

Sociology 4461

Critical Thinking in Sociology

Spring 2010

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Howdy! and welcome to what I think will be a rich and productive early-morning exercise in developing and honing our critical reasoning skills. As the department of Sociology's senior-level, "capstone" course, we are charged with the task of focusing our intellectual skills and sociological knowledge and sharing our evolving insights about the social world in a forthright and articulate manner. Sounds heavy for eight a.m., but that's our objective and our opportunity; to give voice (perhaps, one final time in academia) to your newly acquired sociological vision. Central to this mission is the analysis of our own frameworks of thinking, becoming aware of our own critical thinking tools. It has been said that the ability to reflect upon one's own thought processes is the highest intellectual endeavor one can undertake. That is to say, to become conscious of the very process of how we understand / construct our social world. Such an awareness in both liberating and empowering in that we become independent thinkers, not reliant on others to determine how social issues are to be understood or interpreted. As young intelligentsia - and inheritors of Enlightenment thought - you have been in the process of developing your capacity for reasoned and integrative insight. This course is your /our shared opportunity to talk about these "thought tools."

We will first spend some time elucidating the vital facets of critical questioning, that is, the necessary steps / considerations we employ in determining for ourselves the logical and empirical adequacy of a nonfictional statement. Is that argument true? Strong? Compelling? How do we determine the truthfulness of a social statement? We will / should ask of all presentations on social issues questions regarding how the problem / issue is defined, supporting evidence for this definition, causal relationships, the author's values, and reasonable conclusions. With these critical thinking skills, we will then delve into an array of intriguing, substantive, sociological concerns. We will read / analyze contemporary articles in key areas of sociology, such as education, work, family, gender and sexuality, crime, inequality, politics, etc. Through these exemplary presentations on diverse sociological phenomenon, we will have the opportunity to see many examples of how "good arguments" are constructed.

The two required books for this course are available exclusively at Left Hand Books located at 1200 Pearl Street. The **Left Hand Book** Collective is an all-volunteer, not-for-profit, collectively-run bookstore, which has served Boulder since 1979. Their phone # is 303.443.8252. Since these books will serve as the basis for our classroom discussions, it is vital that you possess them, make a strong commitment to reading them, and always bring them with you to class.

Asking the Right Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking by M. Brown and S. Keeley

The Contexts Reader (American Sociological Association) eds. J. Goodwin and J. Jasper

Exams and Grading: I expect lively and thoughtful participation by all members of this class. I expect you to read the appropriate material for each class meeting and come ready to talk, share, apply, refine, and/or challenge the topic at hand. I favor frequent and informed participation. I strongly encourage you to make every effort to become a "regular member" of this class. Please bring your book(s) to each class meeting. Your grade for this course will be based on the following criteria: class engagement / co-facilitation(20%)*, six critical thinking assignments (10% each); and a small group project / presentation (20%). In determining final grades I do use the "+, -" system." If you are going to miss an exam, it is vital that you notify me prior to that exam.

* **Class Engagement (20%):** Your regular attendance and active participation in class discussions and activities is an essential component of this class. You are expected to engage in civil discourse on issues and readings relevant to each session. Each student is expected to co-facilitate one of our class meetings. Beyond two absences, your grade for engagement will be reduced by one-half letter grade for each subsequent absence, except in the case of high-holiday observance, family emergency or medical emergency.

Students with Disabilities: Students with disabilities who qualify for academic accommodations must provide me notification from Disability Services and discuss specific needs with me, preferably during the first two weeks of class. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities (303-492-8671, Willard Hall, room 322.)

Classroom Behavior Policy: Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Students who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Faculty have the professional responsibility to treat all students with understanding, dignity and respect, to guide classroom discussion and to set re limits on the manner in which they and their students express opinions. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender variance, and nationalities.

Student Honor Code: All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-725-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and nonacademic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion).

Policy on Discrimination and Harassment: The University of Colorado policy on Sexual Harassment and the University of Colorado policy on Amorous Relationships applies to all students, staff and faculty. Any student, staff or faculty member who believes s/he has been the subject of discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550.