Symbolic Interaction and the Social Construction of Reality

We are told on good authority, Callicles, that heaven and earth and their respective inhabitants are held together by the bonds of society and love and order and discipline and righteousness, and that is why the universe is an ordered whole or cosmos and not a state of disorder and license.

-Plato, Gorgias

The mind that has conceived a plan of living must never loose sight of the chaos against which that pattern was conceived.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson, Invisible Man

If people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.

-W.I. Thomas, The Child in America

After all, what is reality anyway? Nothin’ but a collective hunch.

-Trudy the Bag Lady

Course Text:

Note: throughout course will refer to this book as the SLMF text.

This text is available at the University Center Bookstore. You will not have time to order from online markets such as Amazon.com. The syllabus includes a learning section reading schedule (3 two-week sessions). I expect you to read and understand the required pieces prior to discussing the topic on Blackboard. Given the compact nature of this online course, you will need to be reading outside of class on a daily basis (minimum one hour). If you feel you are unable to make this
commitment, you may wish to drop the course. Any additional readings that may be assigned periodically throughout the course will be posted on Blackboard.

Course Description:
“The main goal of this course is that you understand how we become social creatures and how, through our everyday interactions with one another, we make and re-make our social worlds. One important implication of this ideas covered in this course is that if we understand how it is that we participate in the construction of our own realities, then we can take a more active and purposeful approach toward making the sort of world we want to live in.” (O’Brien 2006, xix)

Learning Objectives:
Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:
- Articulate an understanding of the foundation of symbolic interactionism and the theories that support this perspective;
- Apply interactionist processes to contemporary social issues and pop culture;
- Evaluate and critically analyze society in terms of social institutions, such as the media, religion, education, politics, utilizing symbolic interactionism;
- Utilizing symbolic interactionism, present a basic theoretical understanding and sensitivity to the issues of race, class, gender and ethnicity.
- Evaluate a new area of study in symbolic interactionism: Emotions. How do they impact interaction and the formation of self.
- Evaluate how modern technology is impacting social interactions and the formation of a contemporary sense of self.
- Articulate an understanding of collective behavior and social movements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blackboard Discussion</td>
<td>All Three Learning Units</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(25 points each)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Movie Analysis (2)</td>
<td>Learning Unit 1 and 2</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(50 points each)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam Essay</td>
<td>Learning Unit 3</td>
<td>150</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Points</strong></td>
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<td><strong>350</strong></td>
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Grade Scale  Fix This
A  350 - 315  B  314 - 280  C  279 - 245
Requirement Descriptions

Blackboard Discussions
Learning is an interactive process. A large portion of the material for this course will emerge from the online discussions. 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 reading, and active participation throughout the semester. You will not be able to wait until the last minute and dump a bunch of comments on Blackboard to meet this part of the course. Regular contributions at designated due dates are required for successful completion of the course.

Movie/Clip Analysis (2 at 50 points each)
Students are required to complete two short movie/clip analysis utilizing sociological concepts and terms related to this course. Complete instructions are provided in Blackboard.

Final Examination
The final exam in this course will be a 4-6 page scholarly essay. This essay must demonstrate the student’s knowledge of sociological terms and concepts learned throughout the entire course.

The purpose of constructing the course and its requirements in this fashion is to encourage a "hands-on" approach to the study of symbolic interactionism that allows you to actively deal with the ideas, issues, and problems of identity. Additionally, the course structure 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.

Grade Posting: Grades will be posted on Ram CT Blackboard in the Grade Center.

Revise and Resubmit: The instructor reserves the right to allow students to revise and resubmit an assignment if they receive a “C” or lower grade (upon discretion of the instructor and does not apply to the final essay exam).
**Writing Assignment Rubric:** A basic rubric will be used to grade all assignments. This rubric will be presented online with each writing assignment the student is required to complete.

**Late work:** Late work will be deducted 30% of the assignment grade unless prior arrangements are made with the instructor. This includes sickness and emergencies. Notify the instructor as soon as you know you will not be in class in order to avoid losing points. If you _do not_ notify the instructor prior to missing work, you will not be allowed to make-up the missed work. **In addition, if arrangements _are_ made to make-up work (such as an appointment with the instructor or the T.A.), and a student misses the originally scheduled appointment, all opportunities to make-up the work are forfeited.**

**University Policies:**

*Academic Expectations Related to Student Conduct*

Source: [http://www.conflictresolution.colostate.edu/conduct-code](http://www.conflictresolution.colostate.edu/conduct-code)

In order to encourage and foster academic excellence, the University expects students to conduct themselves in accordance with certain generally accepted norms of scholarship and professional behaviors. Because of this expectation, the University does not condone any form of academic misconduct. Academic misconduct includes but is not limited to plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, and knowingly or recklessly encouraging or making possible any act of plagiarism, cheating, or fabrication. Academic misconduct is an unacceptable activity in scholarship and is in conflict with academic and professional ethics and morals. Consequently, students who are judged to have engaged in some form of academic misconduct may be subject to (1) a zero or an “F” on the work in question, (2) an “F” in the course, (3) other academic penalties as outlined in the professor’s course requirements and expectations, (4) disciplinary action as specified in the Sanctions for Misconduct section below, or (5) any combination thereof. Procedural due process, including the right to appeal, is to be followed in making a determination of whether academic misconduct has occurred.

Generally, a student’s intentions will not be the primary consideration in the determination of whether academic misconduct has occurred. A student’s intentions will usually be considered only during the process of deciding on the appropriate sanctions or penalties.

Plagiarism is the act of appropriating the written, artistic, or musical composition of another, or portions thereof; or the ideas, language, or symbols of same and passing them off as the product of one’s own mind.
Plagiarism includes not only the exact duplication of another’s work, but also the lifting of a substantial or essential portion thereof.

Regarding written work in particular, direct quotations, statements which are the result of paraphrasing or summarizing the work of another, and other information which is not considered common knowledge must be cited or acknowledged, usually in the form of a footnote. Quotation marks or a proper form of indentation shall be used to indicate all direct quotations.

1. **For a direct quote** --
   "Proper citation practices ... are a mark of good scholarship" (Shuey 1997, p. 3).

2. **For an indirect reference** --
   Shuey (1997) has suggested that plagiarism is an unethical act and unscholarly.

   OR

   According to some (e.g., Shuey 1997), presentation of information requires proper citation.

As long as a student adequately acknowledges his/her sources and as long as there is no reason to believe that the student has attempted to pose as the originator, the student will not be charged with plagiarism even though the form of the acknowledgment may be unacceptable. However, students should be aware that most professors require certain forms of acknowledgment and some may evaluate a project on the basis of form.

Cheating is the act of using or attempting to use, in examination or other academic work, material, information, or study aids that are not permitted by the instructor. Cheating includes, but is not limited to: Using books, notes, or calculators or copying from or conversing with others during an examination (unless such external aids are permitted by the instructor); having someone else do research, write papers, or take examinations; doing research, writing papers, or taking examinations for someone else; submitting large portions of the same work as part of the academic work for more than one course (unless such submission is permitted by the instructor).

Fabrication is the invention of material or its source and its use as an authority in academic work. Fabrication includes, but is not limited to: inventing the data for a scientific experiment; inventing the title and author of a publication in order to use the invented publication as a source; or knowingly attributing material to an incorrect source.

http://www.conflictreolution.colostate.edu/academic-integrity
Nonsexist, Nonracist, and Nonableist Language

An increasing number of academic and non-academic organizations, as well as many mainstream newspapers and magazines, require that authors use nonsexist nonracist and nonableist 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 "wheelchair bound" person rather than a person who uses a wheelchair when speaking generically perpetuates the stereotype that persons with disabilities are seen only as their impairments and not as people first.

This is not a trivial issue. It is no longer considered appropriate to ignore segments of the human population (i.e., persons with disabilities, persons of color, all women) by using only “preferred” terms or 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, non-racist and non-ableist language in your written and spoken remarks.

For Those with Additional Needs:

Any student requesting disability accommodation for this class must inform the instructor giving appropriate notice. Students are encouraged to contact Disability Support Services at (970) 491-5836 to certify documentation of disability and to ensure appropriate accommodations are implemented in a timely manner.

Federal Policies Regarding Your Privacy:
Throughout the course of the semester (and especially at the end of the semester), you may be wondering what your grade is, what you scored on an exam, or paper, etc. I cannot legally e-mail you your grade without written consent. Therefore, when you send me an e-mail at any time, I cannot respond with grade information unless you give me hand-written consent, with a signature, first. All spreadsheets that contain grade information will be posted outside my office and updated constantly with your “current grade” in the course up to that point. It is your job to look at that posting and find your grade information. As always, you are welcome to make an appointment with me to review your grades in person, but I cannot release information without written consent via e-mail, over the telephone, or especially to a third party (except those listed below). Please see the description of FERPA below for further details.
Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education.

- Generally, schools must have written permission from the parent or eligible student in order to release any information from a student's education record. However, FERPA allows schools to disclose those records, without consent, to the following parties or under the following conditions (34 CFR § 99.31):
  - School officials with legitimate educational interest;
  - Other schools to which a student is transferring;
  - Specified officials for audit or evaluation purposes;
  - Appropriate parties in connection with financial aid to a student;
  - Organizations conducting certain studies for or on behalf of the school;
  - Accrediting organizations;
  - To comply with a judicial order or lawfully issued subpoena;
  - Appropriate officials in cases of health and safety emergencies; and
  - State and local authorities, within a juvenile justice system, pursuant to specific State law.


Schedule of Topics and Readings
(Note: please see Course Schedule document for more precise schedule with all due dates for course)

Learning Unit 1: November 10 – November 23
Introduction to the Course/Expectations

The Meaning of Symbolic Interactionism
  Reading: SLMF Chapter 1

The Interactionist Toolkit: Methods, Strategies, and Relevant Perspectives
  Reading: SLMF Chapter 2
People as Symbol Makers and Users: Language and the Creation of Reality
 Reading: SLMF Chapter 3

Learning Unit 2: November 24 – December 7

Socialization: The Creation of Meaning and Identity
 Reading: SLMF Chapter 4

The Nature and Significance of the Self
 Reading: SLMF Chapter 5

Role Taking, Role Making, and the Coordination of Action
 Reading: SLMF Chapter 6

Learning Unit 3: December 8 – December 21

Interactionist Approaches to the Study of Emotion: Emotions in Everyday Life
 Reading: SLMF Chapter 7

The Politics of Social Reality: Constructing and Negotiating Deviance
 Reading: SLMF Chapter 8

Collective Behavior and Social Movements
 Reading: SLMF Chapter 9

Final Exam Essay Due December 24th at 11:59 pm.