
CULTURAL SOCIOLOGY

Professor Todd Madigan



Course Description

Cultural sociology embraces *meaning* as a fundamental cause of human behavior and views *interpretation* as a primary means to understanding the social world. In this seminar, we'll explore the development of this peculiar field of social science as it played out over the course of the 20th century and examine the cultural structures that lead us voluntarily to think, feel, and act in certain ways but not others, often without ever knowing why.

Seminar Logistics

Mondays

5:30PM-8:20PM

**Curry Building
Room 247**

COURSEWORK

Reading Memos

Each Friday you will submit a one-page memo (based on the following Monday's reading) to our course discussion board. In the memo you should engage with the text by illuminating the central argument and applying the text's perspective to some empirical example, comparing and contrasting the reading to another text, or simply pointing to areas of the text you found to be inconsistent or difficult to grasp. In addition to your own memo, you will also be required to comment thoughtfully on at least two other classmates' memos on the discussion board.

GRADING

Reading Memos

12 memos @ 20 points each = 240

Leading a Seminar

1 seminar @ 60 points = 60

Thesis

1 thesis @ 400 points = 400

Thesis Presentation

1 presentation @ 100 points = 100

Late Work Policy

I will accept reading memos and your thesis up to 48 hours after their due date, but 10% will be deducted from the assignment's grade. I will not accept work more than 48 hours late.

Leading a Seminar

Over the course of the semester you will each be required to lead one of our seminars. This will involve presenting an overview of the week's reading, analyzing its principal arguments, situating it within the other readings we've covered, and leading the class through a series of questions you develop around the text. You should also comment on several of your classmates' memos for that week's reading.



Thesis

Your thesis will be an original interpretation and analysis of some contemporary phenomenon using the theoretical insights of cultural sociology. It should be approximately 20 pages and is due on April 27.

Thesis Presentation

The final two class meetings are set aside for student presentations. Each student will have thirty minutes (20 minutes of presentation and 10 minutes of Q&A from your classmates) to formally present their final paper to the class.

PLEASE NOTE: The readings for each class are to be completed <i>before</i> the start of the class for which they are listed.		
WEEK 1	MON. 1/13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Max Weber: <i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i> (1905)
WEEK 2	MON. 1/20	MLK HOLIDAY—NO CLASS
WEEK 3	MON. 1/27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emile Durkheim: <i>The Elementary Forms of Religious Life</i> (1912)
WEEK 4	MON. 2/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edward Shils and Michael Young: “The Meaning of the Coronation,” <i>Sociological Review</i> 1 (1953): 63-81 • Norman Birnbaum: “Monarchies and Sociologists: A Reply to Professor Shils and Mr. Young,” <i>Sociological Review</i> 3 (1955): 5-23 • Jeffrey Alexander and Philip Smith: “The Discourse of American Civil Society” in <i>The Meanings of Social Life</i> (1993)
WEEK 5	MON. 2/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mary Douglas: <i>Purity and Danger</i> (1966) • Bernhardt Giesen: “Inbetweenness and Ambivalence” in <i>The Oxford Handbook of Cultural Sociology</i> (2012)
WEEK 6	MON. 2/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roland Barthes: “The World of Wrestling” and “Myth Today” in <i>Mythologies</i> (1957) • Stuart Hall: “The Work of Representation” in <i>Representation</i> (1997) • Mary Douglas: “Deciphering a Meal” in <i>Daedalus</i> (1972): 61-81 • Marshall Sahlins: “Food as Symbolic Code” in <i>Culture and Society</i> (1976)
WEEK 7	MON. 2/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eviatar Zerubavel: <i>The Fine Line</i> (1991)
WEEK 8	MON. 3/2	SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS
WEEK 9	MON. 3/9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pierre Bourdieu: <i>Distinction</i> (1979)
WEEK 10	MON. 3/16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michèle Lamont: <i>The Dignity of Working Men</i> (2000)

WEEK 11	MON. 3/23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clifford Geertz: “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” and “Ideology as a Cultural System” in <i>The Interpretation of Culture</i> (1973) • Victor Turner: “Social Dramas and Stories About Them” in <i>From Ritual to Theatre</i> (1982)
WEEK 12	MON. 3/30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jan Assmann: “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity” <i>New German Critique</i> 65 (1995): 125-133 • Paul Connerton: “Commemorative Ceremonies” and “Bodily Practices” in <i>How Societies Remember</i> (1989) • Hayden White: “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality” in <i>On Narrative</i> (1980) • W. B. Gallie: “Narrative and Historical Understanding” in <i>The History and Narrative Reader</i> (1964)
WEEK 13	MON. 4/6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philip Smith: <i>Why War?</i> (2005)
WEEK 14	MON. 4/13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jeffrey Alexander: “Author’s Introduction” and chapters 1-5 of <i>Performance and Power</i> (2011)
WEEK 15	MON. 4/20	THESIS PRESENTATIONS—NO READING ASSIGNMENT
WEEK 16	MON. 4/27	THESIS PRESENTATIONS—NO READING ASSIGNMENT