INTRODUCTION TO CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

**Term 2, Winter 2022**

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## Land Acknowledgement Statement

McMaster University recognizes and acknowledges that it is located on the traditional territories of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee nations, and within the lands protected by the “Dish With One Spoon” Wampum agreement.

# Course Description

Introduction to Contemporary Sociological Theory provides an overview of the historical developments in sociological theory from the mid-20th Century up to the present. This class builds on Sociology 2KK3 Introduction to Classical Sociological Theory (prerequisite), highlighting ways in which contemporary theorists have extended classical insights, critiqued classical theorists, and pursued novel approaches to sociological theory.

In our everyday lives, we think about society and attempt to understand it. This course highlights how sociological theorizing is similar to and distinct form our everyday thinking about society. The textbook used for this course provides an overview of a wide range of theories, the textbook authors explore the intellectual foundations of contemporary sociological theories and explain the ideas developed by prominent theorists. The textbook also includes excerpts from these theorists. The textbook authors (and this class more generally) is designed to help you readd, understand and critically evaluate theoretical writing by important contemporary theorists.

My aim is to offer you tools to critically think about contemporary sociological theory and to develop your own perspective on how to study society.

# Course Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to:

* Articulate what theory is and how it is used to understand the social world.
* Critically read and interpret original writings by contemporary sociological theorists.
* Identify key contemporary thinkers and explain their ideas.
* Develop theoretical arguments by using evidence, evaluating competing explanations, and drawing conclusions.
* Communicate core sociological principles, concepts, and knowledge clearly and effectively.

# Required Materials and Texts

* + *Required* textbook (available through the McMaster Bookstore):

Scott Applerouth and Laura Desfor Edles . 2015. *Sociological Theory in the Contemporary Era: Text and Readings* (3rd edition). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

* + All multimedia materials, details on assignments and other course information can be accessed via McMaster’s Avenue to Learn course management system.

# Course Evaluation – Overview

1. Group activities – 18%
2. Theoretical stance – 23%
3. Mid-term exam – 27%
4. Final exam – 32%

# Course Evaluation – Details

## Group Activities – (18%)

Class participation activities include three group writing exercises. These three exercises will provide you with an opportunity to think more deeply about what you are learning in the course while also strengthening your teamwork skills. Each exercise is worth 6% (total 18%).

## Theoretical Stance (23%: 5% for initial stance [Part 1], 18% for revisiting and reflecting on theoretical stance at end of term [Part 2])

*Theoretical Stance, Part 1 (5%)*

In this assignment you will write a 1-page (double-spaced) paper (approx. 250- 300 words) that includes the following:

* Present your explanation of why people stop for red traffic lights (see Table 1.1 [page 19] in Appelrouth & Edles, Sociological Theory in the Contemporary Era).
* Link your explanation of why people stop for traffic lights to Appelrouth & Edles’s discussion of “order” and “action” (pp. 15-19).

*Theoretical Stance, Part 2 (18%)*

In this assignment you will write a 5-page (double-spaced) paper (approx. 1250- 1500 words) that includes the following components:

* Identify and explain your own theoretical stance.
* Situate your current theoretical stance within the “order” and “action” framework that the textbook uses for navigating contemporary sociological theory.
* Compare and contrast your current theoretical stance with your stance at the beginning of the term (*Theoretical Stance, Part 1).*

## Midterm exam (27%)

The mid-term exam is worth 27% of your total course grade. It will consist of 35 multiple-choice questions. You will complete the exam online using the Avenue to Learn “Quizzes” tool that will be made available for a specific, time-limited period as indicated in the Detailed Course Schedule. You must access and complete the test during this designated period. There will be no additional times at which it can be written.

## Final exam (32%)

The final exam is worth 32% of your total course grade. It will consist of 40 multiple- choice questions and two short-answer essays. You will complete the exam online using the Avenue to Learn “Quizzes” tool. The final exam will take place during the exam period, and the exact date will be announced when available. You must access and complete the exam during this designated period. There will be no additional times at which it can be written.

# Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

## Module 1: Introduction: Jan 10 – Jan 16

#### module learning outcomes

* Articulate what theory is and how it is used to understand the social world:
* Identify the core contemporary sociological theorists,
* Recognize some of the most important ideas advanced by these theorists.

**Reading**: Chapter1 in Applerouth and Edles, *Sociological Theory in the Contemporary Era.*

*YouTube* video linked in the module

**Notes**: Review Figure 1.4 (page 18) and reflect on your theoretical orientation.

## Module 2: Structural Functionalism: Jan 17 – Jan 23

#### module learning outcomes

* Develop a critical understanding of key theorists and concepts associated with structural functionalism
* Demonstrate ability to read original source material written by classical and contemporary sociological theorists.
* Identify key contemporary thinkers and their ideas.
* Communicate sociological principles and knowledge effectively.

**Reading**: Chapter 2 in Applerouth and Edles, *Sociological Theory in the Contemporary Era.*

*YouTube* videos linked in the module

**Notes**: Coordinate with group members to prepare Group Activity #1.

* + **Notes**: **Complete and submit** Theoretical Stance, Part 1 (5% of your grade).

## Module 3: Critical Theory – Jan 24 – Feb 6

### Please note: 2 weeks are devoted to this module

#### module learning outcomes

* + - Develop a critical understanding of key theorists and concepts associated with critical theory
    - Demonstrate ability to read original source material written by classical and contemporary sociological theorists.
    - Identify key contemporary thinkers and their ideas.
    - Communicate sociological principles and knowledge effectively.

**Reading**: Chapter 3 in Applerouth and Edles, *Sociological Theory in the Contemporary Era.*

*YouTube* videos linked in the module

**Notes**: Coordinate with group members to prepare Group Activity #1.

## Module 4: Exchange and Rational Choice Theories: Feb 7 - Feb 13

#### module learning outcomes

* + - Develop a critical understanding of key theorists and concepts associated with exchange and rational choice theories
    - Demonstrate ability to read original source material written by classical and contemporary sociological theorists.
    - Identify key contemporary thinkers and their ideas.
    - Communicate sociological principles and knowledge effectively.

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**Reading**: Chapter 4 in Applerouth and Edles, *Sociological Theory in the Contemporary Era.*

*YouTube* videos linked in the module

**Notes**: **Complete and submit** Group Activity #1 (6% of your grade).

## Module 5: Symbolic Interactionism and Dramaturgy: Feb 14 – Mar 6

### Please note: 2 weeks are devoted to this module (including the week of the mid- term test)

#### module learning outcomes

* + - Develop a critical understanding of key theorists and concepts associated with symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy
    - Demonstrate ability to read original source material written by classical and contemporary sociological theorists.
    - Identify key contemporary thinkers and their ideas.
    - Communicate sociological principles and knowledge effectively.

**Reading**: Chapter 5 in Applerouth and Edles, *Sociological Theory in the Contemporary Era.*

*YouTube* videos linked in the module

**Notes**: Coordinate with group members to prepare Group Activity #2.

**READING WEEK: Feb 21 – Feb 27**

## Midterm exam for the week of Feb 28 – Mar 6: The exam will take place on March 3. See Detailed Course Schedule for details

**Module 6: Phenomenology: Mar 7 – Mar 13**

#### module learning outcomes

* + - Develop a critical understanding of key theorists and concepts associated with phenomenology.
    - Demonstrate ability to read original source material written by classical and contemporary sociological theorists.
    - Identify key contemporary thinkers and their ideas.
  + Communicate sociological principles and knowledge effectively
  + **Reading**: Chapter 6 in Applerouth and Edles, *Sociological Theory in the Contemporary Era.*
  + *YouTube* videos linked in the module
  + **Notes**: **Complete and submit** Group Activity #2 (6% of your grade).

**Module 7: Poststructuralism: Mar 14 – Mar 27** *Please note: 2 weeks are devoted to this module* **module learning outcomes**

* + - Develop a critical understanding of key theorists and concepts associated with poststructuralism
    - Demonstrate ability to read original source material written by classical and contemporary sociological theorists.
    - Identify key contemporary thinkers and their ideas.
    - Communicate sociological principles and knowledge effectively.
  + **Reading**: Chapter 7 in Applerouth and Edles, *Sociological Theory in the Contemporary Era.*
  + *YouTube* videos linked in the module

#### Notes:

* + - Reflect on theoretical stance in preparation of completing Theoretical Stance, Part 2 (due April 9).
    - Coordinate with group members to prepare Group Activity #3.

## Module 8: Postmodernism: Mar 28 – Apr 3

#### module learning outcomes

* Develop a critical understanding of key theorists and concepts associated with postmodernism
* Demonstrate ability to read original source material written by classical and contemporary sociological theorists.
* Identify key contemporary thinkers and their ideas.
* Communicate sociological principles and knowledge effectively.
  + **Reading**: Chapter 8 in Applerouth and Edles, *Sociological Theory in the Contemporary Era.*
  + *YouTube* videos linked in the module
  + **Notes**: **Complete and submit** Group Activity #3 (6% of your grade).

## Module 9: The Global Society: Apr 4 – Apr 12

#### module learning outcomes

* + - Develop a critical understanding of key theorists and concepts associated with theories of global society
    - Demonstrate ability to read original source material written by classical and contemporary sociological theorists.
    - Identify key contemporary thinkers and their ideas.
    - Communicate sociological principles and knowledge effectively.

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* + **Reading**: Chapter 9 in Applerouth and Edles, *Sociological Theory in the Contemporary Era.*
  + *YouTube* videos linked in the module
  + **Notes**: **Complete and submit** Theoretical Stance, Part 2 (18% of your grade).

# Course Policies

## Submission of Assignments

All group activities and theoretical stance assignments will be submitted to Avenue to Learn assignment submission folders. All submissions will also be checked for plagiarism using Turnitin.com.

To submit your assignments:

1. Click **Assessments** (top navigation bar)
2. Select **Assignments**
3. Click the appropriate assignment folder
4. Upload the file to submit your assignment for grading.

## Review of Marks

Occasionally, students may disagree with the marks they receive. If this occurs, you may request a review of a mark by writing a brief (1 page) memo that describes in detail the nature of the perceived marking error. Submit this memo to me via email. You may submit requests for review no sooner than 48 hours and no later than 2 weeks after the assignments are returned. Please note that when a mark is reviewed the new mark may be lower than the original.

## Late Assignments

The McMaster Student Absence Form [(h](http://www.mcmaster.ca/msaf/))t[tp://www.mcmaster.ca/msaf/)](http://www.mcmaster.ca/msaf/)) is a self- reporting tool for Undergraduate Students to report absences that last up to 3 days and provides the ability to request accommodation for any missed academic work. You may

submit a maximum of 1 Academic Work Missed request per term. It is YOUR responsibility to follow up with your instructor immediately regarding the nature of the accommodation. If you are absent more than 3 days, exceed 1 request per term, or are absent for a reason other than medical, you MUST visit your Associate Dean’s Office (Faculty Office). You may be required to provide supporting documentation. This form should be filled out when you are about to return to class after your absence. In the absence of a vetted excuse, late assignments will be marked down 5 percentage points for each day late.

## Absences, Missed Work, Illness

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”.

## Avenue to Learn

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure, please discuss this with the course instructor.

## Turnitin.com

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via Avenue to Learn (A2L) plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work through A2L and/or Turnitin.com must still submit an electronic and/or hardcopy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com or A2L. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more information please refer to the Turnitin.com Policy.

# University Policies

## Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or

suspension or expulsion from the university.

**It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty**. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy**.**

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty

* + Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
  + Improper collaboration in group work.
  + Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

## Authenticity/Plagiarism Detection

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. **All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster’s use of Turnitin.com please go to [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity)

## Courses with an Online Element

**Some courses may use on-line elements** (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.).Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used.

Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

## Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or [sas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sas@mcmaster.ca) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s *Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities* policy.

## Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual

**Observances (RISO)**

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students requiring a RISO accommodation should submit their request to their Faculty Office normally within 10 working days of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

## Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, whether in person or online.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

## Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, including lectures by University instructors

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

## Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e- mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student’s own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

## Course Modification

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

## Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.

## Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

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| **MARK** | **GRADE** |
| 90-100 | A+ |
| 85-89 | A |
| 80-84 | A- |
| 77-79 | B+ |
| 73-76 | B |
| 70-72 | B- |
| 67-69 | C+ |
| 63-66 | C |
| 60-62 | C- |
| 57-59 | D+ |
| 53-56 | D |
| 50-52 | D- |
| 0-49 | F |