

# **SOCIOLOGY 1**

**FIRST TERM - 2025**

## **INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY**



**Lecturer: Ms Janet Chisaka**

[\(j.chisaka@ru.ac.za\)](mailto:j.chisaka@ru.ac.za)

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Department of Sociology and the Introduction to Sociology module!

What is sociology? Isn't sociology just common sense? Why study sociology? Now that you are studying sociology, your family and friends will probably ask you what it is. In response, you might simply say: 'it is the study of society', but this is very vague. As a budding sociologist, you can tell them that sociology is *the systematic study of human society*, which means that sociologists are concerned with understanding society in a *scientific way* (Giddens, 2014). Besides the scientific approach to explaining social reality, sociology enables us to understand the world we live in and to understand ourselves, for we are products of that world. Unlike psychology, whose central focus is on the individual, sociology centres its focus on how society operates and how social forces (e.g. family, culture, education, social media, politics, economy, etc.) shape and influence the way you think and behave.

Studying sociology will enable you to question and challenge your views of the world and commonly accepted beliefs and assumptions. On this note, you are encouraged to apply sociological concepts and theories to your everyday life, your community (e.g. first-year students at Rhodes University) and the world. This will help you understand social theory, which can be challenging, and it will also help you develop a *sociological imagination* (C. Wright Mills 1916-1962).

## MODULE OBJECTIVE AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The aim of this module is to offer you an engaging and critical introduction to sociology. By the end of the module, you will be able to:

- Understand the origins of Sociology as a discipline, and how social theory is used to explain social reality.
- Differentiate between common sense understandings of the social world and those based on sociological explanations.
- Have a critical understanding of the relationship between the individual and society.
- Understand that individuals are shaped by society but that they are not powerless in determining their behaviour.
- Understand how social knowledge is produced (social research).

## COURSE STRUCTURE AND OVERVIEW

There will be four lectures per week (Monday to Thursday) at 1.15 pm – 2 pm in Barratt 2. Prescribed readings and lecture slides will be uploaded to RUconnected. There will be three *compulsory* tutorials starting from the third week of term (see pages 4-7). You are expected to read prescribed readings before lectures. You are strongly encouraged to ask questions during or after lectures (see the consultation timetable on page 6). As stated earlier, all prescribed readings will be available on RUconnected. However, you are strongly encouraged to read introductory sociology books in the library on Level 3. You can ask the library staff for help.

The following section provides a breakdown of the weekly topics, including the prescribed and recommended readings, which will be covered in this module.

## **WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

The goal this week is to introduce you to the sociological perspective, which is the ability to see the social patterns that influence individual and group life - *the sociological imagination* (Mills, 1959). The task of a sociologist is to understand the relationship between individuals and the society in which they live and to reveal how the context of society shapes our lives. Thinking sociologically means that personal troubles are viewed as public issues, for example, understanding unemployment is more than understanding one person's experience. Sociology is also about discovering unsettling facts, seeing everyday life in new ways, and questioning actions and ideas that are usually taken for granted – that is, *debunking* (Berger, 1963).

### **Prescribed Reading**

Stewart, P. & Zaaiman, J. (eds.) 2014. *Sociology: A South African introduction*. Cape Town: Juta & Company. [pages xiii – xviii]

### **Recommended Readings**

Berger, P. L. (1963). *Invitation to sociology: A humanistic perspective*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. [Chapter 3]

Giddens, A. 2009. *Sociology* (sixth edition). Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. [pages 5 - 9]

Mills, C. W. (1959). *The sociological imagination*. London: Oxford University Press.

## **WEEKS 2-3: THE INDIVIDUAL IN SOCIETY**

In these weeks' lectures, we will examine what makes us human and discuss the importance of *socialisation*, a process through which individuals learn the expectations of society. As socialisation takes place in specific cultural contexts, we will explore African and South African cultures to understand how *culture* is a complex system of meaning and behaviour that defines the way of life for a given group or society. We then discuss *social structure*, a term sociologists refer to as *the organised patterns of relationships*, and social interaction (*the process by which we act toward and react to people around us*).

### **Prescribed Reading**

Stewart, P. & Zaaiman, J. (eds.) 2014. *Sociology: A South African introduction*. Cape Town: Juta & Company. [Chapters 2 & 3]

### **Recommended Readings**

Berger, P. L. (1963). *Invitation to sociology: A humanistic perspective*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. [Chapter 3]

Haralambos, M., Holborn, M. & Heald, R. (2013). *Sociology: Themes and perspectives* (eighth edition). London: HarperCollins. [pages 95-104; 727-729]

## **WEEK 4: SOCIAL GROUPS, SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS, AND FORMAL ORGANISATIONS**

This week we explore how a social group (*two or more people who interact with one another, and who share a common identity and a sense of belonging*), a social institution (*an organised and established social system that meets one or more of society's basic needs* – e.g. a family, religion or media), and a formal organisation (*a complex and structured secondary group that has been deliberately created to achieve specific goals in an efficient manner* – e.g. Rhodes University or Samsung) shape individuals' daily lives and the society at large.

### **Prescribed Reading**

Macdonis, J. J. & Plummer K. (2007). *Sociology: A global introduction* (fourth edition). Essex: Pearson Education. [pages 162-164; 168-169]

### **Recommended Readings**

Haralambos, M., Holborn, M. & Heald, R. (2000). *Sociology: Themes and perspectives* (fifth edition). London: HarperCollins. [Chapters 7 & 8]

Stewart, P. & Zaiman, J. (eds.) 2014. *Sociology: A South African introduction*. Cape Town: Juta & Company. [Chapter 3]

## **WEEKS 5-6: THE ORIGINS OF SOCIOLOGY, CLASSICAL SOCIAL THEORY, AND POST-MODERN THEORY**

We discuss the origins of sociology and social theory. Like the subjects it studies, sociology is itself a social product. Sociology first emerged in Western Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During this period, the European economic and political systems were rapidly changing, Monarchies (queens and kings) were disappearing, and new ways of thinking were emerging. Religion as the system of authority and law was giving way to scientific authority. At the same time, capitalism grew. We then examine three most influential classical theorists, namely Emile Durkheim (1858-1917); Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Max Weber (1864-1920). We will briefly discuss post-modern theorists, who argue that classical social theory is no longer able to adequately explain the features of contemporary society.

### **Prescribed Reading**

Stewart, P. & Zaiman, J. (eds.) 2014. *Sociology: A South African introduction*. Cape Town: Juta & Company. [Chapter 1]

### **Recommended Readings**

Giddens, A. (2009). *Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press. [Chapter 4]

Haralambos, M., Holborn, M. & Heald, R. (2000). *Sociology: Themes and perspectives* (fifth edition). London: HarperCollins. [Chapter 15]

## WEEK 7: DOING SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH AND MODULE SUMMARY

In the final week, we will briefly examine how sociological research is about explaining and understanding social reality and how it goes beyond the surface-level understanding of micro and macro social issues and events. We conclude with a summary of the module.

### Prescribed Reading

Stewart, P. & Zaaïman, J. (eds.) 2014. *Sociology: A South African introduction*. Cape Town: Juta & Company. [pages 37-38]

### Recommended Reading

Giddens, A. (2009). *Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press. [Chapter 3]

## ASSESSMENT

Four assignments will be written for this module: three *compulsory* tutorial assignments (assessed by tutors), and a test (assessed by Ms Chisaka). The test counts 95% of the term mark, and it is *mandatory* as it is part of your Duly Performed (DP) requirements for Sociology 1. Although the tutorial assignments' mark counts only 5% towards your term mark, *it is in your best interest to pay attention to each tutorial* because one of the tutorial questions will be included in the exam.

A 45-minute test will be written on **20<sup>th</sup> March at 19h00 in Barratt Lecture Theatre 2 and 3.**

You will write two essays in the June exams, which will be based on the material covered in the lectures and tutorials. The module mark is broken down as follows:

- Test and tutorial assignment – 30%
- June examination – 70%

## TUTORIALS

### Assignment Requirements

As earlier stated, tutorials are *compulsory*. You are required to write a 500-word essay in response to each week's tutorial question/s (see Sociology Handbook, 2025: 24-26 on how to format written assignments). The essay must be referenced properly (see Sociology Handbook, 2025: 17-23 on rules for referencing). The essay must be submitted on RUconnected a day before the tutorial, and a hard copy must be submitted to your tutor at the beginning of the tutorial session. You will be penalised (zero mark for the tutorial essay) for failure to adhere to the submission requirements.

*Please refer to the Sociology Handbook (available on RUconnected) for the rules regarding the university's policy on plagiarism as well as the department's rules regarding formatting, referencing, and late submission of assignments. All assignments and exam submissions MUST include a signed cover page (available on RUconnected and in the Handbook).*

## **Tutorial 1: 27 & 28 February**

Question: Why did you choose Rhodes University (RU), and how was your choice influenced by larger social forces?

### **Assignment Criteria**

1. Write an introduction in two to three sentences outlining how you will answer the question;
2. List two to three factors (social forces) that have influenced your decision to study at RU;
3. Using the *sociological imagination* concept/theory, explain in two to three paragraphs how and why the identified factors (ref 2 above) informed your choice of coming to RU;
4. Write a conclusion in two to three sentences;
5. Your assignment must be 500 words in length;
6. Reference *sociological imagination* in-text as: Mills (1959 cited in Stewart & Zaaïman, 2014: xv-xviii) as part of a sentence; or as (Mills, 1959 cited in Stewart & Zaaïman, 2014: xv-xviii) at the end of a sentence.
7. Include on the reference list as:  
Stewart, P. & Zaaïman, J. (eds.) 2014. *Sociology: A South African introduction*. Cape Town: Juta & Company (PTY) Ltd.

## **Tutorial 2: 6 & 7 March**

Watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqF5C0xU-f4> and answer the following questions:

What evidence of gender socialisation can you find in this video? Do you think gender inequality is a consequence of gender socialisation in the home?

### **Assignment criteria:**

1. Write an introduction in two to three sentences outlining how you will answer the questions;
2. Identify two to three accounts of gender socialisation mentioned in the video;
3. In two to three paragraphs, discuss how the video evidence (ref 2 above) of gender socialisation leads to gender inequality;
4. Write a conclusion in two to three sentences;
5. Your assignment must be 500 words in length;
6. Reference video in-text as Msibi (2021) as part of a sentence; or as (Msibi, 2021) at the end of the sentence;
7. Include on the reference list as:  
Msibi, M. (2021). Gender inequality starts in the home. (Tedx Talks). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqF5C0xU-f4> [Accessed on XX March 2025] XX - you must insert the date on which you watch the YouTube video.

### **Tutorial 3: 13 & 14 March**

Question: Which of the sociological perspectives (functionalist, conflict, interactionist, feminist) on gender inequality do you find most convincing? Why?

#### **Assignment Criteria**

1. Write an introduction in two to three sentences outlining how you will answer the questions;
2. List two or three examples of gender inequality that you have personally experienced, observed or watched on social media (e.g. TikTok, YouTube);
3. Using one or two of your chosen sociological perspective/s, discuss, in two to three paragraphs, why your chosen perspective/s provides a convincing explanation of gender inequality that you have identified (ref 2 above).
4. Write a conclusion in two to three sentences;
5. Your assignment must be 500 words in length;
6. Reference your chosen perspective as: Name of author (Year) as part of a sentence; or as (Name of author, year: page number) at the end of a sentence.
7. To list the reference/s and video, see bullet 7 in tutorial assignments 1 and 2 above. You can also read the Sociology Handbook (2025: 22-23) on how to list references.

### **MODULE EVALUATION**

As a department, we are committed to reflecting on our teaching practices and module content to strengthen our courses. Towards the end of the term, you will be asked to participate in a module evaluation process. Please take this seriously and evaluate the module honestly and comprehensively. Your input will be highly appreciated and will make a real contribution to enhancing teaching and learning in the department.

### **CONSULTATION TIMES**

Tuesday: 9.30 am – 11.30 am.

Wednesday: 10 am – 12 pm.

Please email me ([j.chisaka@ru.ac.za](mailto:j.chisaka@ru.ac.za)) to book an appointment.