

II. Sample Course Outline: Discussion-Based Course

The preferred way in which to use *Sociology in Action* and the decision cases contained in it is by using class sessions to discuss and analyze cases. This active learning method allows students to learn sociology by doing sociology. Through class discussions of cases, students develop their skill at analyzing real-life situations using the sociological ideas, theories, and concepts discussed in *Sociology in Action*. The following course outline is designed for a course in which instructors focus class sessions around the discussion of the decision cases. The outline is meant to be illustrative, not definitive. It has suited my desire to introduce students to sociology by getting them to use those ideas to read and understand situations that they could face. It also provides a solid foundation for students who want to take additional sociology courses. Most important, the course engages students in their own learning.

Introduction and Objectives

This course introduces students to sociology by helping them learn how to use sociology to read and analyze situations. This skill at analyzing situations sociologically is developed by having students practice using this skill by analyzing decision cases, that is short, problem-centered narratives that promote critical thinking. The ability to analyze situations is developed incrementally through five stages in which students learn how to:

- See situations sociologically by identifying and describing four important social connectors: social relationships, groups, organizations, and networks.
- Use sociological theories to reframe and develop multiple perspectives on social connections.
- Think about situations from the point of view of insiders by decoding culture.
- Uncover inequalities by analyzing differences in power.
- Imagine futures by taking into account changes that could result from three important driving forces: demography, technology and collective actions.

Required Text

David Hachen *Sociology in Action: Cases for Critical and Sociological Thinking*,
Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2001

Course Grades

Given that the objective of the course is to enhance students' ability to analyze real situations sociologically, assessment of student learning is based on evaluating their ability to analyze cases in a variety of contexts:

- *Class Participation*: Student participation is encouraged and is assessed in terms of the ability of a student to articulate their views, use sociological ideas, and respond to other student's ideas. (20%)
- *Case Analyses*: Students are required to submit four 2-page analyses of cases. Students choose which cases to analyze. Papers are submitted prior to the class session in which the case is discussed and are evaluated in terms of the student's ability to argue for a position and their use of sociological ideas in the analysis. (20%)
- *Case Reaction Papers*: Students are required to submit five 1-page reaction papers, one for each of the cases at the beginning of each chapter in *Sociology in Action*. These papers are evaluated in terms of whether the student conveys an interesting reaction to the case. They are not intended to be analyses using sociological ideas. Instead, they help students express their initial reactions prior to considering the case sociologically. (10%)
- *Mid-Term Essay Examination*: An examination in which students write short essays on a case. The case is given to students ahead of time, but the questions are not. Alternative formats are to ask questions about a case which has already been discussed in class, or to ask students to compare two of the cases that have been already discussed. (25%)
- *Final Essay Examination*: An examination in which students write a full-fledged case analysis of a case. The case is given to students ahead of time. Students can bring notes and an outline, but must write the essay in class. (25 %)

Course Outline

The course is divided into five modules corresponding to the five chapters in *Sociology in Action*.

Unit 1: Seeing Society

Objectives:

- Recognize the key social actors, the central issues, and the crucial problem or dilemma in a situation.

- Identify and describe the important social connections (social relationships, groups, networks and organizations).
- Use knowledge of social connections to understand what has happened and what social actors could consider doing in order to solve the problems they face.

Readings:

Sociology in Action - Chapter 1: Seeing Society

Cases:

Separate but Safer (Chapter 1)

Why Can't Things Stay as They Are? (Chapter 1)

Off to College (Case 6)

Lisa's Hidden Identity (Case 9)

Tossin' and Turnin' (Case 3)

Unit 2: Using Theory

Objectives:

- Move from describing to explaining situations.
- Use five images of social connections to see situations from different theoretical perspectives.
- Become cognizant of your own theoretical assumptions and be able to reframe by analyzing situations using different assumptions.

Readings:

Sociology in Action - Chapter 2: Using Theory

Cases:

The Towering Dilemma (Chapter 2)

Changing a Hospital's Culture (Chapter 2)

The Worth of a Sparrow (Case 1)

Conflict at Riverside (Case 2)

Unit 3: Decoding Culture

Objectives:

- Learn how to see situations from the point of view of insiders by recognizing and describing cultural symbols, rituals, stories and worldviews.
- Explore the relationship between social connections and culture.
- Use different images and theories of culture to examine the various ways in which cultural factors affect a situation.

Readings:

Sociology in Action - Chapter 3: Decoding Culture

Cases:

Perfection or Bust! (Chapter 3)

Linda Gorman (Chapter 3)

Lucy Allman (Case 4)

Unit 4: Uncovering Inequalities and Power

Objectives:

- Explore differences among social actors in their ability to realize their interests.
- See and understand social divisions and inequalities based on social class, race and ethnicity, and sex and gender.
- Use theories of inequality and discrimination to develop explanations for observed inequalities and differences in power.

Readings:

Sociology in Action - Chapter 4: Uncovering Inequalities and Power

Cases:

The MPA Program at Southeastern State University (Chapter 4)

Robert Lopez (Chapter 4)

Lisa's Hidden Identity (Case 9)

What's So Scary About the Truth? (Case 7)

People Like You (Case 8)

Conflict at Riverside (Case 2)

Lucy Allman (Case 4)

Unit 5: Imagining Futures

Objectives:

- Shift attention when analyzing situations from the social actors and their connections to the background conditions.
- Construct scenarios about the future based upon analysis of driving forces.
- Use knowledge of three driving forces – demographics, technology and collective action – to imagine possible futures.

Readings:

Sociology in Action - Chapter 5: Imagining Futures

Cases:

Where Have All the Salmon Gone? (Chapter 5)

Deaf President Now! (Chapter 5)

In the Eye of the Beholder (Case 5)

Conflict at Riverside (Case 2)

People Like You (Case 8)