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or by appointment.

## ***The Primacy of Social Interactions***

Sociology 281 – Special Topics: Neurosociology  
Spring 2007  
223 Sturges Hall  
MWF: 10:30 am – 11:20 am

“One of the most popular, most enduring misperceptions about science is that it proceeds in an orderly, linear fashion. That science works like this: Hypothesis precedes observation, which proves it right or wrong. That the need to make an observation creates the need to make an instrument . . . . The truth about science is that it also proceeds in an unruly, intuitive fashion. That sometime observation precedes hypothesis, and what creates the need to make an observation is a desire to see what a particular instrument can do. That sometimes the best answer a scientist could want is more questions.”

Richard Panek, 1998, *Seeing and Believing: How the Telescope Opened Our Eyes and Minds to the Heavens*, pp. 4-5

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“I am not attempting to reduce social phenomena to biological phenomena, but rather to discuss the powerful connection between them. It should be clear that although culture and civilization arise from the behavior of biological individuals, the behavior was generated in collectivities of individuals interacting in specific environments. Culture and civilization could not have arisen from single individuals and thus cannot be reduced to biological mechanisms, and even less, can they be reduced to a subset of genetic specifications. Their comprehension demands not just general biology and neurobiology but the methodologies of the social sciences as well.”

Antonio R. Damasio, 1994, *Descartes' Error*, p. 124

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“All recent human ‘evolution’ and development now occurs without the participation of DNA. In fact, almost all of it takes place outside the body. This is because we can alter our environment in ways no other species ever could and our self-shaped environment plays a crucial role in the postnatal development of the human brain. Our genetic makeup today is not significantly different from that of the caveman fifty thousand years ago, yet nothing else about our lives is similar. That sort of change is unprecedented, could not have been predicted by Darwinian theory, and is unrelated to any of those not-so-random genetic variations in the DNA of our chromosomes.”

Harold Klawans, M.D., 2000, *Strange Behavior: Tales of Evolutionary Neurology*, pp. 233-234

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“[A] new view of the brain, a sense of it not as programmed and static, but rather as dynamic and active, a supremely efficient adaptive system geared for evolution and change, ceaselessly adapting to the needs of the organism – its needs, above all, to construct a coherent self and world, whatever defects or disorders of brain function befell it. That the brain is minutely differentiated is clear . . . . The miracle is how they all cooperate, are integrated together, in the creation of a self.”

Oliver Sacks, 1995, *An Anthropologist on Mars: Seven Paradoxical Tales*, p. xvii

**Course Goals:** Known demographic trends portend a potentially drastic change in American's health status in the future. Specifically, it is estimated that by 2050 a large percentage of the population will be over sixty years old and that another large portion of the population will reach thirty. Accompanying such population changes will be changes in key health concerns for the United States – a large older population will increase the number of people with some form of dementia and a large cohort of people in their 30's will increase the number of people who develop schizophrenia. Additionally, it is estimated that over 40% of the population today suffers from depression and that this will not change over the next forty years. Such health issues seriously impact the quality of life of the patients themselves as well as their family and friends. All three health issues – dementia, schizophrenia, and depression – are typically described, discussed, and explained in terms of their neurological, chemical, physiological, or psychological processes. ***I argue that social interactions play a significant role in the development and progress of such diseases (disorders/illnesses). However, current explanations do NOT reference social interactions and I further argue that this omission seriously impacts the utility and success of related treatment plans. Therefore, in order to truly understand the development of these types of illness as well as to definitively impact their progress requires integrating our sociological knowledge with existing explanations.***

More to the point, by 2050 a large percentage of the American population will potentially suffer from life-altering and life-threatening illnesses that can severely impact the quality of our lives. Our ability to successfully treat these illnesses depends on how well we actually understand their underlying mechanisms. This course encourages students to explicitly make connections between existing explanations of such illnesses and the role of social interactions in their occurrence, so as to literally affect how these illnesses are viewed and treated. To accomplish this we will start to become experts in neurological and social psychological aspects of human existence and develop links between these two different perspectives.

“Special Topics: Neurosociology” is an elective course for all sociology majors and minors. The overall goal of this course is to introduce students to a broad understanding of sociological social psychology as well as key aspects of neuropsychology. Specifically, the course accomplishes three things:

1. Develops students' critical skills through a variety of class assignments that ask students to apply their understanding of social psychology to existing neurological knowledge,
2. Provides students with in-depth knowledge of a specific disease process from both the social psychological and neurological view, and
3. Highlights the potential for future interdisciplinary work that addresses key aspects of human health that impact on the quality of life.

### **Course Readings:**

#### **Required texts (available at Sundance Books):**

- DeLamater, John D. and Daniel J. Myers. 2007. *Social Psychology, Sixth Edition*. CA: Thomson-Wadsworth. [DD]
- Elias, Lorin J. and Deborah M. Saucier. 2006. *Neuropsychology: Clinical and Experimental Foundations*. MA: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon. [ES]
- Goleman, Daniel. 2006. *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships*. NY: Bantam Books. [DG]
- Ratey, John J., MD. 2002. *A User's Guide to the Brain*. NY: Vintage Books. [JR]
- Materials to be distributed in class after spring break.

**You are expected to do the required readings prior to the day noted on the attached schedule.**

**Course Requirements:** The course requirements are constructed to achieve the following three things. They:

1. ensure that each student acquires a base of knowledge concerning sociological social psychology and neuropsychology,
2. ensure an ongoing two-way communication process between student and instructor concerning course material whereby an appropriate level of feedback provides guidance for students' improvement in the course, and
3. provide a variety of opportunities for students to demonstrate their progress since everyone learns in different ways.

Each requirement yields a maximum number of points contributing to the total number of points possible which are translated into a final grade as noted on the scale below. This is known as the mastery system of evaluation whose purpose is to allow each student to determine his/her own level of performance based on your own expectations. In other words – the grade you receive in the class is based on what you have learned and earned, rather than on how you compare to other students in the class. I **do not** curve grades on a mean or average – each person's grade at the end of the semester is based on the total number of points he/she has earned.

<u>Requirement</u>	<u>Due Date</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>Grade Scale</u>			
Reading Integration Discussion	See schedule	120	A	419 pts	C+	343 pts
Take home test	See description	75	A-	403 pts	C	328 pts
Group research project	See description	190	B+	388 pts	C-	314 pts
Participation	See description	70	B	373 pts	D	300 pts
			B-	358 pts	E	< 300 pts
		<b>Total Points</b>	<b>455</b>			

### Requirement Descriptions

### Points

- *Reading integration discussion* 120  
 A total of **six** reading integration discussions are required for the course and each is worth 20 points for a total of 120 points toward the final grade. The purpose of the reading integration discussion is to encourage students to hone their critical skills by identifying key sociological social psychological ideas and connecting them to key aspects of neurology. Guidelines for the reading integration discussion submissions will be distributed in class and specific submission dates are noted on the class schedule.

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- *Take home test* 75  
**One** take home test is included in the course and it is worth 75 points toward the final grade. The purpose of the take home test is to encourage students to actively integrate social psychological ideas with neurological understandings, particularly as it relates to understanding the disease/illness with which they are working for the group project. More importantly, the take-home format provides an opportunity for students to thoughtfully work through possible connections between the social and the neurological. The dates for distributing the take home test and when it is due are noted on the class schedule.

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- *Group research project* 190  
 The purpose of the group project is for students to become experts concerning one of the specific illnesses that are currently explained solely from neurological, physiological, chemical, or psychological perspectives. The project, as described in the handout to be distributed in class, consists of three short written papers, a formal presentation (at the end of the semester), and one handout to accompany the presentation. Each component includes individual- and group-awarded points for a total of 190 points toward the final grade. Specific dates for paper submissions are noted on the class schedule.

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- *Participation credit* 70

To encourage class attendance and participation in class discussions a total of 70 points are earned in two different ways. First, students will individually respond to questions posed in class and submit their written responses for credit. Second, students will work together in informal groups to respond to questions and problems posed in class. The written responses will be submitted for credit.

**The purpose of constructing the course and its requirements in this fashion is to encourage a “hands-on” approach to learning neurosociology that allows you to actively deal with the ideas, issues, and problems inherent in what is literally a brand new development in the discipline of sociology. These skills are applicable in any arena you might find yourself – other courses, running a business, working for a business, and in further education. Additionally, this course compels you to have a stake in the class since it depends on cooperative learning among students, as well as the expertise, dedication, and interest of the instructor.**

**Things for your consideration:**

**Attendance:** Learning is an interactive process. A large portion of the material for this course will be covered in class and emerge from class discussions. The take home test is based on the material discussed in class thus going beyond just the required readings. Additionally, the success or failure of any class depends on the efforts of both the instructor and class participants. Therefore, I strongly encourage thoughtful preparation (on my part as well as yours), regular attendance, and active participation. Although regular attendance is not a course requirement it will provide students with the skills and knowledge necessary for successful completion of the course.

**Cell Phones and Pagers:** All cell phones and pagers **MUST** be on silent during class meetings. Cell phone ringing and pager buzzing is VERY disruptive during discussions and I consider it disrespectful of class members as well as myself. I will assume that you simply forgot the first time it occurs. However, the second time it occurs I will ask you to permanently leave the class and I will have your school record so noted.

**Plagiarism:** When you use the ideas of someone else, whether you quote a source directly or indirectly incorporate general points made by another person, **you must cite the source**. Proper citation practices not only help you to avoid the unethical act of plagiarism but are also a mark of good scholarship. Additionally, proper citation practices indicate that students are taking their own work seriously. When citing the work of others you demonstrate your ability to apply and synthesize information and to form your own ideas regarding the opinions of someone else. Guidelines for citing in any written materials submitted (tests and papers) will be distributed in class.

**More to the point, to emphasize the importance of proper citation practices I will deduct up to 25% of the total points available for any given assignment from the points earned for that submission for plagiarism AND for incomplete or improper citations. It is your responsibility to ensure that you understand the guidelines preventing plagiarism using proper citation practices. Essentially, students will be penalized two and one half letter grades on each assignment for inaccurate or incomplete citation practices.**

**Evaluation of Written Assignments:** I expect a thoughtful response to each written submission. Each written submission, unless stated otherwise, **MUST be typewritten and double-spaced, have 1” margins on all**

**sides of the paper, be stapled in the top left-hand corner of the paper, and contain a cover sheet that identifies a title for the paper as well as the author's name.** Each entry will be graded according to the following criteria:

1. **Completeness of response:** the ability to convey necessary information in a concise and thorough form is a vital aspect of being an active participant in society. Make sure that all parts of each written assignment are explicitly addressed in your responses. Also, I assume you will refer to the concepts and ideas being studied throughout the course in any written submission. To be more precise, a complete response will always contain the following information necessary to present a full argument:
    - a. restate the question/item to which you are responding as part of an introductory sentence or paragraph,
    - b. explicitly state your answer to the question,
    - c. define any non-primitive terms in the answer (those terms that a high school student would not understand),
    - d. discuss any information/evidence/examples supporting your answer, and
    - e. provide a concluding sentence or paragraph.
  2. **Accurateness of response:** all written assignments will ask you to integrate material from the reading assignments and class discussion into your own knowledge system and experiences. Therefore, there are correct responses for every assignment and you will be graded on whether these are reflected in your responses.
  3. **Style:** I expect that your responses will reflect scholarly and thoughtful reflection on the material. This requires the use of proper grammar, language, and the lack of typographical errors. Points will be deducted if an excessive number of typographical errors detract from the clarity of the presentation, as well as for incorrect use of grammar. Using the "spell check" function on word processors indicates students' serious intentions to effectively communicate. More specifically, it is expected that your responses will reflect the thoughts of a budding sociologist who seeks to understand the social world from an unbiased position rather than that of personal opinion.
  4. **Correct citations and avoids plagiarism:** this is self-explanatory.
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**Nonsexist Language:** An increasing number of academic and non-academic organizations, as well as many mainstream newspapers and magazines, require that authors use nonsexist language. This means referring to persons in terms that are not ambiguous, stereotypical, or evaluative. For example, it is ambiguous to say "man is selfish by nature" when we mean to include all people regardless of sex. Thus, "humans are selfish by nature" is the less ambiguous phrase. To refer, for example, to a "chairman" rather than a "chairperson" when speaking generically perpetuates the stereotype that only men hold high-level positions.

This is not a trivial issue. It is no longer considered appropriate to ignore more than half of the human population (i.e., all women) by using only male pronouns simply because it is considered more convenient and less unwieldy. I strongly encourage you to make the manner in which you express ideas as conscious as the manner in which you learn to ask and answer sociological questions in this course, by using non-sexist language in your written and spoken remarks.

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**Complaints and Rebuttals: I will accept written rebuttals up to 1 week following the return of your scored assignment.** A persuasive rebuttal includes a summary of the question or task involved, your response, and a statement about why you think you deserve more credit than you were given. Attach the original scored assignment to the back of the rebuttal. I encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity to participate in the process of your own evaluation. This is your chance to make a case for yourself. Use it if you think you have just cause.

Although I have put a great deal of consideration into both my teaching methods and the structure of the class, they are not perfect for every individual. I value your constructive feedback and use such information to improve. If there is a specific issue regarding the course I encourage you to approach me for discussion. If

you are not satisfied with my response you should contact the Chairperson of the Sociology Department (Dr. William Lofquist). I will ask you to provide anonymous evaluations of my efforts during the course, in addition to the end-of-the-semester formal evaluation. Please give these evaluations your careful consideration.

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**Special Consideration:** Students who require special consideration in regard to meeting and completing course requirements should speak with the instructor **as soon as possible**. Although course requirements are meant to appeal to all learning styles, I recognize that there are extenuating circumstances that impact on a student's ability to learn. My goal is for all students to have an opportunity to learn course material and to demonstrate their knowledge.