

SOCIOLOGY

Overview and Contact Information

Sociology is the systematic study of society and social relations. Sociology majors develop the critical tools to theoretically and comparatively understand social trends and problems, grasp the intersection of self and society, and analyze empirical data. They read the works of major sociological thinkers, from the classical figures who founded the discipline to contemporary theorists of society. The major requires courses in research methods and sociological theory. The faculty also offers classes in criminology, collective behavior and social movements, the sociology of gender, the sociology of media, the sociology of education, and the sociology of development and globalization.

Contact Information

Matthew Watson, Chair

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<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/academics/find-your-program/sociology>

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Learning Goals

By participating in coursework and experiences constituting a major in Sociology:

- Students will gain a comprehensive understanding of the field of sociology, the intersections among sub-fields, and the connections among theory, research, and practice.
- Students will gain skills and knowledge about research methods and understand the ethical issues involved in sociological research.
- Students will learn how to critically analyze texts and develop skills as writers, speakers, and researchers.

Faculty

This area of study is administered by the Sociology faculty:

Patricia Banks, Professor of Sociology, On Leave 2023-2024

Kristie Ford, Professor of Sociology and Critical Race and Political Economy

Eleanor Townsley, Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Sociology; Director of Nexus

Kenneth Tucker, Helen P. Bibbero Professor of Sociology

Benjamin Gebre-Medhin, Assistant Professor of Sociology, On Leave 2023-2024

Ayca Zayim, Assistant Professor of Sociology

Samantha Leonard, Visiting Instructor in Sociology

Cassandra Sever, Visiting Instructor in Sociology

Requirements for the Major

A minimum of 36 credits:

Code	Title	Credits
SOCI-123	Introduction to Sociology	4
SOCI-223	Development of Social Thought ¹	4
SOCI-225	Social Science Research and Data Analysis ¹	4
12 credits at the 300 level, including:		12
SOCI-333	Contemporary Social Theory	
12 additional credits beyond the 100 level		12
Total Credits		36

¹ SOCI-223 and SOCI-225 should be completed as early as possible but certainly by the end of the junior year.

Additional Specifications

- Please note: Proposal deadlines are strictly enforced for independent study at the SOCI-295 and SOCI-395 levels.

Requirements for the Minor

A minimum of 20 credits:

Code	Title	Credits
SOCI-123	Introduction to Sociology	4
4 credits at the 300 level		4
12 additional credits above the 100 level		12
Total Credits		20

Course Offerings

SOCI-123 Introduction to Sociology

Fall and Spring. Credits: 4

This course uses a sociological framework to examine the nature and structure of modern industrial societies. To identify central trends in society and culture, this course covers several basic themes, such as social inequality and social interaction, that have appeared repeatedly in the works of major social thinkers.

Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences

C. Sever, E. Townsley

Restrictions: This course is limited to first-years, sophomores, and juniors

SOCI-214 Race in America: Inequality, Immigration, and Other Issues

Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4

From the Black Lives Matter movement to debates about immigration and a color-blind America, race and ethnicity are at the forefront of contemporary public discourse. In this course students will be introduced to the various sociological perspectives and theoretical frameworks used to understand racial and ethnic relations in the United States. We will discuss the dynamics of individual racial and ethnic groups including African Americans, Latino Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and White Americans. We will also examine what the concepts of race and ethnicity mean and how they affect various aspects of American society.

Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences; Multicultural Perspectives

P. Banks

Restrictions: Course limited to sophomores, juniors and seniors

SOCI-216 Special Topics in Sociology**SOCI-216DR Special Topics in Sociology: 'Dialoguing for Racial Change'**
Spring. Credits: 4

A critical analysis of race, racism, and justice in the United States, as set in a socio-historical context defined by power. In addition to traditional modes of teaching-learning, students use intergroup dialogue and collaborative group work to examine how race is constructed, experienced, reproduced, and transformed within social structures. Topics include racial identity development and how individuals internalize and 'live race' in everyday interactions; historical mechanisms for how bodies and spaces have become 'raced' over time; institutional dimensions of racial inequality (e.g., law, education, popular culture); and practices for pursuing racial justice.

Crosslisted as: CRPE-231

Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences; Multicultural Perspectives
K. Ford

Instructor permission required.

Notes: Use this application form to seek instructor permission:

<https://forms.gle/NYFWNcjLWAtQPNcf6> (<https://forms.gle/NYFWNcjLWAtQPNcf6/>)

SOCI-216DU Special Topics in Sociology: 'Schooling in American Society'
Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4

COVID-19 has upended schooling in the United States. Assumptions about physical co-presence, standardized testing, the rights of students, and the responsibilities of schools have all been transformed at warp speed. The pandemic also exposed durable fault lines in American education and society. This course provides an opportunity to evaluate our present moment using classical and contemporary sociological perspectives on mass schooling. It highlights issues facing the future of education, the role of schooling in struggles for economic and racial justice, and how the aspirations of individuals and families interact with state institutions to shape the American social and economic order.

Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences

B. Gebre-Medhin

Prereq: SOCI-123.

SOCI-216FM Special Topics in Sociology: 'Families, Kinship, and Sexuality'

Fall and Spring. Credits: 4

How do family and kinship shape our social lives? In turn, how are family and kinship shaped by social and historical contexts? We all come to this course with individual experiences of family, kinship, and sexuality, but this course will ask you to critically engage with these concepts from a sociological perspective. In this course we will both define and use an intersectional lens to understand how class, race-ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and citizenship mutually shape our individual and collective experiences of family and kinship. We will consider family as a site for reproducing inequality and violence, but also as a site for resistance, revolution, and home.

Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences

S. Leonard

Prereq: SOCI-123.

SOCI-216MK Special Topics in Sociology: 'Marketing and Society'

Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4

Marketing penetrates every domain of society. While perusing the Internet, watching television, attending sports and cultural events, we are being marketed to by businesses. This course offers students insight on the fundamentals of marketing through a critical lens. Readings and assignments will give students an understanding of the theories and concepts that underlie marketing, along with its practical elements. We will be especially attentive to the ways that marketing influences social inequality. An ongoing question that we will explore over the term is what is the potential for, and what are the limits of, marketing as a force for reducing gender, class, racial, and other forms of inequality. Among assignments will be exercises where students critically examine marketing campaigns, such as inclusive beauty campaigns, and a project where students develop a marketing campaign that is attentive to social purpose.

Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences

P. Banks

Restrictions: Course limited to sophomores, juniors and seniors

Notes: With the permission of the instructor, a select number of students can elect to take this course at the 300 level. If you are interested in doing so, please email the instructor to discuss this prior to registering for the course.

SOCI-216MV Special Topics in Sociology: 'Gender and Social Movements'
Spring. Credits: 4

This course will focus on the relations between gender, politics, and social change to explore the gendered character of citizenship, political participation, and mobilization. We'll start by considering what makes a social movement, who mobilizes, and what resistance has, does, and can look like in practice. Students will engage with historical and contemporary cases of feminist and women's social movements to explore how gender constructs both formal political participation and activism. We will explore how feminist and women's movements have contributed to alternative practices of politics and visions of social change and wellbeing.

Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences

S. Leonard

Prereq: SOCI-123.

SOCI-216PT Special Topics in Sociology: 'Political Sociology'

Spring. Credits: 4

This course focuses on political processes and power – in particular, which groups have the ability to implement their political, social, and economic agendas, which ones do not, and why. We will explore the means by which certain groups affect political outcomes that shape society and social-political reality. In particular, we will concentrate on the interrelationship between the state, the market, and civil society, and investigate how this intersection has informed the politics of our time. By the end of this course, students are expected to have achieved an understanding of the major theoretical perspectives and debates in political sociology, and a sense of the historical and contemporary organizations, parties, classes, and other groups that influence social change. We will focus mostly on western democracies, especially the U.S., but other countries and political arrangements will also be included. Globalization as an on-going social, political, and economic system will be discussed throughout the semester.

Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences

K. Tucker

Prereq: 4 credits in sociology.

SOCI-216QD Special Topics in Sociology: 'Qualitative Research and Data Analysis'*Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4*

This course introduces students to qualitative research methods. In the course students will get basic training in the collection and analysis of qualitative research data, develop experience writing and presenting qualitative data, gain exposure to the theoretical assumptions underlying qualitative inquiry, and learn insights about the ethical responsibilities surrounding qualitative social analysis. We will focus on methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, and close observations. This course will provide students with the skills and knowledge to pursue qualitative data analysis in future projects such as for an independent study, senior thesis, or internship. In addition, since cases will focus on consumer research, this class is also well-suited for students who want to learn qualitative research techniques that are used in marketing.

*Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences**The department***SOCI-216TX Special Topics in Sociology: 'Text as Data I: From Qualitative to Quantitative Text Analysis'***Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4*

Characterizing, categorizing, and counting text documents is at the heart of research and knowledge development in the social sciences and humanities. New digital technologies have introduced new methods for analyzing text documents on a massive scale. These computational approaches have also provoked important debates about the role of meaning, context, and reproducibility in social science research. This course considers the affordances of new digital methods for text analysis in relation to established practices of qualitative coding. Students will explore this new frontier in a hands-on manner using Python to count and compare relevant features of text documents in large data sets.

*Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences**B. Gebre-Medhin**Prereq: SOCI-123 or COMSC-151.***SOCI-216WK Special Topics in Sociology: 'Sociology of Social Work'***Fall. Credits: 4*

Sociology and social work – what's the difference? This course examines, from a sociological perspective, the history and current organization and operation of social welfare systems in the United States. It examines the social aspects of the welfare system and how certain issues have become the focus of social services, with a specific focus on the case of intimate partner violence. It will explore the professionalization of social change and reform, relationships between social workers and clients, and how gender, race-ethnicity, class, and sexuality shape the current welfare system in the U.S.

*Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences**S. Leonard**Prereq: SOCI-123.***SOCI-223 Development of Social Thought***Fall. Credits: 4*

This course examines the origins and development of sociological theory in the nineteenth century. Focusing on the three most important representatives of the classical tradition in sociology - Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim - we consider in detail the ideas of each, compare their perspectives on emerging industrial society, and assess their contemporary significance.

*Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences**K. Tucker**Prereq: SOCI-123 or ANTHR-105.***SOCI-225 Social Science Research and Data Analysis***Spring. Credits: 4*

This course is an introduction to the use of quantitative data in sociology. It focuses on the ways in which data is collected, analyzed, and presented to make sociological arguments. It introduces various tools to describe data for single variables, explore relationships between pairs of variables, and make statistical inferences. Students will learn basic skills to conduct their own social science research and analyze data using statistical software. The aim of the course is to allow students to conduct elementary statistical analyses on their own and become critical readers of statistical evidence.

*Applies to requirement(s): Meets No Distribution Requirement**A. Zayim**Restrictions: This course is offered to Sociology majors only.***SOCI-231 Criminology***Fall. Credits: 4*

This course focuses on the historical and theoretical development of the major approaches to crime and criminality in the 20th and 21st centuries. Material discussed will include crime patterns, the formation of criminalized subgroups and how criminology relates to criminal justice policy. While focusing on social aspects of crime, we will ask: what makes people commit crimes? How do social policies impact criminal activity? How has our social construction of punishment changed over time?

*Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences**C. Sever**Prereq: SOCI-123.***SOCI-234 Social Problems***Fall. Credits: 4*

This is a course on the social construction of social problems. It devotes almost exclusive attention to how a 'problem' becomes a social problem; examining how atypical cases become regarded as typical; how definitions are expanded to inflate statistics; and how claim makers and advocacy groups manipulate the media to market social problems and solutions to the public.

*Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences**C. Sever**Prereq: SOCI-123.***SOCI-239 How Capitalism Works: Social Class, Power, and Ideology***Fall. Credits: 4*

The Occupy movement protests and recent popular uprisings across developing countries draw attention to rising global economic inequality. This course asks, "How does capitalism produce and reproduce economic inequality both within and across nations?" Drawing on theoretical and empirical research, we will examine class relations as a way to explain the unequal distribution of wealth and power. We will also discuss the role of the state and ideology in perpetuating the gap between the rich and poor. Students will learn the social dynamics underlying a range of contemporary issues in advanced and developing economies, ranging from labor exploitation to unemployment and financial crises.

*Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences**A. Zayim**Prereq: SOCI-123.*

SOCI-240 Collective Behavior and Social Movements*Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4*

This course examines instances of organized collective action in social, historical, and empirical contexts, from the labor movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the new social movements of today. We also explore various forms of unstructured protest, such as riots and demonstrations.

*Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences**K. Tucker**Prereq: SOCI-123.***SOCI-295 Independent Study***Fall and Spring. Credits: 1 - 4**The department**Instructor permission required.***SOCI-316 Special Topics in Sociology****SOCI-316DG Special Topics in Sociology: 'Sociology of Development and Globalization'***Fall. Credits: 4*

This course investigates economic development and globalization through a sociological lens. What is development? Why and how has the idea of development changed over time? Which development policies has this promoted, and with what consequences on people's lives in developing countries? Based on case studies across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, the course examines economic, political, and institutional factors that inform global development processes from post-WWII to the present. As we discuss challenges to the neoliberal development paradigm, students will gain a critical perspective on contemporary issues such as environmental damage, global inequality, and poverty.

*Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences; Multicultural Perspectives**A. Zayim**Prereq: 4 credits in sociology.***SOCI-316EC Special Topics in Sociology: 'Ethnography of Crime'***Spring. Credits: 4*

What can ethnography reveal about the nature of crime and the functioning of criminal justice institutions? What contributions has ethnography made to the study of crime? What place does ethnography occupy within the contemporary landscape of criminology? These questions serve as the point of departure for this reading-intensive seminar investigating classic and contemporary ethnographic texts addressing crime and criminal justice institutions.

*Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences**C. Sever**Restrictions: This course is open to juniors and seniors**Prereq: 8 credits in the department.***SOCI-316FN Special Topics in Sociology: 'Finance, Globalization, and Inequality'***Spring. Credits: 4*

We live in a financialized world dominated by financial actors, markets and institutions. From the Occupy Wall Street movement to ongoing debates about the power of big banks, finance has been seen as the culprit for the 2008 financial crisis, U.S. income and wealth inequality, and global instability. But what explains the rise of finance and how has finance gone global? How does global finance contribute to inequality within and across nations? We will tackle these questions by covering some of the recent sociological research on finance and financial globalization. Students will examine the political and institutional roots of financialization and its consequences in advanced and developing economies.

*Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences**A. Zayim**Prereq: 8 credits in sociology.***SOCI-316LT Special Topics in Sociology: 'The New American Elite'***Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4*

Inequality in the United States is at levels not seen since the 1920s, yet we know relatively little about those at the top who've accumulated enormous wealth and power. This course is a critical study of American Elites. Who are they? How did they amass such staggering resources? How are these resources used in the political, economic, and social spheres to reproduce/enhance their privilege? We put contemporary American elites into historical perspective, interrogate their origins, and evaluate the networks and practices that distinguish them from everyone else. We also analyze the narratives used to justify their privilege and consider their potential for group solidarity and collective action

*Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences**Other Attribute(s): Speaking-Intensive**B. Gebre-Medhin**Prereq: 8 credits in the department.***SOCI-316NQ Special Topics in Sociology: 'Organizations and Inequality'***Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4*

In Organizations and Inequality, we analyze how organizations create, reproduce, and also potentially challenge social inequalities. Drawing on different organizational perspectives, students will engage the challenges of ethical action in a complex world marked by competing rationalities and deep inequalities. Students will also research an organization of which they are a member and develop their own case study.

*Crosslisted as: EOS-349NQ**Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences**E. Townsley**Prereq: SOCI-123.***SOCI-316PS Special Topics in Sociology: 'Digital Media and the Public Sphere'***Fall. Credits: 4*

How do different kinds of stories unfold in contemporary public spheres? How do we make sense of pressing matters of common concern as members of publics? This research seminar asks: what are the effects of a pervasive cultural distrust in social institutions, the widespread mediatization of everyday life, and the intercultural and intertextual nature of media texts themselves? Drawing from foundational texts about media, the role of intellectuals, and the public sphere, students will be asked to develop an empirical case study to explore these questions and test their ideas.

*Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences**E. Townsley**Prereq: 8 credits in Sociology.*

SOCI-316RM Special Topics in Sociology: 'Consumer Culture: Race in the Marketplace'*Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4*

This course looks at the central concerns of consumer culture through the lens of race and ethnicity. Through exploring issues such as multicultural marketing and advertising, discrimination in e-commerce, consumer boycotts, and urban food deserts, students will gain theoretical and empirical insight on the ways that racial and ethnic boundaries shape, and are shaped by, consumption.

*Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences; Multicultural Perspectives**P. Banks**Restrictions: Course limited to sophomores, juniors and seniors**Prereq: 8 credits in sociology, economics, or EOS.***SOCI-316ST Special Topics in Sociology: 'Storytelling Sociology: Data for the People'***Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4*

How can we communicate social science knowledge to the wider public? How can we interpret, and assess the quality of, social scientific sources? In this writing-intensive seminar, students will build data literacy and public writing skills to translate important social scientific findings to wider audiences. In a workshop-style model that maps the process of publication, students will create a long-form story that they may seek to publish in wider news outlets. Embedded within is a continuous exploration of social science communication ethics: what is the anticipated impact of publication on marginalized groups? What responsibility do writers carry of audience understandings?

*Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences**Other Attribute(s): Writing-Intensive**C. Sever**Prereq: 8 credits in the department.***SOCI-316SY Special Topics in Sociology: 'The Business of Culture: Marketing & Selling Symbolic Goods'***Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4*

This course investigates the creative economy through a sociological lens. Through case studies of various creative industries, as well as examination of the creative sector as a whole, we will examine how the cultural economy influences, and is influenced by, social phenomena. We will explore issues such as how value is produced in the field of fashion modeling, how music and other creative industries drive urban economies, how local crafts enter global markets, and how norms and values influence the adoption of e-commerce in the market for fine art.

*Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences**P. Banks**Restrictions: Course limited to sophomores, juniors and seniors***SOCI-316TX Special Topics in Sociology: 'Text as Data II: Computational Text Analysis for the Social Sciences'***Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4*

How can the social sciences benefit from remarkable advances in hardware and software that have unlocked new approaches to using text-as-data? This course interrogates the use of text-as-data from both social scientific and computational perspectives. Students will consider how meaning and context are theorized and how scale is achieved in the analysis of text by social scientists and computational experts. This new frontier will be explored in a hands-on manner; by the end of the course, students will deploy machine learning models to gain insights from large bodies of text such that we may evaluate the utility of these approaches in our quest for insight into the social world.

*Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences**B. Gebre-Medhin**Prereq: 8 credits in Sociology including SOCI-216TX.***SOCI-316VN Special Topics in Sociology: 'Violence and Intimacy'***Fall. Credits: 4*

What makes violence "intimate"? And how are the most private experiences of violence also collective ones? This course examines how seemingly private violence - such as intimate partner violence - come to be defined as public problems. Students will analyze how collective violence is intimately experienced and how intimate violence is collective issues. In our sociological examination of violence, we will trace the connections between the intimate and the collective, the historical and the present, the interpersonal and the structural to answer our initial questions of how to define violence, intimacy, and intimate violence. We will conclude by examining responses and solutions that have been enacted to prevent abuse and will imagine futures without violence.

*Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences; Multicultural Perspectives**S. Leonard**Prereq: 8 credits in sociology.***SOCI-317 Topics in Contemporary Social Thought****SOCI-317ST Topics in Contemporary Social Thought: 'Cultural Sociology and Contemporary Theory'***Spring. Credits: 4*

This seminar examines topics in cultural sociology and contemporary social theory. The first part of the class asks: How do we imagine social things? The second part of the class reviews the history of social theory with a focus on the multiple crises of the modernity narrative, and various attempts to resolve these crises. The final third of the class poses the question of how to analyze culture and "do" social theory.

*Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences**E. Townsley**Prereq: SOCI-223 and 4 additional credits in Sociology.***SOCI-333 Contemporary Social Theory***Spring. Credits: 4*

In this critical survey of the main theoretical perspectives in contemporary sociology, we focus specifically on structural functionalism, symbolic interactionism, critical theory, feminism, and postmodernism. Besides gaining familiarity with these alternative perspectives, we try to identify the main axes of theoretical dispute in sociology and discuss the problems of evaluating and resolving conflict between theories.

*Applies to requirement(s): Social Sciences**K. Tucker**Prereq: SOCI-223, 8 credits in sociology.***SOCI-395 Independent Study***Fall and Spring. Credits: 1 - 8**The department**Instructor permission required.*