

**INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY**  
**SOCI 1**  
UCSD, Winter 2026



Tues, Thurs, 2-3:20pm  
PCYNH 106

Prof. Jake Watson  
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Social Science Building, Room 493

Office Hours: Fri, 1pm-3pm over Zoom, or by appointment  
You can book office hour slots in 20 min increments on [Calendly](#)  
Feel free to attend as individuals or in groups

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## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course provides a sampling of questions and methods used by sociologists with an emphasis on how sociological perspectives differ from explanations in other disciplines as well as “folk” understandings of the world. Students will develop what C. Wright Mills called the “sociological imagination,” a perspective that grasps the interplay between individual action and social structures, with which to analyze the social construction of everyday life, how society is both stable and changing, and the causes and consequences of inequality. This is an

introductory course designed to provide a broad sweep of our discipline. The hope is that the course inspires you to pursue more specialized interests during your time here at UCSD.

## **COURSE STRUCTURE**

We have two lectures each week and one discussion section meeting. Attendance in lectures is not mandatory, but it is encouraged. Lectures will include material not in the readings that will be covered in assessments. The readings and materials covered in each lecture are listed below on the day they are to be completed *before* coming to class. They should be done in the order that they appear on the syllabus. Unlike lectures, attendance in discussion sections is mandatory. You are expected to attend sections prepared to participate, engage in discussion, and ask questions of your peers and TAs. These are important venues to deepen your sociological imagination by exploring the topics and ideas presented in readings and lectures.

## **READINGS**

There are no required texts for this course. You are encouraged to acquire hard copies of texts, but given contemporary custom, all assigned materials will be made available as PDFs on Canvas or through the library. You may be interested in this [discussion between Ezra Klein and Maryanne Wolf](#) about reading as you make decisions throughout college about hard vs. digital texts. Please familiarize yourself with UCSD's physical holdings and online catalogue system. Please also sign up for free *New York Times* access. UCSD has an institutional membership, and it just takes a few minutes to activate your account.

## **GRADING AND COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

At the end of this course, you will receive a numerical grade out of one hundred that refers to the letter grades below. Your grade will be rounded to the closest whole number. For example, if you finish with 93.4, you will be rounded to 93 (A-). If you finish with 93.5, you will be rounded to 94 (A). An A+ is reserved for exceptional performance. For those taking the course for P/NP, a passing grade is considered a C- or higher as per UCSD [grading guidelines](#).

A	94+
A-	90 - 93.9
B+	86 - 89.9
B	82 - 85.9
B-	78 - 81.9
C+	74 - 77.9
C	70 - 73.9
C-	66 - 69.9
D	60 - 65.9

Your final grade will be assessed on the following components:

15% Attendance & Engagement in Sections

*“Through speech we have come together and founded great cities and made laws and invented arts; and, generally speaking, there is no institution devised which the power of speech has not helped us establish [...] None of the things which are done with intelligence take place without the help of speech, but this in all our actions as well as in our thoughts, speech is our guide.”*

- Isocrates, 436–338 BC

You are expected to attend every discussion section (see the Free Pass Policy). This is your opportunity to engage the material with peers under the guidance of a TA. A sign-in list will be distributed each class, and it is your responsibility to make sure your attendance is properly registered. You are also expected to engage with the course by contributing to discussions, being prepared, conducting readings, and asking questions.

30% Assignments

You will get to apply your sociological imagination in two essays, each no more than 1,000-1,250 words (4-5 pages double spaced). Papers must **define their concepts** (e.g., norms, habitus, class, gender, etc.) and cite readings from the syllabus. Papers are due on Canvas by 11:59pm on the due date. All papers should be 12-point font and double spaced, with a works cited page that is not included in the overall word/page count. Refer to [ASA Style Guide](#) for formatting, citation, and reference guidelines. In general, I don't mind which reference style you use as long as it's consistent.

**Paper Topic #1: Break a Social Norm**

We will learn in the first few sessions of class that norms structure our everyday lives to a significant extent. To develop a deeper understanding of this, I ask you to break a social norm and write a reflection paper on your experiences. For example, you might wear formal attire to a casual get together, stand backwards in an elevator, or hold a door open for someone a long way away. While you are welcome to be creative, do not do anything illegal, dangerous, offensive, or extremely disruptive. Check with me or your TA if you are unsure. Do not disrupt any classes or instructional activities. Your essay should describe and analyze the norm you broke and explain why you selected it; how you felt and what you experienced while breaking the norm; and how conforming to and violating this social norm fits into your own lifelong process of socialization.

**Due Sunday, Jan 25** by midnight.

### **Paper Topic #2: Why Go to College?**

In Week 7, we will examine how class background shapes college experiences through Bourdieu's theory of capital and Armstrong & Hamilton's research on pathways through college. This will extend Week 6's examination of social class and inequality. For your second assignment, you will interview a UCSD student about their college experience and analyze how economic, cultural, and social capital shape their pathway through college using concepts from readings. More specific guidelines – including interview prompts – are posted on Canvas. Your interview recording should be uploaded with your paper.

**Due Sunday, March 8** by midnight.

25% Midterm – Thursday February 5<sup>th</sup>, In-Class

The midterm will cover all course materials and lectures up to and including February 3<sup>rd</sup>. There will be two question formats: multichoice & true/false. You can bring a two-sided, letter-head sized cheat sheet to the exam.

30% Final – Thursday, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 3:00p-5:59p in PCYNH 106 (our regular classroom)

The final will cover all course materials and lectures. It will follow the same format as the midterm. You can bring a two-sided, letter-head sized cheat sheet to the exam.

### **FREE PASS POLICY**

You get one unexcused absence across the quarter. This means that you can miss section once without it impacting your grade. Your free pass will be applied to everyone's record at the end of the quarter, so you do not need to let me or your TA know about your absence or receive approval. All other absences will be counted toward your attendance grade. Free passes are designed to provide you flexibility to manage unexpected issues and demands as they arise during the quarter. You are strongly encouraged to attend every class.

### **TIME BANK**

Every student is given a 24-hour time bank for the quarter to submit graded assignments after the deadline. You can choose how to use your time bank – if at all. It is your responsibility to keep track of how much time you have used. Canvas tracks lateness, so you do not need to inform me independently if you use your time bank.

### **LATENESS POLICY**

Late assignments beyond the time bank will be penalized by three points for every 24-hours late. I am happy to discuss extensions when appropriate, but please reach out to arrange these

*before* deadlines pass. In the interests of fairness and accountability, retroactive extensions will not be granted except under exceptional circumstances.

## **TECHNOLOGY POLICY**

A growing body of social science research demonstrates that the use of laptops, tablets, and phones during class [distract you and others](#) and [undermine learning](#). As such, I request that students put their laptops and phones away during lecture. Students may use laptops across the backrow of the classroom. Flat tablets can be used in the front row. These provisions are designed to accommodate student needs. I will also provide slides after class so that you have both your [written notes](#) and lecture materials.

## **STATEMENT ON USAGE OF GENERATIVE AI**

Generative AI tools such as Chat-GPT are transforming higher education. My view is that GenAI can short-circuit important stages of the learning process to detrimental effects. Across the sciences and humanities, the *process* of our learning (i.e., critical reading, thinking, and communication skills) is at least as important as the information we are learning and creating. We can use GenAI to get at the latter, but often at the expense of the former. It is through grappling with concepts and ideas, assessing their relative value, debating them with our peers, and formulating our own thoughts in relation to them through research, writing, and speaking that we develop the habits of mind critical for active participation in democratic societies.

At the same time, I recognize that GenAI can be a valuable tool and that many of you will enter careers after college where you will interface with it frequently. Given this, it is important to learn how to use these tools in intentional, reflective, and transparent ways. As such, I permit the use of GenAI in this course with important considerations and stipulations:

1. AI should not be used as a substitute for reading course materials. Read all assigned materials yourself, take your own notes, and engage critically with the content before (if ever) turning to AI for supplementary explanation.
2. You may not use AI tools to generate, write, or substantially revise your written assignments. The ideas, analysis, and writing must be your own. Submitting AI-generated text as your own violates UCSD's academic integrity policy.
3. You may use AI tools for brainstorming topics or initial ideas (which you then develop independently); checking spelling and grammar after you've written your draft; explaining unfamiliar terms or concepts to supplement course readings.
4. You're permitted to use AI tools to help you prepare for exams, such as creating practice quizzes, explaining concepts back to the AI to test your understanding, or generating flashcards.

Why this policy? The goal of this course is to develop your sociological imagination, i.e., your ability to think critically about social patterns and structures. AI cannot develop this capacity for you. Using AI to complete your work shortcuts your learning and prevents you from achieving the course’s learning objectives. If you’re unsure, ask me or your TA before using any AI tool for coursework. When in doubt, don’t use it without checking first.

## WRITING SUPPORT

Professional and academic writing is a skill that requires practice and training. I encourage you to take advantage of the wonderful writing support resources offered on campus. UCSD’s [Writing Hub](#), for example, offers free one-on-one consultation on papers and assignments.

## ACCOMMODATIONS

Life happens. If you find yourself in a difficult situation such as the loss of a family member, grave illness, or a mental health crisis, please let me know. I might be able to accommodate your specific circumstances and/or direct you to appropriate campus resources.

Winter 2026 Schedule Overview			
Week	Tuesday	Thursday	Deadlines & Notes
Week 1	January 6	January 8	
Week 2	January 13	January 15	
Week 3	January 20	January 22	Essay #1 due Sunday, January 25 by midnight
Week 4	January 27	January 29	
Week 5	February 3	February 5	MIDTERM (Thursday, February 5, in class)
Week 6	February 10	February 12	
Week 7	February 17	February 19	
Week 8	February 24	February 26	
Week 9	March 3	March 5	Essay #2 due Sunday, March 8 by midnight
Week 10	March 10	March 12	Last week of instruction
Finals	—	Thursday, March 19	FINAL EXAM, 3:00–5:59pm, PCYNH 106



## WEEK 1 - INTRODUCTION

Tues – 01/06 – What is Sociology?

- C.W. Mills – “The Promise,” from *The Sociological Imagination*

Thurs – 01/08 – Social Forces: Are you Responsible for your Actions?

- Randall Collins, Excerpts from Chapter 1, *Interaction Ritual Chains*
- Listen: The New York Times, The Daily, “[Herd Mentality](#)” (0:00:00 – 0:36:49)

## WEEK 2 – THE SOCIAL SELF

Tues – 01/13 – Socialization

- Philip Meyer. 1970. “If Hitler Asked You to Electrocute a Stranger, Would You? Probably.” *Esquire Magazine*.
- Gwynne Dyer. 1985. “Anybody’s Son Will Do,” from *War: Past, Present, and Future*, pp. 135 – 146.

Thurs – 01/15 – Symbolic Interactionism

- Erving Goffman. 1959. “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.” pp. 1 – 6.
- Grazian, David. 2007. “The Girl Hunt: Urban Nightlife and the Performance of Masculinity as Collective Activity.” *Symbolic Interaction* 30(2): 221-243.

## WEEK 3 – CULTURE

Tues – 01/20 – Culture as Social Structure

- Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic & the Spirit of Capitalism, in *Max Weber: Readings and Commentary on Modernity*, edited by Stephen Kalberg, pp.75-104

Thurs – 01/22 – The Meaning of Work

- Ofer Sharone. 2004. “Engineering Overwork” *Fighting for Time: Shifting Boundaries of Work and Social Life*, 191-218
- Miya Tokumitsu. 2014. “[Do What You Love](#),” *Jacobin Magazine*

## WEEK 4 – DEVIANCE & SOCIAL ORDER

Tues 01/27 – Labelling & Stigma

- David Rosenhan. 1973. On Being Sane in Insane Places. *Science* 179: 250-258.

- Devah Pager. 2003. The Mark of a Criminal Record. *American Journal of Sociology*, 108(5): 937–75

Thurs – 01/29 - Social Control

- Gonzales, Roberto. 2011. Learning to be Illegal. *American Sociological Review*, 76(4): 602-619.
- **Watch:** The Unafraid (available through [UCSD library](#))

## WEEK 5 – EQUALITY, INEQUALITY

Tues – 02/03 – The Problem of Inequality

- Harvey Moloch. 1989. The Restroom and Equality. *Toilet: Public Restrooms and the Politics of Sharing*, pp. 1-20

Thurs – 02/05 – MIDTERM EXAM

## WEEK 6 – CLASS

Tues – 02/10 – Class Formation

- Marx & Engels – The Communist Manifesto
- Listen: [How Two Friends Beat Amazon](#), The Daily

Thurs – 02/12 – Poverty & Exploitation

- Matthew Desmond. 2023. [Why Does Poverty Persist in America?](#) *New York Times*, March 9, 2023
- Ezra Klein, 2025, [America's Housing Crisis, in One Chart](#) (we'll critically discuss this in class)

## WEEK 7 – CULTURAL CAPITAL

Tues – 02/17 – Forms of Capital

- Pierre Bourdieu. 1986. “Forms of Capital,” in Richardson, J., *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, pp.15-26
- Rachel Sugar. 2019. “[Good Taste is All About Class Anxiety](#),” Vox

Thurs – 02/19 – College & Class Reproduction

- Armstrong & Hamilton. *Paying for the Party*, Introduction & Chapter 1



## WEEK 8 – RACE

Tues – 02/24 – Racial Formation

- Read “Racial Formation Reading Packet” on Canvas
  - Omi & Winant, “Racial Formation” (~7 pages)
  - Barbara Fields, “Slavery, Race, and Ideology” (~12 pages)
  - Karen Sacks, “How Jews Became White Folks” (~6 pages)
- **Watch In-Class:** Christina Mora on [The Invention of “Hispanics”](#) (4 mins)

Thurs – 02/26 – Racial Inequalities

- Rothstein, Richard. 2015. “The Racial Achievement Gap, Segregated Schools, and Segregated Neighborhoods.” *Race and Social Problems* 7(1): 21-30.
- Shapiro, Thomas, Tatjana Meschede, & Sam Osoro. 2013. “The Roots of the Widening Racial Wealth Gap.” *Research and Policy Brief, Institute on Assets and Social Policy*. (8 pgs.)
- Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor. 2018. [How Real Estate Segregated America](#). *Dissent Magazine*. (2 pgs.)

## WEEK 9 – GENDER

Tues – 03/03 – Constructing Gender

- Messner, Mike. 2000. Barbie Girls vs. Sea Monsters: Children Constructing Gender. *Gender & Society*, 14(6): 765-784

Thurs – 03/05 – Gendered Inequalities

- Christine Williams. 1995. “The Glass Escalator: Hidden Advantages for Men in the ‘Female’ Professions,” pgs. 211-224 in *Men’s Lives*.
  - READ from p. 212, beginning with “Methods.”
  - You may also be interested in an intersectional critique of Williams: Wingfield, Adia. 2009. Racializing the Glass Escalator: Reconsidering Men’s Experiences with Women’s Work. *Gender & Society*, 23(1), 5-26.
- Kristen Schilt, 2006. “Just One of the Guys? How Transmen Make Gender Visible in the Workplace.” *Gender & Society* 20(4): 465-490.
  - SKIM pgs. 465 – 473, and read from p. 473, “Transmen as Outsiders Within at Work.”

## WEEK 10 – TECHNOLOGY

Tues – 03/10 – Race, Algorithms, and the New Jim Code

- Ruha Benjamin, *Race After Technology*, Introduction & Chapter 1 (“Engineered Inequity”)
- **Recommended:** Kashmir Hill and Ryan Mac. 2023. Thousands of Dollars for Something I Didn’t Do. *New York Times*, April 6, 2023. (5 pgs.)

Thurs – 03/12 – The Attention Economy and the Mental Health Debate

- Jonathan Haidt. 2023. “[Social Media is a Major Cause of the Mental Illness Epidemic in Teen Girls. Here’s the Evidence.](#)” After Babel (Substack).
- Candice Odgers. 2024. “[The Great Rewiring: Is Social Media Really Behind an Epidemic of Teenage Mental Illness?](#)” *Nature* 628: 29-30.
- Watch: Tristan Harris, “[How a Handful of Tech Companies Control Billions of Minds Every Day](#)” TED Talk, watch first 13 minutes

===== END OF CLASSES, March 13 =====