

**University of Manitoba**  
**Department of Sociology**  
**Contemporary Sociological Theory**  
**SOC 3390, A01**  
**3 Credit Hours, First Term 2008/09**

**Instructor:** Rod Kueneman **Class Location:** 214 Tier  
**Office:** 302 Isbister  
**Office Hours:** slot 6 or by arrangement  
**Phones:** 474-6501 (office)  
452-4560 (home) between 10:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m.  
**Email:** rod\_kueneman@umanitoba.ca

---

**TEXTS**

Lukes, Steven. Power: A Radical View, ( 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)  
Brownlee, Jamie. Ruling Canada: Corporate Cohesion and Democracy  
Knuttila, Murray and Wendee Kubik. State Theories: Classical, Global and Feminist Perspectives (3<sup>rd</sup> edition)  
Broszmitter, Franz. Ecocide: A Short History of the Mass Extinction of Species  
Nozick, Marcia. No Place Like Home

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Students will be evaluated by way of the following activities:

First In Class Test	- 30%
Second In Class Test	- 30%
Take Home Assignment	- 20%
Third In Class Test	- 20%

The tests are 50 minute essay type. Study questions are provided in this outline. There will be some choice of questions for each test. The take home assignment is described later in this outline.

**DUE DATES AND READING ASSIGNMENTS**

**FIRST TEST** **October 17**  
**READINGS:** Knuttila/Kubik Chapters 1 - 5.  
Lukes pp. 14 -59, 108-151.

**SECOND TEST** **November 10th**  
**READINGS:** Miliband summary (to be provided in class)  
Brownlee (entire book)  
Knuttila/Kubik Chapters 6 - 9

**VOLUNTARY WITHDRAWAL DATE - November 12th****TAKE HOME ASSIGNMENT      November 21st - due date**

READING:                                      Broswimmer (entire book)

**THIRD TEST                                      December 3rd**

READINGS:                                      Knuttila/Kubik Chapter 10  
     Nozick (Chapters 3, 5, 6 and 7)

Students who fail to write tests on assigned dates will receive a grade of F for that part of the course grade unless an alternative date has been agreed to by the instructor. Such arrangements should be made in advance whenever possible. Missed tests must be rescheduled within 7 days of the above published dates. Rescheduled tests will only be permitted for good reasons. If the take home assignment is not handed in on time, and prior arrangements for late submission have not been made, I will not accept it and you will receive a grade of F for that part of the course grade.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course briefly reviews the central themes of contemporary sociological theory. While you will be exposed to some basic information about several themes, we will be paying particular attention to the issues of structure, power, manipulation, domination and the growing crisis of global society. We will attempt to understand how the current patterns of power developed, who they benefit, what is the basis for their stability, and what possible avenues exist for social change. We will also consider the current state of social theory and the possible roles it might play in the 21st century.

**Study Questions - First Test**

1. Discuss the organismic analogy in Durkheim's Division of Labour and show how this helps form the basis for Parson's structural functional analysis. To what extent are general systems theory and structural analysis important departures from the organismic analogy?
2. There have been varying accounts about the place of the state in providing order in social modernity. Contrast the classical liberal, elite, pluralist, functional, and marxist understanding of what the state does to order social relationships.
3. Briefly identify the major criticisms levelled against Parsons' structural functionalism. Did Merton, Gans, Dahrendorf, and Buckley help salvage a systems' type of analysis?
4. We have compared various patterns of asymmetrical relationships in this section of the course. The Diagram (handed out in class) which we used in this discussion is attached for

your use. You are to choose one of the following options and discuss why it falls within the various categories outlined on the chart:

- a) authority
- b) force and manipulation **or** discipline and persuasion
- c) manipulation and persuasion.

5. Discuss why the notion of conflict of interest is important to the practice of sociology. Why does the notion of conflict of interest help us analyse and distinguish between forms of asymmetrical relationships? How can we attempt to make such determinations of conflict of interest sound from a "scientific point of view"? Does the hypothetical construct "objective possibility" help in this regard?

### **Study Questions - Second Test**

6. Miliband and Brownlee argue that there is imperfect competition between the major organized 'interests' in capitalist societies which shows the pluralist theory to be wrong. Identify the three key interest groups in liberal democracies, discuss their access to resources, and conduct an analysis of power to assist you in formulating an answer to this question: Is the competition imperfect? Why or why not?
7. Miliband devotes considerable attention to the process of legitimation. Why does he think that legitimation ideologies are so important? Does his analysis substantiate Gramsci's insistence on the importance of the concept of hegemony?
8. Marxists distinguish between the notion of a "class in itself" and a "class for itself". Contrast capital and labour's ability to identify what their "class interests" might be. Use Brownlee to fully discuss that ways in which capital can identify and promote their interests.
9. There is a range of opinion as to how the relationship between the capitalist class and the state should be described. How do the instrumentalists differ from the structuralists in their basic understanding of this relationship. (Be sure to include a discussion of their assessment of the autonomy of the state from the capitalist class). Where would you situate Brownlee within this debate? Do you find this distinction helpful? Why or why not?
10. Miliband provides an analysis of domination within a capitalist economy. The analysis of gender relations is conspicuously absent in his mapping of inequality within this social formation. How can feminist theory be used to recast Miliband's analysis to better account for the negative effects of gender inequality and patriarchy within a capitalist formation? In what ways can an analysis of the relationship between productive and reproductive labour increase our understanding of the stability of the capitalist formation?

### **Take Home Assignment**

Much of contemporary sociological theory is predicated on an examination of the conditions of life within urban, industrial and global capitalist social formations. At the centre of this study is a concern with issues of social equality, personal freedom, democratic governance. In fact, many theorists can conduct their work without extending their gaze beyond the boundaries of human society. Broswimmer would see this as a mistake. Perhaps the key issue facing social theory is the interface between society and ecology. His book, Ecocide: A Short History of the Mass Extinction of Species, provides you with the core of his argument.

For this assignment, you are to undertake the following tasks:

- provide a brief summary of his argument. I have read the book and so you are to forego the details and provide a succinct, precis of his analysis. (2 pages)
- in greater detail, discuss the particular features of the global, industrial, military, corporate, and capitalist social formation and outline why Broswimmer thinks they are so damaging. (5 -6 pages)
- assess whether efforts to make human societies secure and just can be achieved without attending to the ecological imperatives humanity has created for itself and the rest of the community of life on this planet. If not, what new directions must be undertaken? (2 - 3 pages)

### **Study Questions -Third Test**

11. The Corporations and the State are clearly the dominant actors at this point in human history. What could be done to help facilitate the transformation of the Mass (or Aggregate) of these times into a viable historical actor? Are social movements an appropriate vehicle?
12. Knuttila/Kubik propose an alternative framework for theorizing which remains focussed on the state but does acknowledge civil society. Nozick/Kueneman offer an alternative approach which focuses more directly on civil society and local community as an alternative to reliance on the state. Briefly outline each approach to social theorizing and discuss main commonalities and differences.
13. We have talked about Social Reconstruction as an option for these troubled times. What basic principles would be crucial to make such an undertaking viable? Reflect on some of the innovations being implemented in other communities and discuss what could be done to improve the present and future in friendly Manitoba.

### **GRADING PROCEDURES**

The following description of my grading scheme should make it possible for you to calculate your

final grade in the course. You are urged to make your own computations to ensure that I have not made an error. I find the normal grading system too constraining, so I have modified it to a limited extent by introducing the minus grade (e.g. A-, B-, C-). In the final grade submitted, however, I must conform to the university scheme.

Your answers are being evaluated on a letter grade system, not on a point system which is converted to a letter grade. The main benchmarks for the grade ranges can be described as follows:

D/F = an answer which is factually weak, faulty analysis, and very poor organization.

C = an answer which is mostly complete in terms of facts but suffers from poor analysis, organization and integration. Knowing the facts is a good start, but only a beginning.

B = answer is factually accurate and mostly complete as well as organized and integrated.

A = answer factually complete, well organized, sophisticated analysis which demonstrates a good degree of comprehension.

There is no grading curve used in the evaluation of our answers, as class could do very well or very poorly, I feel no obligation to artificially manipulate the distribution into a bell curve. Each letter grade has been assigned a numerical value to allow for averaging and the calculation of a final grade. The numerical value has been assigned to convert the letter grade into an interval scale. Thus a C ≠ 30% rather a C is equidistant from a C+ (4) and a C- (2) on the scale; a C is a factually complete answer which suffers from limited analysis. Mechanically, you assign each of your letter grades the comparable numerical weight in your calculation in the following way:

A+ = 10	B+ = 7	C+ = 4	D = 1
A = 9	B = 6	C = 3	F = 0
A- = 8	B- = 5	C- = 2	

On a test with two questions, which received a letter grade of A- and C+, your average grade is  $8 + 4 \div 2 = 6$  or B. I take all of your tests and assignments and calculate them together, as weighted by their relative value and derive a final numerical value for the course. The final cutting points for your letter grade are very important, because the minus grades must now disappear. They give you a higher final numerical grade because a weak A answer was an A- instead of a B+. But in the final analysis, all A- would become a B+. You would need some A or A+ grades to pull you over the cutting point. The cutting points are:

A+	(9.6 - 10) exceptional
A	(8.3 - 9.5) excellent
B+	(6.6 - 8.2) very good
B	(5.3 - 6.5) good
C+	(3.6 - 5.2) satisfactory
C	(2.3 - 3.5) adequate

D (0.5 - 2.2) marginal

F (0.0 - 0.4) failure a grade of F

This grading scheme gives you the benefit of the buoyancy of the minus grade. If you fail to make it over a threshold, even by a fraction, it is unlikely that I will raise your grade unless you have shown significant improvement over the term; have submitted an exceptional piece of work, or have made positive contributions to class discussion. Otherwise, an 8.24 will remain a B+ and not an A.

### **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

I encourage collaborative and cooperative work ethics. Feel free to discuss your thoughts with other members of the class and thereby develop your comprehension and critical analysis. But remember, when it is time to submit your assignment, do your own work. The written material of your colleagues is the fruit of their labour and under no circumstances should you avail yourself of it when preparing your own answers. Likewise the printed work of other scholars must be properly recognized. Acts of academic dishonesty or plagiarism are serious offenses and are subject to academic discipline. Students should acquaint themselves with the University's policy on 'Examinations: Personations' (pg. 27) and 'Plagiarism and Cheating' (pg. 28) found in the Undergraduate Calendar. The Faculty of Arts also reserves the right to submit student work that is suspected of being plagiarized to Internet sites designed to detect plagiarism.