

Psychology of learning

Countries, United States



Short paper guidance ** Spring 06 Short essay guidance: The following provides some practical information and general guidance on the writing requirements for this course. Two short essays are required for this course. Each essay is worth 15 points, or 30 points total, and comprise 30% of your grade. The first paper, due on 17 February, should be drawn from any of the suggested topics for Chapters 1 – 3, or 7 – 9. The second paper, due on 21 April, should be drawn from any of the suggested topics listed for Chapters 10 – 13, 15, or 16. Your short essays should reflect your role of student as interpreter, thinker, and explainer of the topic you have chosen. The essay inevitably has about it a whiff of argument; it is not simply description or opinion. The paper should be about 1200 – 1500 words, or 3 ½ -- 4 ½ pages when double spaced with a standard font size and standard margins. Put your name, course and section number, and turn in date at the top right of the first page. Next, to ensure the reader/grader is clear about your topic, type out the chapter number/title and topic you have selected for your essay as it appears below. Number the pages on the bottom right side of the paper. Before you turn the paper in, proof read it, do a word count, a spell check, and make sure it looks okay. Make sure the completed paper is stapled together at the upper left corner.

Chapter 1: Perspective, theory and methods

- The sociological perspective helps us recognize that the lives of individuals are shaped by the forces of society. Explain, in a short essay, how the sociological perspective reveals " the general in the particular." To illustrate, explain how society played a part in your own decision to attend college.
- Point out what the approach of a sociologist who is influenced by the structural-functional approach (say, Emile Durkheim) has in common

with the approach of a sociologist influenced by the social-conflict approach (say, Karl Marx). That is, what makes them both sociological? At the same time, how does each represent a somewhat different assumption about the nature of society? In each case, what is the purpose of sociological study? What is the link(s) between the three methodological approaches to sociology and the three theoretical approaches? Chapter 2: Culture • Highlight the different insights about culture that come from the structural-functional approach, the social-conflict approach, and sociobiology approach. Do you think that the differences in how we understand culture using each of these approaches is a matter of being more right than the others? Or do they all offer some correct insights? Why do you say this? • Identify the types of societies in Gerhard Lenski's analysis. In what sense does technological advance mean "progress"? In what sense does it not necessarily mean this? • Film: Brokeback Mountain (2005) Chapter 3: Socialization from infancy to old age • Explain the "nature-nurture debate." How do the ideas of Sigmund Freud and George Herbert Mead differ in this regard? • Summarize Freud's theory of human personality, Piaget's approach to human development, and Mead's view of development of the self. What do all have in common? What are the main differences between them? • Film: Full Metal Jacket (1987); One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975) Chapter 7: Deviance • Explain the limitations of biological and psychological explanations of crime. Expand the essay by explaining the strengths of a sociological approach to understanding crime. • The U. S. government provides a great deal of data about crime in the United States. Drawing on FBI data, what can we say about the "typical street criminal" in terms of age, gender, social class, and

race and ethnicity? In each case, what can you say to explain the pattern?

Finally, point to several reasons why we must treat criminal statistics with

caution. • Film: Bowling for Columbine (2002) Chapter 8: Social stratification

• In this essay, explain the differences in the approaches to social stratification of Karl Marx and Max Weber. How did each envision

stratification? Why is Weber's approach more complex? Which approach do

you think better represents social inequality in the United States? Why? •

Explain the debate over the causes of poverty in the United States. What

evidence suggests that the poor are responsible for poverty? What evidence

suggests that society as a whole is responsible for poverty? Which side of the

debate do you find more convincing? Why? • Film: Six Degrees of Separation

(1993) Chapter 9: Global stratification • Describe an approach to ending

world hunger drawing on, first, the modernization approach, and second, the

dependency approach. What lessons can we learn from each approach? Be

as specific as you can as to what policies poor countries should enact.

Consider, too, the role of rich nations. • Describe the trend in global

inequality over the course of the last century, and also since 1970. Based on

where we have been and where we are now, predict where the world may be

a century from now. What prediction would modernization theory support?

What about dependency theory? What do you think will happen? Why? •

Film: Mother Teresa (1987); Gandhi (1982) Chapter 10: Gender stratification

• The socialization process links gender to personal identity (gender identity) and to distinctive behavior and activities (gender roles). In this essay,

describe the importance of gender to socialization across the life course from

birth through early adulthood. Begin by addressing the fact that people are

quick to ask about the sex of a newborn child. Consider the expectations of parents, peer group activity, and school life. • Define feminism. Describe the three main types of feminist thinking in the United States today. What do the approaches have in common? How do they differ? Also, suggest reasons for resistance to feminism. What is your view of the various types of feminism? Why? Chapter 11: Race and ethnicity • Why do various racial and ethnic categories of the U. S. population have different social standings? Why do some categories surpass the national average in income, while others do not? Consider both structural-functional (cultural) and social-conflict (power) explanations. • Write an essay critically evaluating affirmative action as a social policy. Begin with a look at the Controversy & Debate box (pages 304-305) and do additional research as necessary. What is this policy? What is it supposed to achieve? How successful has it been? What arguments are made supporting affirmative action and what arguments are made opposing it? Which position do you find more convincing? Why do you say this? Chapter 12: Economics and politics • Summarize the major arguments of the three models of political power. What do the three models have in common? What are their major differences? To what extent does each assess U. S. as democratic? Which model best describes the U. S. political system? Why do you say this? • What have sociologists learned about the causes and character of war? That is, why do nations go to war? What strategies seem able to prevent war? Finally, how is terrorism a new form of twenty-first century warfare? • Film: Citizen Kane (1941) Chapter 13: Family and religion • Sociologists tell us that families in the United States are socially diverse. Exactly how are they diverse? Describe differences in

marriage and family life that are linked to (a) class, (b) gender, (c) race and ethnicity, and (d) personal choice. Why are families becoming more diverse? Do you view this trend as positive or negative? Why do you say this? • What is secularization? Is secularization a reality in the United States? That is, is religion getting weaker, stronger, or simply changing its character? Provide evidence to support your argument. Chapter 15: Population, urbanization, and the environment • Describe the state of the natural environment in the United States. Consider solid waste, water supply, water pollution, and air pollution. Do you think the environment is getting better or worse? Why do you say this? • What can Grandma Macionis (see the box on page 438) teach us about living a life that does not strain the natural environment? In what specific ways has life changed since her time? How have these changes affected the environment? What are the chances of regaining some of her "environment-friendly" ways of living? • Film: *Grapes of Wrath* (1940); *A Civil Action* (1998); *Erin Brockovich* (2000) Chapter 16: Social change • Social change has as many causes as it does consequences. In this essay, identify and discuss several causes of social change, including cultural processes (invention, discovery, and diffusion), social conflict, ideas, and demographic patterns. Where you can, point to specific changes in the United States brought about by each of these causes. • People in the United States are inclined to speak of social change as "progress." Critically assess that contention. As evidence, consider some of the patterns of change included in the box on pages 468-469. Does the idea of "change as progress" hold up? Try to develop a more complex statement of the link between social change

and quality of life. • Film: Blade Runner (1979); The Matrix (1999); Malcolm X (1992); Gandhi (1982)