

**BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY**  
**SOCIOLOGY 1A**  
**ORDER & CHANGE IN SOCIETY**

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**INSTRUCTORS:**

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**CLASS:** MWTH 11:10-12:00  
IN GOLDING 110

**OFFICE HOURS (IN PEARLMAN 207):**  
M 4:00-5:00  
TH 10:00-11:00 & BY APPOINTMENT

This course is broadly focused on processes of order and change, with an emphasis on how individual-level choice both shapes and is shaped by institutional and societal-level dynamics. While Sociology is a wide-ranging field, we will not be concerned with briefly introducing all of its different substantive areas, but instead with understanding particular key generalizable processes. Our central motivation will be to uncover how systems of power operate to yield sustained inequalities, as well as how individuals and groups confront, and sometimes alter, such institutionalized systems. To this end, we begin by examining how complex social structures emerge from simple patterns of interaction among persons. With this background, we will then examine a variety of issues and institutions, touching on race, class, gender, government and community organizations, gangs, and social movements. The class will combine large lectures and discussion on Mondays and Wednesdays with smaller section meetings on Thursdays, and readings will often serve to supplement and apply what we do during class rather than cover the same ground. A central goal of the semester is not only to have you understand specific concepts and processes from readings and class discussions, but also to introduce new perspectives that enable you to develop fresh insights from the books, films, music, and interactions that surround you everyday.

### **Office Hours**

David has scheduled office hours on Monday from 4:00 to 5:00 and Thursday from 10:00 to 11:00. If these times are not convenient for you, we can make other arrangements – email is generally a good way to contact any of us, and our email addresses are listed at the top of this page. We encourage each of you to come to office hours to discuss problems with the class or any other issues that interest or concern you. Each of us will generally be available for quick questions immediately after class, and you can also leave messages in any of our mailboxes on the second floor of Pearlman Hall. Additionally, if you need to contact David at other times, his phone numbers are listed above.

### **Readings**

The readings in this course will likely be more varied than what you have encountered in most other Brandeis classes. The logic here is that a wide range of essays, stories, films, songs and other audio recordings, newspaper and magazine articles, and web pages – including those that you might usually

read, view, or listen to on your own – can serve as a jumping-off point for developing general sociological insights. Many of these sources will be available online; those posted on our course Latte page are referred to as 'L' readings below. Additionally, the following books are required for this course:

*The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, by Erving Goffman

*The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, by Malcolm Gladwell

*Gang Leader for a Day: A Rogue Sociologist Takes to the Streets*, by Sudhir Venkatesh

*Doormen*, by Peter Bearman

Copies of each of the books will be on reserve in Goldfarb Library. *Please note that reading assignments should be done by the date listed on the syllabus* – we will generally discuss them during that class period.

## **Assignments and Grading**

3 response papers (10% each)	30%
Mid-term take-home project/essays	25%
Final essays	30%
Participation	15%

### Response papers

At four points during the semester, we will assign a brief (no more than 4 page) thought paper intended to provide an opportunity for you to respond to a book-length reading and its connection to class discussions. You will need to complete any three of these papers. We will distribute a detailed set of guidelines for these thought assignments in class, but basically each response should briefly summarize key concepts from readings and class, and then focus on: 1) how effectively you feel these concepts explain particular real-world phenomena, and 2) any ideas you have about extending these concepts to better explain outcomes.

### Mid-term and Final Essays

Twice during the semester (in early March, and at the final class session on April 29<sup>th</sup>), we will distribute essay questions designed to tie together broad sets of ideas from readings and class discussion. Approximately one week after you receive each set of questions, you will need to hand in written responses not exceeding a total of ten double-spaced pages.

### Participation

Much of the benefit of this class will come through class discussion. It is therefore very important for each of you to keep up with the reading and come to class prepared to discuss issues you found interesting or want clarified. We understand that in-class participation is sometimes difficult in a large class, and we therefore view the 'participation' component of your grade very broadly -- meaning that participation can include contributing *during* class, as well as asking questions and/or suggesting ideas, possible topics of discussion, connections between class topics and current events, etc. *outside* of class (i.e. before or after class, in office hours, or over email). Once a week, you will meet in smaller discussion sections, which do provide a fuller opportunity to contribute your thoughts, questions, and critiques. Participation is especially important here – your instructor will take attendance, and you are expected to attend each session (please make arrangements ahead of time with both David and your section instructor if you cannot make a section meeting).

**If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.**

## Course Outline

### Weeks 1-3 (14-29 January):

- Introductory business
- Building a macrostructure I: Social exchange & social roles  
-reading: Erving Goffman, *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*
- Making sense of social structure: conventions and stories  
-reading: Charles Tilly, *Why?* (L)

### **First response paper due Thursday, 1/29**

### Weeks 4-5 (2-12 February):

- Building a macrostructure II: Balance theory  
-reading: Tom Wolfe, "The Mermaid Blushed" (L)
- Majority-minority relations: power and the emergence of status distinctions  
-readings: Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *A Tale of 'O'* (L)  
Phillip Zimbardo, "Power turns good soldiers into 'bad apples'" (L)  
Seymour Hersh series in *The New Yorker* (L)  
-film: *Quiet Rage: The Stanford Prison Study*

### Week 6 (16-19 February): No class (midterm recess)

### Weeks 7-9 (23 February - 12 March):

- Understanding group-level outcomes: Threshold effects  
-reading: Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*

### **Second response paper due**

- Inequality I: Social capital  
-reading: Mark Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties" (L)  
Mark Granovetter, "Threshold Effects in Collective Action Models" (L)
- Inequality II: Networks, observation, and social mobility

### **Midterm take-home essays due**

### Week 10 (16-19 March):

- Civic engagement and the maintenance of democracy  
-reading: Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, Chapters 1-3 (L)

Weeks 11-13 (23 March - 8 April):

- Inequality III: Community structure and collective efficacy  
-reading: Sudhir Venkatesh, *Gang Member for a Day*

**Third response paper due**

Week 14 (13-16 April): No class (Passover and spring recess)

Weeks 15-16 (20-29 April):

- Observing social life analytically  
-reading: Peter Bearman: *Doormen*

**Fourth response paper due**

- Course wrap-up

**Final essays due (tba)**