

**Sociology**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Year PhD Programme**  
**Bocconi University**  
**Academic Syllabus (2025-2026)**

Professor Anne-Marie Jeannet [anne-marie.jeannet@unimi.it](mailto:anne-marie.jeannet@unimi.it)



Image by Julien Pacaud

### **Course Description**

This course introduces students to key themes in sociological research, focusing on formulating empirical research questions and developing a research agenda grounded in sociological insights. Students will explore the modalities of sociological inquiry, the conceptualization of social phenomena, and the evaluation of sociological arguments with empirical support. Through discussion-based learning, participants will engage with sociological concepts and theories, as well as skills in research and persuasion applicable across disciplines.

## **Expectations**

The sessions will be mostly dedicated to discussing the assigned readings for the week. Students should come to each class with analytically rigorous observations or questions grounded in specific aspects of one or more readings.

These may include:

- A critical reflection on a central argument or concept
- A connection between the reading and prior theoretical frameworks
- A methodological critique or question
- An application of the reading to a contemporary empirical case

Each session will have a lead discussant, changing each week. The lead discussant is in charge of starting and facilitating the discussion. Sessions may also include brief in-class exercises.

## **Course Readings and Materials**

The course will rely on the reader: "Introductory Readings for Sociology" edited by Anthony Giddens and Philip W. Sutton 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. In addition to the book, there two required articles to be read *before* each class.

## **Assessment Methods:**

Class Project (Written) - 30% of Grade

Class Project (Presentation) - 20% of Grade

Class Participation - 50% of Grade

## **Class Project**

The project will require students to prepare a research question related to one of the topics covered during the course and to outline the structure of a potential journal article that addresses the research question. The written version of the project should provide an extended outline of the Introduction, Background & Theory, Data & Methods, (First) Findings, and (Abridged) Discussion/Conclusion.

To be clear, you are not expected to actually write a full academic paper here; this is instead meant to be an extended outline of a potential paper that you could pursue during later during your PhD. For the Findings and Discussion/Conclusion sections, you could show and discuss initial analysis linked to your proposed research project and describe extensions that you wish to do; or provide a detailed reflection of the data you need and the data analysis methods you would need to apply (which methods, why, possible problems), including why you cannot do this now (data access, etc.); describe

initial analysis you have conducted on a (somewhat) related population / region / variable, etc. You should then contextualize the relevance of your findings, and how such findings would improve our understanding of the given research topic.

The written version of the project will be due via email on December 20, 2025.

The **presentation** component of the project is a 15-minute presentation of your paper outline. You should treat the presentation as you would if you were presenting your work at an academic conference. After each presentation, classmates will have 10 minutes to pose questions related to your proposed paper. More details will be provided during the term.

### Time and Room

The course will meet nine times. We typically meet on Thursdays from 10:15 to 13:30 (except October 21 and November 21). Each meeting consists of two sessions (for example, we will cover both Sessions 1 and 2 during our first meeting). The room will be 1e4sr01 (except on October 21 in room 1c4sr01).

### Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Required Readings
Oct 9	Sessions 1: The Sociological Perspective  Session 2: Asking and Answering Sociological Questions	Reader: "Private Troubles - Public Issues" by C.Wright Mills. Pgs.5-8.  " <a href="#">Threshold models of collective behavior</a> ." By Mark Granovetter. American journal of sociology 83, no. 6 (1978): 1420-1443.  " <a href="#">Thresholds of Violence</a> ." by Malcolm Gladwell. New Yorker 2015.  Also watch this video: Sociological Insights, <a href="#">Guns: Weapons or Tools?</a> (2 mins)
Oct 16	Session 3: Theorizing Modern Society  Session 4: The Social Structure and Human Agency  Lead Discussant:	Reader: "From Mechanic to Organic Solidarity" by Emile Durkheim. Pgs.25-29.  Reader: "The Spirit of Capitalism Weber" by Max Weber. pgs.109-111.  James Hawdon, John Ryan, Social Relations that Generate and Sustain Solidarity after a Mass Tragedy, Social Forces, Volume 89, Issue 4, June 2011, Pages 1363-1384  Treiman, D. J., & Walder, A. G. (2019). The Impact of Class Labels on Life Chances in China. American Journal of Sociology. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1086/701715">https://doi.org/10.1086/701715</a>  Also watch this <a href="#">video</a> (9 mins) and this <a href="#">video</a> (7 mins)
Oct 21	Session 5: Social Interaction  Session 6: Self- Formation and Socialization	Reader: Presenting the Self in Everyday Life by Erving Goffman. Pgs. 203-205.  Small, M. L., Brant, K., & Fekete, M. (2024). <a href="#">The Avoidance of Strong Ties</a> . American Sociological Review, 89(4): 615-649.

	Lead Discussant:	<p>Raymond, C. W., &amp; Gill, V. T. (2025). Pre-emptive Repair of Potential Misunderstandings: Prospective Procedures for Managing Intersubjectivity and Steering Social Action. <i>American Sociological Review</i>, 90(4), 690-725.</p> <p>Also, watch this <a href="#">video</a> (2 mins).</p>
Oct 30	<p>Session 7: Habits, Tastes, and Consumption</p> <p>Session 8: Cultural Capital</p> <p>Lead Discussant:</p>	<p>Friedman, S. &amp; Reeves, A. (2020). "<a href="#">From aristocratic to ordinary: Shifting modes of elite distinction</a>." <i>American Sociological Review</i> 85 (2): 323-350.</p> <p>Boyle, B., &amp; Vandebroek, D. (2025). The Labor of Distinction: Butlers, Service Work, and the Production of Elite Lifestyles. <i>American Sociological Review</i>, 90(1), 26-60.</p> <p>Also watch this video: <a href="#">The Dull Man's Club</a> (15 minutes)</p> <p>Examine this visual essay <a href="#">An Exploration of dining habits and companions of Americans</a>. by Amber Thomas (2017). The Pudding.</p>
Nov 6	<p>Session 11: Intersecting Inequalities</p> <p>Session 12: Social Reproduction of Inequalities</p> <p>Lead Discussant:</p>	<p>Reader: "Intersecting Inequalities by Patricia Hill Collins." Pgs. 147-153.</p> <p>Wooten, T. (2024) "<a href="#">Effort Traps: Socially Structured Striving and the Reproduction of Disadvantage</a>" <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> 130(2).</p> <p>van de Werfhorst, H. G. (2024). Is Meritocracy Not So Bad After All? Educational Expansion and Intergenerational Mobility in 40 Countries. <i>American Sociological Review</i>, 89(6), 1181-1213.</p> <p>Also watch this video: The "<a href="#">Up</a>" Series by Michael Apted (10 mins).</p>
Nov 13	Sessions 9 and 10: Project consultations	<p>This week will be dedicated to one-on-one meetings to discuss your end-of-term project. You should prepare preliminary answers to the following questions (as brief as one or two sentences is fine) to bring to the meeting:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What broad topic are you interested in studying?</li> <li>2. What is an example of a research question you could pursue related to that broad topic?</li> <li>3. How might answering this research question contribute to the broader literature that it relates to?</li> <li>4. What data source and methods might you apply to answer your research question?</li> <li>5. What do you anticipate your key findings would be?</li> </ol>
Nov 19	<p>Session 13: Power and interpersonal relationships</p> <p>Session 14: Social Closure</p> <p>Lead Discussant:</p>	<p>Reader: "Defining Power." by Stephen Lukes Pgs. 301-307.</p> <p>Anderson, K. L. (2010). <a href="#">Conflict, Power, and Violence in Families</a>. <i>Journal of Marriage and Family</i>, 72(3), 726-742.</p> <p>Engineering Inequality: Informal Coaching, Glass Walls, and Social Closure in Silicon Valley Sigrid Willa Luhr</p>

		Watch: <a href="#">Do we all need to have power?</a> (29 mins) on Arte.tv
Nov 27	<p>Session 15: Cities and Urbanism</p> <p>Session 16: Place, context, and opportunity</p> <p>Lead Discussant:</p>	<p>Reader: "Individuality in the Modern City." by Georg Simmel. Pgs. 79-81.</p> <p>Brown-Saracino, J. (2015). How Places Shape Identity: The Origins of Distinctive LBQ Identities in Four Small U.S. Cities. <i>American Journal of Sociology</i>, 121(1), 1-63.  <a href="https://doi.org/10.1086/682066">https://doi.org/10.1086/682066</a></p> <p>Ingmar Ehler, Felix Bader, Tobias Rüttenauer, Henning Best, <a href="#">The air pollution disadvantage of immigrants in Germany: partly a matter of urbanity</a>, <i>European Sociological Review</i>, Volume 40, Issue 4, August 2024, Pages 551-565,</p> <p>Explore: "<a href="#">Mapping Diversity</a>" Data Visualization Tool. Choose one European City and explore trends there.</p>
TBD	Sessions 17 and 18: Presentations of Group Projects	

## **Responsibilities of the Lead Discussant**

### Engage with the Text

- Read carefully and grasp key arguments, theories, methods, findings, and implications.
- Note unclear points, contradictions, or gaps for discussion.

### Prepare a Focused Summary

- Offer a concise overview of the main argument.
- Highlight key contributions, themes, and sociological questions.
- Be ready to clarify frameworks or concepts for peers.

### Provide Constructive Critique

- Identify strengths and areas for improvement (e.g., theoretical, methodological, or interpretive).
- Balance critique with appreciation—avoid harshness.

### Lead the Conversation

- Open with a 10-15 min summary and critique.
- Pose 2-3 open-ended questions to guide discussion.
- Facilitate inclusively and keep the discussion focused and generative.