

Modern Sociological Theory ONLINE

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University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

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Course Information

Introduction: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Not exactly! These questions were never asked by anyone, let alone, frequently. You may also wonder why "Introduction" should start with FAQs. The answer to both puzzles is my desperate attempt to grab your attention. I know I may still fail to rope you in but I'll take a chance. So here are some questions that I think I should be asked, frequently, and no others (just kidding! If you have more questions, shoot away).

Why study sociological theory?

Because it's neat, interesting, counter-intuitive, and offers tools for understanding the changing world.

Counter-intuitive? Give me a break!

Well, I must warn you that many of your cherished beliefs are going to come crashing down during the course. You may find the often repeated advice, "Be yourself," flat out wrong, as you will discover there is no unchanging "self" out there to identify with. Did the Gulf War really take place? Again, the answer may sound weird: "The Gulf War Did Not Take Place" (the title of the last article we will read in this course).

Will this course make me rich?

No (but it may tell you that income has no correlation with happiness, a well-researched social fact).

Will this course make me happy?

It depends. If you are taking the course to fulfil some requirements, then the answer is "no." But if you are looking for intellectual excitement, and ready to work for it, then, yes, a big yes.

Will the entire course be like this?

Not really. As I said earlier, I am just trying to lure you in. Much of the course will be tough going. Theory happens to be a difficult subject for the uninitiated: no pain, no gain. But I am not a sadist; I try to make learning as pleasantly painful as possible.

What do the author's students think of him?

I can provide some quotes from past students if you are really interested. In general, they think I am sincerely and passionately interested in getting us to learn.

Why the elephant?

If social reality is like the proverbial elephant above, then we are a bunch of blind persons, touching the elephant's leg here and tail there, and worse, defining the whole reality shaped as leg or tail (note: this example comes from Jainism, an ancient religion in India). Unlike physics, chemistry, or even

economics where there is usually one dominant way to explore reality, sociology is a multiple paradigm discipline. What does that mean? Well, it means sociology is open to the ideas of not just one but all the blind folks.

Finally, this course also seeks to train you how to think. It is of critical interest not only to students who wish to major in sociology, but also to those, who need tools to think and talk about their society with a view to broader life satisfaction.

Readings? What a bother!!

The following required text books are available at the UWM bookstore as well as on Amazon.

[Contemporary Sociological Theory \(6th edition\) by Ruth A. Wallace & Alison Wolf \(Prentice Hall 2006\)](#)

[The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences edited by Quentin Skinner \(Canto 1985\)](#)

All other texts are directly available by clicking the hyperlink on weekly modules.

Contact Information

You can contact me by sending email at any time at aneesh@uwm.edu. I will check and reply to your e-mail regularly on **Mondays** and **Wednesdays**. Whenever you email, please always use "Soc 376" in your subject heading, and always write your full name in your signature.

This year I am in Santa Fe, New Mexico, as a resident scholar at the [School of American Research](#), working on my second book. Gosh, it's beautiful out here. But distance and place do not matter for online presence (even if they matter a lot offline). I'm available online if you need help.

For all other information about me, check out my website: www.uwm.edu/~aneesh

Or, read my useless [blog](#)

Exam Troubles

Break Up by Exam Type

Exams are a highly troubling feature of modern times, I agree. But there is nothing you and I can do about them, except take and give them. Quizzes, Response Papers, and

Discussion forum participation are three types of exam in this course.

	Points
Quizzes	300
Response Papers	500
Discussion participation	200
Total	1000

Quizzes

I expect you to have completed the readings outlined for the week by Friday. And just to make sure, we will have one short quiz every week, consisting of 10 questions each (1.5 points for each question, totaling 15 points for each quiz).

Quiz questions will be mostly in the multiple-choice format, covering all texts, lecture notes and slides assigned in the particular week. You can take the weekly quiz any time during the week between **Monday** and **Sunday**. But only one attempt is allowed for each quiz, and you have to complete it in 15 minutes, meaning there will be no time for you to go looking for answers in the book/website while taking the quiz.

If for some reason, you miss taking a quiz during the entire week, TOO BAD! You cannot take any quiz later than the week when it was meant to be taken (hint: one week is a loooong time to take a quiz)

The last quiz of the course (Week 15) will be cumulative, covering the material from the entire course. This quiz will have 45 questions (2 points for each question) to be completed in 75 minutes.

All the quizzes together will constitute **30% of the total grade (300 points)**

- **First 14 weeks = 10 questions each week = 140 questions = 210 points (each question carries 1.5 points)**
- **Last week = 45 questions = 90 points (each question carries 2 points)**
- **Total = 210 + 90 = 300 points**

Response Papers

- You will be writing **five response papers** during the course.
- Each response paper must be 450-500-word long (**no more, no less**), responding to the question posed every week, using the theory learned.
- Always mention the exact word count at the beginning or end of your paper (using Microsoft Word's word count utility under "Tools")
- You are free to choose response paper questions from any **five** of the fifteen weeks.
- Upload your paper into the Dropbox.
- **Total 500 points or 50% of the total grade.**

Each response paper = 100 points (hint: write with care)

You may wish to review the [Guide to Writing a Successful Response Paper](#), and [a sample response paper](#)

Discussion Forum

Your participation and responses to discussion questions on the discussion forum each week will cover about **20% of your total grade, i.e., 200 points.**

See [Discussion Guidelines](#) for more details.

Final Paper

Just kidding! **There is NO final paper in this course.** So relax and rejoice!!

But don't forget to take **the last week's quiz**, which will be **the only cumulative quiz of the course**, covering the **entire course material**, and consisting of 45 questions to be answered in 75 minutes.

Guidelines

Directions for submitting a response paper to the Dropbox

1. Click on the words "Dropbox" from tool bar on the top of the screen.
2. Click on the folder in which you want to submit the assignment.
3. Click "Browse" to select the file that you wish to send
4. The file name for your paper should start with your last name, and brief title.
5. Click the "upload" box.
6. On the next screen click "OK."

Direction for submitting your comment to the Discussion Board

1. Click on "Discussions" from tool bar on top of screen.
2. Click on the appropriate Discussion Board (for example, Self Introduction).
3. Click on "Add Message."
4. Fill in subject line with name of the Discussion Board that you selected (Week 1 posting)
5. Type your answer directly in the text box. Or cut and paste from Word document into the text box. This will be a more efficient way to see the posts quickly as opposed to having to open and close attachments.

Class Participation Guidelines

7. Submit your postings to Discussion Forum
 1. Read the assigned reading materials, and respond to my questions on Discussion Forum.
 2. Your responses (minimum 100 words for each posting) need to be posted on the website before midnight on Thursdays.
8. Contents of each posting should include the following:
 1. Responding to the question, clearly make one key argument regarding the question.
 2. If you are responding to another student's posting on the question, present your explanations or arguments persuasively; for example, how your argument differs from others, or how exactly it adds a new dimension to someone's argument.

3. You are free to post more than one response in a week.
9. All students **MUST** join the discussion (even if it starts as a dyadic response between two students).

Guidelines for Response Papers

Due date

Every **three weeks**, you must write at least one response paper, selecting any of the questions given in the first three weeks. In total, you will be writing **five response papers** during this course. The question for the response paper is mentioned every week. In this paper you will apply the concepts and theories learned in a particular week.

Format and Length of the assignment

450-500 words (don't forget to mention the **word count** at the beginning of the paper). See my [sample response paper](#).

Submit your paper in the [Dropbox](#) in Word or PDF as a one-page, single-spaced document in 12-point Times New Roman. And always use your name and week number as your filename. For example, "**Smith, Week 2 Response**".

Purpose of this assignment

One key aspect of the course is to be able to apply theory to the real world to understand a social issue in a different and deeper fashion. Response papers provide you with an opportunity to apply some of the concepts and theories you're learning in class to all aspects of the world: social issues, organizations, news, culture, entertainment, globalization, racism, gender inequality, or crime.

I believe this format will let you demonstrate your knowledge and apply what you have learned from this course to a real-world phenomenon that you are familiar with. And, being a short assignment, the paper will allow you to avoid spending too much time on how to structure and organize ideas.

Sample

I have provided a [sample response paper](#) in which I have applied Marx's ideas from the first week's readings to Peer-to-Peer music downloads (and they said Marx's ideas were dead).

Preparation

Go on a web field trip to find out more information about the week's topic. Read the relevant text again to see how a particular theory opens up the issue in a new and surprising way.

Organizing

Write the thesis statement first. Decide on the key points that will focus your ideas. These will be your topic sentences.

Develop your ideas by adding examples, quotations, and details to your paragraphs.

Make sure the last sentence of each paragraph leads into the next paragraph (focus on transitions)

Check your thesis and make sure the topic sentence of each paragraph supports

it.

How to proceed

The question for the response paper is mentioned every week. You will write a 450-500-word painless paper about that topic, applying the concepts and theories that we have learned in that week. Yes, I am repeating myself but you will be surprised to know how many people e-mail me about something already explained and repeated on the syllabus.

Content of the response paper should include the following

- Significant features of the topic that are relevant to the theory.
- Frame and argue your case clearly and logically by using theories and concepts from the readings, lecture notes, and slides, if any, of the week.
- Always add empirical details to support your argument. For example, in the sample paper, I show the significance of the topic by citing how many lawsuits are being filed against peer-to-peer downloads.

Grading

Response papers are not quizzes with definite answers and definite scores. I grade them not for your knowledge but how well and tightly theory and application are tied together. If your paper is really good, you will surely receive an A. But don't expect a perfect score for which the theorist of the week may have to write the paper himself or herself.

Grading will evaluate four dimensions:

- **Fundamental concepts:** you will be graded on the correct application of theories and concepts from weekly readings and lectures. For example, if you are using Functionalism to explain an issue, don't mix up its basic ideas with those of Conflict Theory.
- **Breadth and scope of your knowledge:** the more ideas from the week's texts that you can correctly bring to bear on real-world examples or questions, the better you will do.
- **Analytical skills:** you will also be graded on your skill at analyzing social behavior or institutions, using the theories/concepts discussed in this class. The basic point here is to describe why things are the way they are.
- **Creativity:** the quality of examples you choose matters, as does your ability to synthesize ideas across variations in the week's readings. If you can illuminate a problem from a surprising angle, you are being creative.