

Instructor: Prof. Agnes Ku (谷淑美)/ soagnes@ust.hk
 Office hrs: Mon/Wed (2:30-3:30pm) or by appointment (Rm: 3369, lift #13-15)
 Teaching Assistants:
 Creamy Wong (wuyukha@ust.hk); Zhuojun Zhang; Kelvin Chandra

UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY

“Ours is a time of uneasiness and indifference ... Instead of troubles – defined in terms of values and threats – there is often the misery of vague uneasiness; instead of explicit issues, there is often merely the beat feeling that all is somehow not right. Neither the values threatened nor whatever threatens them has been stated; in short, they have not been carried to the point of decision. Much less have they been formulated as problems of social science.” (C. Wright Mills 1959, The Sociological Imagination)

“(T)he discovery of sociology can change your life. It can help you to understand better the social forces you confront, the forces that constrain and free. This understanding has a liberating potential: By examining these forces you can stand somewhat apart from at least some aspect of society, and thereby exert more creative control over your own life.” (James Henslin, adapting from Peter Berger 1963, Invitation to Sociology)

I. COURSE AIMS

1. To introduce the basic sociological concepts and perspectives;
2. To address some critical social issues and problems from sociological perspectives;
3. To enable students to relate sociology to their life experiences and the social context.

II. INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completion of the course, students should be able:

- (1) To demonstrate basic knowledge of the key sociological concepts and perspectives;
- (2) To explain and analyze a wide range of social issues including deviance, gender inequality, family changes, class inequality, education, power, politics and so on; &
- (3) To apply some basic sociological concepts.

III. MODES OF LEARNING/ASSESSMENT

Mid-term exam	35%
Final exam	40%
Essay	25%
Class exercises/ discussion	(10 bonus points max.)

※ Exams take the form of MC and/ or short questions. Mid-term exam will cover the topics from the start to Family & Gender; final exam will cover the rest of the topics.¹

¹ The questions will cover the lectures/ required readings (80-90%) and the video clips shown in class

※ An essay, *on an individual basis*, of 600-900 words is due on 18 May (Saturday), 11:59pm (submission via Canvass). The task is to write a sociological essay about yourself, your family or a social phenomenon (suggestions regarding the essay topics will be provided along the way). For the sake of fairness to all, late submissions will receive a penalty and submissions late for more than 3 days will not be accepted.*

(*Please submit a Word or PDF file named in the following format – “student’s name_student ID_course code”, such as “Chan Tai Tai_12345678_SOSC1850”. The name, student ID, and course code should also be typed in the document.)

※ The class exercises give you an opportunity to apply the concepts and theories you have learned in class and stimulate you to think further about some critical social issues. You may receive bonus points on top of your total course score. (There will be no make-up arrangement for these exercises in case of absence for class.)

※ Class etiquette: (i) *punctuality*; (ii) *no mobile phone, notebook or tablet PC*.

We all share the responsibility to ensure that the classes will run well with the least disturbance to anyone. Please come to class on time. You are also advised against using any electronic devices in class, for this will distract both yourselves and the instructor more than you might be aware of. Everyone will be better off if we all learn to respect the occasion.

IV. CONTENTS AND CLASS SCHEDULE

Wk	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>
1		[30/01] Introduction
1	[04/02] Culture and Socialization	[06/02] {holiday}
2	[11/02] Deviance	[13/02] Deviance
3	[18/02] Deviance	[20/02] Deviance
4	[25/02] Deviance/ Sociological Theories	[27/02] Family
5	[04/03] Family	[06/03] Gender
6	[11/03] Gender	[13/03] Family/ Gender
7	[18/03] Social Inequalities	[20/03] MID-TERM EXAM
8	[25/03] Economy & Class Inequalities	[27/03] Economy & Class Inequalities
9	[01/04] Economy & Class Inequalities	[03/04] Economy & Class Inequalities
10	[08/04] Economy & Class Inequalities	[10/04] Education
11	[15/04] Education	[17/04] Education
11	[22/04] {holiday}	[24/04] Power & Politics
12	[29/04] Power & Politics	[01/05] {holiday}
13	[06/05] Power & Politics	[08/05] Power & Politics

(10-20%). Lecture notes, as well as supplementary ppt notes, will be available from Canvass. Students who are unable to take the mid-term will not be given a make-up exam except in the event of accidents or critical illness (the latter subject to prior approval), they may be given a take-home essay exam as an alternative. If students do not show up in the exam and also fail to seek approval from the instructor prior to the exam (except in the case of accidents), their exam will receive no marks. The final exam will take place during the university’s exam period --- no make-up arrangement will be made except in the case of accidents or critical illness (subject to approval).

V. READINGS (available on Canvass)

1. Introduction: The “Sociological Imagination”

Required

- J.C. Alexander and K. Thompson 2008. *A Contemporary Introduction to Sociology – Culture and Society in Transition*, London: Paradigm, pp. 7-13

Culture & Socialization

Required

- Haralambos and Holborn 2004. *Sociology*, pp. vi-xi
- Henslin, *Down to Earth Sociology* (chapter by Henslin, “On Becoming Male: Reflections of a Sociologist on Childhood and Early Socialization)

2. Deviance

Required

- Haralambos and Holborn. 2004. *Sociology*, pp. 330-351, 353-355

Supplementary

- Howard Becker.1953. “Becoming a Marihuana.” *American Journal of Sociology*, 59 (3), pp.235-242.

3. Sociological Theory

Required

- Haralambos and Holborn 2004. *Sociology*, p. xiv-xxi, pp. 934-950, 961-964

4. Family

Required

- Haralambos and Holborn 2004. *Sociology*, 466-470, 478-488, 494-500

5. Gender

Required

- Haralambos and Holborn 2004. *Sociology*, pp 98-115, 126-137
- Henslin, *Down to Earth Sociology* (chapter by Thorne and Luria, “Sexuality and Gender in Children’s Daily Worlds”)

6. Social and Class Inequalities

Required

- Bilton et al. 2002, *Introductory Sociology*, chapters 4 & 5 (pp.70-94, 98-127)

Supplementary:

- Henslin, *Down to Earth Sociology* (chapter by H. J. Gans, “The Uses of Poverty: The Poor Pay All”)

7. Education

Required:

- Haralambos and Holborn 2004. *Sociology*, pp. xxvi-6, 692-694, 698-706, 731-756

8. Power and Politics

Required:

- Haralambos and Holborn 2004, pp. 538-559

Recommended Books for the Course (on reserve)

- Haralambos, M., and M. Holborn. 2004. *Sociology - Themes and Perspectives*. London: Collins. (Note: The 2013 edition contains very minor changes.)
- Bilton, T., K. Bonnett, P. Jones, D. Skinner, M. Stanworth and A. Webster. 2002. *Introductory Sociology*. London: Macmillan.
- Henslin, J. 2007. *Down to Earth Sociology: Introductory Readings*. New York: Free Press.
- John, J. Macionis. 2012. *Sociology*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Johnson, Allan G. 1997. *The Forest and the Trees - Sociology as Life, Practice, and Promise*. Temple University Press.
- Worsley, P. 1991. *The New Modern Sociology Readings*. London: Penguin, chs. 1,3,4,6,27,29,58,59,64,65,66,74.
- 莫家豪 (1998) :《社會學與社會分析》。香港：香港人文科學出版社。章 1-2。
- 李明堃, 黃紹倫主編 (1992) :《社會學新論》。香港：商務印書館。章 6,9,11,12。

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Introductory Lecture

I. Nature vs Nurture (Culture)?

II. “Sociological Imagination” (C.Wright Mills 1959)

-An awareness of the relationship between personal experience and the wider society

- private troubles ↔ public issues (e.g. poverty; unemployment; “unsuccessful” students)

-*Do not take things for granted!* (i.e. Don’t ever believe that what you see at present is the natural or the only way of behaving or organizing social relationships. There always are alternatives.)

-Sociology encourages you to develop a *debunking* attitude toward social phenomenon (i.e. a critical attitude that exposures falseness and pretensions).

Sociological Focuses:

- the recurring patterns in people’s attitudes and action
- how such patterns are formed culturally, socially, economically and politically
- how such patterns vary across time, societies, & social groups (e.g. classes)
- how such patterns generate social inequalities (e.g. gender inequality) & social conflicts