit all reading responses on time, you will automatically receive 35% of the total credit for this course.

In-class Quiz (15%): I will administer quick, short quizzes throughout the term without notice to confirm whether students read the assigned material. The quizzes will consist of simple multiple-choice questions, the answers to which should be obvious to those who have read the course material.

Midterm (25%): There will be an in-class midterm consisting of five questions. Students will be asked to write 500 words for each question. The questions will touch broadly on the themes covered in the first half of the course. Here are a few examples:

- What does Goffman mean by “self”? How does he conceptualize it? Refer to specific examples in his text.
- Are we living in an asylum? What would Goffman say?
- “All the world’s a stage,” Shakespeare wrote, “and all the men and women merely players.” What does this mean in terms of social theory?
- What is cultural capital? What is habitus? How do these two concepts relate to each other?
- How does culture matter for the reproduction of inequality? Use the examples from Dartmouth.
- Why did the bachelors of Béarn not engage in dancing? Did they not want to, or they just couldn’t?

Out of the five questions, I will let students come up with four. We will devote a class session to this exercise of brainstorming midterm questions. I will add a question of my own to the results and present them in class on Wednesday. You will have an hour to write the answers on your computer. You are welcome to look up sources on/offline but not allowed to use AI. Doing so would lead to disciplinary sanctions (see below).

Final Exam (25%): I will administer 10-minute, one-on-one oral exam for each student. More on this to follow.

Absence/Late Assignment Policy

You are given two “freebies” for class absences and late assignments for the term, combined. That is, you do not lose points for missing a class and turning in an assignment late. You do not have to explain the circumstances. Just note that you are using your freebie. From the third time I will begin to deduct points. Further excuses are possible, but I expect full documentation, including doctor’s notes, official letters, etc.

*. Absences due to varsity sports games: I do understand that some of you may have to miss lectures to play in away games. If you are missing two lectures, I urge you to use your two freebies. If you must miss more than two, I need a) your team’s note and the coach’s contact info and b) your plan to make up the missed content. As for b), I generally expect you to read all the assigned reading and review the lecture slides. If you are so inclined, you can gather other

students who missed lectures to meet with me for a quick summary session. I will do this only for more than three students in one setting.

Grade breakdown:

A 94-100
A- 90-94
B+ 87-90
B 83-7
B- 80-83
C+ 77-80
C 73-77
C- 70-73
D 60-70
F <60

I follow Dartmouth's Scholarship Ratings:

http://www.dartmouth.edu/~reg/transcript/grade_descriptions.html

Earning an "A" entails the following:

Excellent mastery of course material

Student performance indicates a very high degree of originality, creativity, or both. Excellent performance in analysis, synthesis, and critical expression, oral or written Student works independently with unusual effectiveness.

In case of a borderline score (i.e., 94), I will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the student's participation during the term to decide on a grade (either A or A-). The main criteria will be attendance, quiz, and in-class participation. For instance, a 94 who turned in excellent assignments and missed a couple of classes will most likely receive A-. If they actively participated in class discussions, however, they may still receive an A.

Office Hour Meeting:

I will hold weekly office hour meetings in my office every Tuesday from 2 PM to 3 PM. You should sign up in advance using the following link:

<https://www.wejoinin.com/sunmin.kim@dartmouth.edu>

You should sign up for a meeting at least once throughout the term. If you sign up early in the term in the first couple of weeks, I can get to know you and help you learn better as we move forward.

Accessibility:

Student Accessibility Needs: Students requesting disability-related accommodations and services for this course are encouraged to schedule a phone/video meeting with me as early in the term as possible. This conversation will help to establish what supports are built into my online course. In order for accommodations to be authorized, students are required to consult with Student Accessibility Services (SAS; student.accessibility.services@dartmouth.edu; SAS website; 603-646-9900) and to email me their SAS accommodation form. We will then work together with SAS if accommodations need to be modified based on the online learning environment. If students have questions about whether they are eligible for accommodations, they should contact the SAS office. All inquiries and discussions will remain confidential.

Title IX Reporting Requirement:

At Dartmouth, we value integrity, responsibility, and respect for the rights and interests of others, all central to our Principles of Community. We are dedicated to establishing and maintaining a safe and inclusive campus where all have equal access to the educational and employment opportunities Dartmouth offers. We strive to promote an environment of sexual respect, safety, and well-being. In its policies and standards, Dartmouth demonstrates unequivocally that sexual assault, gender-based harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking are not tolerated in our community.

The Sexual Respect Website (<https://sexual-respect.dartmouth.edu>) at Dartmouth provides a wealth of information on your rights with regard to sexual respect and resources that are available to all in our community.

Please note that, as a faculty member, I am obligated to share disclosures regarding conduct under Title IX with Dartmouth's Title IX Coordinator. Confidential resources are also available, and include licensed medical or counseling professionals (e.g., a licensed psychologist), staff members of organizations recognized as rape crisis centers under state law (such as WISE), and ordained clergy (see https://dartgo.org/titleix_resources).

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Dartmouth's Title IX Coordinator or the Deputy Title IX Coordinator for the Guarini School. Their contact information can be found on the sexual respect website at: <https://sexual-respect.dartmouth.edu>.

Religious Observances:

Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during this academic term. If you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please meet with me before the end of the second week of the term to discuss appropriate accommodations.

Honor Principle:

Assignments will be conducted in accord with the principles of academic honor detailed in the Dartmouth Organization, Regulations and Courses. I encourage you to discuss ideas from class

with your classmates. However, unless otherwise noted, assignments should be completed independently, and all work turned in should be your own. You may study with classmates, but (as noted above) you should not discuss the exam or your answers with classmates or anyone else while completing it. If your paper topic for a project is one that you're exploring in another class, independent study, or other academic work, you must let me and the other professor(s) know. If you have questions about what is permissible, I urge you to consult the academic honor principle (<https://students.dartmouth.edu/judicial-affairs/policy/academic-honor-principle>), the statement on sources and citations (<http://writing-speech.dartmouth.edu/learning/materials/sources-and-citations-dartmouth>) and talk with me.

*****A Special Note on Use of Generative AI *****

You should not use any existing AI algorithms (i.e., CHAT GPT and such) for any tasks related to this class. If you do use AI, I will personally see to it that you receive the maximum degree of disciplinary sanctions for doing so. I will explain the rationale for this more in detail in our first meeting.

Course Schedule and Assigned Readings:

Week 1

January 5 Introduction

January 7 What is Social Theory?

Bargheer, Stefan. 2014. "The Usefulness of Theory." *Perspectives: Newsletter of the ASA Theory Section* 36(2).

January 9 Postcolonial Theory "Provincializing Europe"

Go, Julian. 2016. *Postcolonial Thought and Sociology*. Oxford University Press: 1-17 and 64-102 ("Introduction" and "The Postcolonial Challenge").

Week 2

January 11 Reading response due by 8 PM EST

January 12 Goffman "Self and Performance"

Shalin, Dimitri. 2013. "Interfacing Biography, Theory, and History: The Case of Erving Goffman." *Symbolic Interaction* 37(1): 2-40.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Anchor Books: 1-16; 17-76 and 238-256 ("Introduction, "Performances," and "Conclusion").

January 14 Goffman “Total Institution”

Goffman, Erving. 1961. *Asylum: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. Anchor Books: 1-12 and 125-170 (“On the Characteristics of Total Institutions: Introduction” and “The Moral Career of the Mental Patient”).

January 16 Goffman “Stigma”

Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Simon and Schuster, Inc: 1-40 and 126-139 (“Stigma and Social Identity” and “The Self and Its Other”).

Week 3

January 18 Reading response due by 8 PM EST

January 19 MLK Day; No class.

January 21 Goffman applications

Lee, Jooyoung. 2009. “Escaping Embarrassment: Face-work in the Rap Cipher” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 72(4): 306-324.

Bailey, Charlotte and Imogen Tyler 2019. *From Stigma Power to Black Power* (available at: <https://thesociologicalreview.org/collections/guest-essays/from-stigma-power-to-black-power/>)

January 23 Bourdieu “Habitus”

Video: *Sociology is a Martial Art* (available at: <https://vimeo.com/92709274>)

Bourdieu, Pierre. 2008. *The Bachelors’ Ball*. The University of Chicago Press: 81-93 (“The Peasant and His Body”).

Week 4

January 25 Reading response due by 8 PM EST

January 26 Bourdieu “Culture and Class”

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Harvard University Press: 9-96 (“The Aristocracy of Culture,” “The Titles of Cultural Nobility,” and “Cultural Pedigree”).

January 28 In-class Exercise: “Distinction at Dartmouth”

January 30 Bourdieu “Reproduction”

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Harvard University Press: 99-168 (“The Social Space and Its Transformations”).

Week 5

No reading response on week 5

February 2 Bourdieu “Embodying Class”

Khan, Shamus. 2010. *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul’s School*. Princeton University Press: 151-192 (“Learning *Beowulf* and *Jaws*”).

Riviera, Lauren 2015. *Pedigree: How Elite Students Get Elite Jobs*. Princeton University Press: 147-182 (“Continuing the Interview: The Candidate’s Story”).

February 4 Midterm brainstorming

February 6 Midterm

Week 6

February 8 Reading response due by 8 PM EST

February 9 Foucault: Introduction

Macey, David. 1993. *The Lives of Michel Foucault*. Pantheon: xi-xxiii; 1-20 (“Introduction: ‘I, Michel Foucault...’” and “Paul-Michel”).

February 11 Foucault “Body”

Foucault, Michele. 1995. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage Books: 3-31 and 73-103 (“The Body of the Condemned” and “Generalized Punishment”).

February 13 Foucault “Technologies of Power”

Foucault, Michele. 1995. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage Books: 135-169 and 195-230 (“Docile Bodies” and “Panopticism”).

Week 7

February 15 Reading response due by 8 PM EST

February 16 Foucault “Governmentality”

Foucault, Michele. 1990. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Vintage Books: 1-14 and 133-160 (“We ‘Other Victorians’ and “Right of Death and Power over Life”).
_____. 2009. *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*. Palgrave Macmillan: 55-86 and 115-134 (lectures three and five).

February 18 Foucault “The State”

Canaday, Margot. 2009. *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*. Princeton University Press: 1-18 and 214-254 (“Introduction” and “Who is a Homosexual? The Consolidation of Sexual Identities in Mid-twentieth-century Immigration Law, 1952-1983”).

Scott, James. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Conditions Have Failed*. Yale University Press: 1-8 and 11-52 (“Introduction” and “Nature and Space”).

February 20 [Extra session]

Week 8

February 22 Reading response due by 8 PM EST

February 23 Critical Race Theory

“James Baldwin vs. William Buckley: A Legendary Debate from 1965”

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Tek9h3a5wQ>)

For context, also refer to: “Baldwin-Buckley Race Debate Still Resonates after 55 Years.”

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRzkHgMaPL4&t=37s>)

Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States*. Routledge: 1-18 and 103-136 (“Introduction” and “The Theory of Racial Formation”).

February 25 Intersectionality

King, Deborah. 1988. "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Contest of a Black Feminist Ideology." *Signs* 14(1): 42-72.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 2019. *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*. Duke University Press: 21-53 ("Intersectionality as Critical Inquiry").

Nash, Jennifer. 2019. *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality*. Duke University Press: 1-32 and 133-138 ("Introduction: Feeling Black Feminism" and "Coda: Some of Us are Tired").

February 27 Gender/Queer Theory

Butler, Judith. 2024. *Who's Afraid of Gender?* Farrar, Straus and Giroux: 3-36; 170-211. ("Introduction: Gender Ideology and the Fear of Destruction," "What About Sex?," "What Gender Are You?," and "Nature/Culture: Toward Co-Construction")

Halberstam, Judith (Jack). 2011. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Duke University Press: 1-26 ("Introduction: Low Theory")

Week 9

March 1 Reading response due by 8 PM EST

March 2 Special Session: "What is happening?"

Arendt, Hannah. 1973. *The Origin of Totalitarianism*. Harper Collins: 389-479 ("Totalitarianism in Power" and "Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government").

March 4 Final oral exam

March 6 Final oral exam

Week 10

March 9 Final oral exam