

# SOCI 503

## Foundations of Sociological Explanation

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**Instructor:** Dr. Katelin Albert

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**Course Description:** This course focuses in on the foundations of sociological thought – from foundational thinkers and the history of sociology to more contemporary thinkers and knowledge politics. We will study a group of theorists whose work provided key intellectual resources for the foundation and development of social theory and sociology. It will include the canonical ‘founding’ figures of Karl Marx and Max Weber, but will also cover other founding scholars whose work has been erased or forgotten, such as Jane Addams, Martineau, Du Bois, Cooper, and Wells-Barnett. We also cover some contemporary foundational thinkers such as Harding, Mohanty, and Patricia Hill Collins. There will be large emphasis on i) knowledge politics and the different ways theory informs both the study of society and our explanations of the social world, and ii) the history of sociology.

The course will also attempt to follow through on some of the key sociological themes (e.g. class, capitalism, power, the state) developed by these thinkers, and trace how they have been transformed and still influence contemporary theoretical issues and debates within sociology and social theory more broadly.

Of particular interest, there is a focus on how contemporary sociological explanation considers the intersection of class, race and gender in understanding current structural patterns of inequality, and how these complex, interrelated dimensions of social power form the basis for ongoing political and social struggles. We will also look closely at the intersectional theory – its origins, uses, and politics.

Key questions for the course are: what have been the various sociological explanations of the past, and how did each theorist arrive at that explanation?

What does this mean for our contemporary explanations of political, economic, social and cultural phenomena?

**Course Objectives:** Theory is about learning what has been said, but it is also about learning a unique vocabulary and history that is tied to knowledge politics that continue to shape the work we do today as contemporary sociologists and theorists. To that end, the objectives of this course are to (1) understand and learn these thinkers on their own terms. You will learn to read them, think critically about them, and to see their usefulness. (2) You will come to see how their biography and social location shaped their method, theory, and explanations. The methods we use are rooted in theoretical traditions and assumptions, which fundamentally shape what we can and cannot know, our causal arguments, and what we observe and see. (3) You will learn about the politics of theory, theorizing, and the history sociology itself and how this shapes theory building and our empirical work. (4) You will learn to expand your idea of classical theory. (5) You will also learn to theorize in a creative way. (6) As a student, you will also learn how to be a class leader and facilitate a healthy peer-learning environment.

**Required Resources May Include:** At this time, required course readings will be made available via Brightspace or will be available through the library.

**Mode of Delivery:** This class is a seminar style class and is very hands on for students. Students will be class leaders wherein they facilitate the class. This is not a presentation but is early practice in learning to design and organize class time. Students play a big part in facilitating discussion and learning.

This is a face-to-face course and will not be recorded. Students are expected to come to class. There may be several in-class workshops. There may be a few classes held over zoom to accommodate guest speakers. This course will make use of many of the online tools on Brightspace.

This course description is provided in advance of the course to help with planning and to help students make decisions about their studies. The course focus and direction may change by the time the course is offered.