

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND CRIMINOLOGY
SOC 2360 – A01 – SMALL GROUP INTERACTION
3 Credit Hours
215 Tier – T & TH 1:00-2:15pm

Instructor: Matthew Sanscartier

Office: 321 Isbister Building

Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday, 11:00-12:00, and by appointment

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Course Description

This course will examine the basic sociological concepts and methods used in analyzing and designing small groups such as the family, children's groups, work groups, and friendship groups.

Learning Objectives

If we do our jobs correctly (both me as your instructor and you as the student), by the end of the course, you will be able to do the following:

1. Identify the symbolic interactionist bases of small group interaction (i.e., the sociological principles underlying small group formation and interaction, such as the presentation of self).
2. Explain the social dynamics and principles of small groups in various social contexts (e.g. dyads, triads, and larger smaller groups). This includes accounting for *how* and *why* small groups form across a variety of contexts (work, the family, and so on).
3. Demonstrate how to empirically research and understand small group interaction in specific, varying social contexts. This will include:
 - Recognizing that there are multiple, valid approaches from which to study social interaction and small groups.
 - Recalling how realist and interpretivist researchers study social interaction from different perspectives.
4. Show how the general social principles of small groups (such as membership, leadership, and order) operate in specific social contexts through the examination of case studies.

Required Readings

There is no required textbook purchase for the course. Unless otherwise specified, readings will be uploaded to UM Learn. You may also find them online or in the library yourself. They are, in order of topic:

The Building Blocks of Social Interaction

1. Simmel, G. (1997 [1908]). The Sociology of the Senses. In G. Frisby & M. Featherstone (Eds.), *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings* (pp. 109-120). Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
2. Berger, P. & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York, NY: Penguin.

(Available at: <http://perflensburg.se/Berger%20social-construction-of-reality.pdf>)

Symbolic Interactionism & Group Formation

1. Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City: Doubleday Anchor.
2. Albas, D., & Albas, C. (1988). Acers and Bombers: The Post-Exam Impression Management Strategies of Students. *Symbolic Interactionism* 11(2), 289-302.

Emergent and constructed social order in small groups

1. Hewitt, J.P. & Shulman, D. (2011). Chapter 5: Understanding and Constructing Social Order. Pp. 153-179 in *Self and Society: A Symbolic Interactionist Social Psychology*. Boston, MA: Pearson.
2. Mead, G.H. (1934). *Mind, Self and Society* (Excerpt). Available on UM Learn.

Interactionally Producing the Realities of Small Groups

1. Schutz, A. (1945). The Homecomer. *American Journal of Sociology* 50(5), 369-376.
2. Vaughn, D. (1979). Uncoupling: The Process of Moving from One Lifestyle to Another. *Alternative Lifestyles* 2(4), 415-442.
3. Zurcher, L. (1970). The Friendly Poker Game. *Social Forces* 49(2), 173-186.
4. Misra, S., Cheng, L., Genevie, J. & Yuan, M. (2016). The iPhone Effect: The Quality of In-Person Social Interactions in the Presence of Mobile Devices. *Environment and Behavior* 48(2), 275-298.

Studying Small Groups: Perspectives & Challenges

1. Flyvbjerg, B. (2001). *Making Social Science Matter*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
2. Schwartz-Shea, P. & Yanow, D. (2012). *Interpretive Research Design*. New York, NY: Routledge.
3. Yoon, J., Thye, S.R., & Lawler, E.J. (2013). Exchange and cohesion in dyads and triads: A test of Simmel's hypothesis. *Social Science Research* 42, 1457-1466.

4. Denzin, N. (1984). Toward a Phenomenology of Domestic, Family Violence.” *American Journal of Sociology* 90(3), 483-513.

Small groups in social context

1. Simmel, G. (1902). The Number of Members as Determining the Sociological Form of the Group, I. *American Journal of Sociology* 8(1), 1-46.
2. Simmel, G. (1902). The Number of Members as Determining the Sociological Form of the Group, II. *American Journal of Sociology* 8(2), 158-196

Interaction Online: Digital Groups, Interactions and “Netnography”

1. Gatson, S.N. (2011). ‘The methods, politics, and ethics of representation in online ethnography’ from *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (4th ed).
2. Johnston, G., Sanscartier, M.D., & Johnston, M.S. (2019). Retail Therapy: Making Sense of Menial Labour. *Journal of Sociology* (Advance Online Publication).
3. Chen, M.G. (2009). Communication, Coordination, and Camaraderie in World of Warcraft. *Games and Culture* 4(1), 47-73.

Groups and Total Institutions

1. Goffman, E. (1957). The Characteristics of Total Institutions. *Symposium on Preventive and Social Psychiatry*. Washington, DC: W.R. Army Institute of Research.
2. Barnao, C. (2019). Military Training. Group, Culture, Total Institution, and Torture. *Italian Sociological Review* 9(2), 289-304.

Due to the circumstances around the course, please note that readings are subject to change as we progress. I will give you at least two weeks notice if this happens.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

Your assessment is broken down into the following components.

Assignment	%	Due Date
Test 1	30	February 25th
Case Study	20	March 31st
Activity Reflections	20	Various
Take Home “Exam”	30	Assigned April 7th, due April 14th at 1:00pm (321 Isbister)

Test 1

Test 1 will be held in-class, in the same timeslot and room as usual. This test will consist of **three** short-answer questions (i.e., one paragraph of about five or six sentences each). These

questions will be designed to assess your competency with **learning outcomes 1 and 2**. This will mean being familiar with concepts, readings and discussions in the first part of the course.

While you will need to remember key concepts and ideas (e.g. what Simmel thinks is the purest form of interaction, and how it works generally), I'm not going to ask you overly specific, memory-based questions (e.g. list all the specific functions of the eye in communication). It is more important for you to *understand* the ideas and concepts being discussed in the readings and in class. If you are struggling with understanding concepts, readings, or discussions, that would be a great time to come to office hours (or contact me to set up an appointment).

Case Study

The case study will be a take-home assignment will be assigned in more detail on March 10th, after the readings and discussions from February 27 – March 10th. The case study will be due **March 31st**. You will be presented with a situation in which you asked to study/research small group interaction in a specific situation. The questions in the assignment will require you to be familiar with the importance of context, realist and phenomenological approaches to studying social interaction, and the readings that discuss research design. This assignment is designed to assess your competency with **learning outcome 3** (and its sub-points).

The important thing to keep in mind with this assignment is that I am not looking for a robotic, rote memory of details of how to build a research design. You need to justify and explain each choice you make to *demonstrate* to me your knowledge and understanding of course material. Through readings and in-class discussions, you will have access to all the tools you need to complete the assignment. I will walk through the specifics of the questions when we are closer to the assignment date.

Submitting an assignment late will result in a penalty of **2 marks** each day or portion thereof. Therefore, if a student hands in an excellent case study analysis, they might get 20/20 on the assignment itself, but their mark would be 16/20 due to the late penalty.

Activity Reflections

The great thing about a course called “small group interaction” is that we can engage in experiential learning (i.e. learning through personal experience) by breaking into small groups ourselves and interacting with each other. Throughout the semester, we will be doing a number of activities in-class designed to bring some more abstract principles into the concrete and experienced, such as dramaturgy, the difference between dyads and triads, creating social order, and other key topics addressed in our readings and discussions.

Before each activity, I will hand out reflection sheets for you to fill out at the end of class. After each activity, you will have about 15-20 minutes to write your reflections, guided by a question that will prompt you. What I am looking for in these answers is not a simple recalling of course concepts, but a holistic and somewhat detailed reflection of your experiences in conjunction with whatever the topic is that week. **This includes using one or two key concepts to make sense of what you viscerally experienced.** Really take a few minutes to think about what you felt, thought about, what caused stress, etc. and try to capture it on the page. These exercises are

designed to assess your competency with **learning outcomes 2 (earlier on) and 4 (later on)**, but in ways that draw on your own experiences (*you* are the case study!) rather than just abstract readings and concepts.

There will be at least **five** activities throughout the semester, with each counting towards **5%** of your final grade. You may have noticed that this is worth more than the total percentage for this category ($5 \times 5 = 25$, when the category is worth only 20%). If you complete more than four activities ($4 \times 5 = 20$), then I will use your **four highest marks** in this category in computing your final grade.

Some activities may be assigned to you to do, briefly, on your own time. If and when this happens, I will give you specific instructions and the timeline for completion.

Take Home Assignment

As the name implies, your final assignment in the course will be taken home and completed over the course of two evenings. It will be handed out at the end of class on March 31st, and returned **at the beginning of class** on April 7th, at 1:00pm. You will answer **three long-answer questions** that will each make up one-third of the exam (each worth 10% of your final mark). Because it is take-home, I am really looking for your ability to show how the principles, dynamics and concepts we discuss throughout the year (more in the last half of the course) operate in specific social contexts.

Assignments are due no later than 1:10pm on April 7th, typed and printed, 12 pt font, Times New Roman. Electronic submissions will not be accepted under any circumstances. For every half hour (or portion thereof) missed after 1:10pm, **two points** will be deducted from your final grade.

As such, this assignment is designed to assess your competency with **learning outcome 4**. You will, of course, have access to all your notes and readings. The goal with this exam is not to have you worry about memorizing course material but focus more on how to apply existing/familiar information in new ways.

Letter Grade Assignments

Letter Grade	Percentage	GPA	Description
A+	90-100%	4.5	Exceptional
A	80-89%	4.0	Excellent
B+	75-79%	3.5	Very Good
B	70-74%	3.0	Good
C+	65-69%	2.5	Satisfactory
C	60-64%	2.0	Adequate
D	50-59%	1.0	Marginal
F	49% or less	0	Failure

Classroom policies

Late Submission, Absence and Grading Policies

If you are absent from test 1 or test 2, you must provide supporting documentation in the form of a note/certificate indicating a medical or compassionate reason (doctors/therapists/obituary, etc) within **one week** of the test. Tests will be re-scheduled on an as-needed basis.

I understand that things happen in life. Students are also parents, workers, and have many other roles. If you are having difficulty meeting a deadline for an assignment, I am flexible with small extensions of a day or two—but you must request these **before** the deadline with a reasonable and compelling explanation. **No retroactive extensions will be given without supporting documentation.**

All submitted work will be returned within two weeks; if this is not possible due to exceptional circumstances, I will tell you ahead of time. If you have a question about your feedback, or a grade, you should e-mail me to set up a meeting as soon as possible. Grades will not be discussed over e-mail. You must bring up concerns **within two weeks** of getting your assignments back but must wait **at least 24 hours to contact me** after receiving your work.

Without exception, there are no opportunities in the course for “extra credit” or re-writing tests.

Disruptive Behaviour

Disruptions due to excessive talking or early departures from the classroom are especially distracting to large classes. Please be considerate and respectful of the needs and rights of others in the class. Students should be aware that persistent disruption may result in disbarment from the course. Any student who has a legitimate reason for leaving class early should inform me at the beginning of class.

If you arrive late to class, please refrain from interrupting other students as much as possible. If a seat is open on the side you arrive in, please exercise good common sense and sit there rather than walking over 15 people to get to the other side of the room.

If you are using technology in the classroom, like phones, laptops, etc., I'm not going to stop you. However, if using your phone or laptop (especially in ways that aren't conducive to learning), I ask that you sit at the **back** or the **sides** of the room. When you're on Facebook or watching YouTube videos, it's incredibly distracting to the people sitting behind you, who may want to learn something that day.

E-mail Policy

I only use e-mail in my classes as a way of figuring out logistics—not discussing concepts and ideas. As such, please e-mail me only if the subject is about the following:

- Missing an exam for medical or compassionate reasons (with supporting documentation);
- Asking a “yes/no” question about assignments or tests;
- To set up a meeting outside of office hours.

I do not use e-mail to discuss deeper concepts and ideas with you because there is too much that can go wrong—we may miscommunicate, you might misinterpret something, I might misinterpret something, and it’s not very efficient to have an e-mail chain of 10-15 e-mails to discuss one concept or idea. If you wish to discuss your ideas in more depth, or tricky concepts that you might want to talk through, you should come to office hours or arrange a meeting that works for both of us outside of those hours.

All communication outside of class will be via your University of Manitoba e-mail account. Please refrain from using Hotmail, Gmail, or other systems as it might be identified as junk. You have a responsibility to regularly check your U of M e-mail address to ensure timely receipt of correspondence from the University and/or myself.

I will try to answer all e-mails within 24 hours, but it may take me up to three business days. Please be patient, especially during busy parts of the term.

University Policies

Religious and Accessibility/Other Accommodations

I, and the University, respect the right of students to observe holy days of all religions and faiths. Students who require accommodations for these purposes should contact me **at least two weeks** in advance of intended absences or assignment due dates. We will arrange alternative dates for tests and work without penalty.

Students with documented disabilities, temporary or chronic medical conditions, requiring academic accommodations for tests/exams (e.g. private space) or during lectures/laboratories (e.g. note-takers) are encouraged to contact Student Accessibility Services at 204-474-7423, or **student_accessibility@umanitoba.ca** to discuss appropriate options. All information about a student’s disability or medical condition remains confidential.

Students **without** documented or clinical disabilities, but who would benefit from additional accommodations—whether they relate to sight, hearing, learning or other—should talk to me about how I can make them more comfortable in class or optimize their learning experiences.

Important Dates and Withdrawal

The first day of class in this course is January 7th; the last day is April 7th, 2020. There is no scheduled final exam for this course during the evaluation period. Please note, however, that travel is not a valid excuse for missing tests or assignments.

January 17th, 2020 is the final date you may drop this course and get a tuition refund.

March 18th, 2020 is the final date you may drop this course with a voluntary withdrawal (VW). In this course, you will have received **at least 40%** of your final grade by this date.

Academic Integrity

Cheating (e.g. looking at your neighbour's test) and inappropriate collaboration (working together on assignments/exams when they are meant to be completed independently) are serious offenses with significant consequences.

Students should acquaint themselves with the University's policy on plagiarism, cheating, exam personation ("Personation at Examinations, Section 5.2.9 and "Plagiarism and Cheating", Section 8.1)) and duplicate submission by reading documentation provided at the Arts Student Resources website:

http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/student_resources/student_responsibilities_integrity.html.

Please note that ignorance of the regulations and policies regarding academic integrity is not a valid excuse for violating them.

Research has shown that academic offenses like plagiarism, cheating and inappropriate collaboration are not done by cheaters looking for a free ride, but students who might feel overwhelmed, lost or otherwise helpless in a crunch. If you are having a hard time with course materials, or feeling overwhelmed, **please meet with me** so that we can figure something out. Some of you may not have had to read older texts before, so this may be challenging. Rest assured, it is an acquired skill, and you will get better at it over time.

You also want to visit the Academic Learning Centre for resources, tutors, and strategies on a wide variety of topics from reading, to taking tests, to writing research papers and class assignments. You may make an appointment online at <http://umanitoba.ca/student/academiclearning/>, in-person at 201 Tier, or by phone at 204-480-1481.

Unclaimed term work disposal

Any term work that has not been claimed by students will be held for four (4) months from the end of the final examination period for the term in which the work was assigned. At the conclusion of this time, all unclaimed term work will become property of the Faculty of Arts and be destroyed according to FIPPA guidelines and using confidential measures for disposal.

SOC 2360 –SCHEDULE (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

Dates	Topic	Required readings (before class)
January 7	Course introduction & overview	Course syllabus
January 9, 14 & 16	The building blocks of social interaction	Simmel, “Sociology of the Senses” Berger & Luckmann, “The Social Construction of Reality” (pp. 33-61, 166-182)
January 21 & 23	Symbolic interaction and group formation	Goffman, “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life”, Introduction Albas & Albas, “Acers and Bombers”
January 28 & 30	Emergent and constructed social order in small groups	Hewitt & Shulman, Chapter 5 Excerpt from Mead, “Mind, Self & Society”
February 4 - 13	Interactionally producing the realities of small groups	Schutz, “The Homecomer” Vaughn, “Uncoupling” Zurcher, “The Friendly Poker Game”

		Misra et al., “The iPhone Effect”
February 18 & 20	Reading Break	N/A
February 25 th	Test 1 (in-class)	N/A
February 27 – March 10	<p>Studying small group interaction: perspectives and challenges</p> <p>Case study assigned</p>	<p>Flyvbjerg, “Making Social Science Matter,” Chapter 4</p> <p>Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, “Interpretive Research Design,” Chapter 3</p> <p>Yoon et al., “Exchange and cohesion in dyads and triads”</p> <p>Denzin, “Toward a Phenomenology of Domestic, Family Violence”</p>
March 12 & 17	Small groups in social context	<p>Simmel, “The Number of Members as Determining the Sociological Form of the Group. I & II.</p> <p>PAGES TBD</p>
March 19 & 24	Interaction online: digital groups, interactions, and “netnography”	Gatson, “Online Ethnography”

		<p>Johnston et al., “Retail Therapy”</p> <p>Chen, “Communication, Coordination, and Camaraderie in World of Warcraft”</p>
March 26	Groups and total institutions	<p>Goffman, “Characteristics of Total Institutions”</p> <p>Barnao, “Group, Culture, Total Institutions, and Torture”</p>
March 31	<p>Review & Wrap-up, take-home exam assigned</p> <p>Case study due in-class</p>	N/A
April 2	TBD	TBD
April 7	Take home exam assigned	N/A
April 14th	Take home exam due, 321 Isbister	