

University of North Carolina  
Chapel Hill

# Soci111-001 Human Societies

Spring 2012

Professor François Nielsen

## 1 Times, Places & Contacts

### Presence Required on These Dates:

- Tue 28 Feb 11:00 AM – 12:15 PM (Midterm)
- Tue 1 May 12:00 Noon – 2:30 PM (Final)

NO EXCEPTION – You must drop the course if you cannot be present on both dates

### Class Meets

- Tue, Thu 11:00 AM – 12:15 PM in PE (Peabody) 203

### Instructor

- Professor François Nielsen – Email: francois\_nielsen@unc.edu Office: Hamilton 163 Hours: by appointment Phone: 962-5064 Fax: 962-7568
- Web site <http://www.unc.edu/~nielsen>

### Teaching Assistant

- Michael Good – Email: goodmp@unc.edu Office: Hamilton 252 Hours: Mon, Wed 11:00 – 12:00 PM, other times by appointment

## 2 Course Description & Goals

*Human Societies* is an introduction to *macrosociology*, the study of entire societies past and present. In macrosociology, the focus is less on the behavior and attitudes of isolated individuals than on the explanation of social structure and patterns of social change. We will seek such explanations within the framework of the modern *ecological-evolutionary theory* of social development. Ecological-evolutionary theory explains social and cultural characteristics of societies (such as the degree of social inequality, family structure, the position of women, the degree of division of labor, and even the nature of religious beliefs and the games people play) as resulting from the combined influences of the prior state of the society (its “history” and “culture”), fundamental behavioral propensities that are part of the common genetic heritage of our species (“human nature”), and features of the biophysical and social environment in which the society is situated. Ecological-evolutionary theory further asserts that the level of subsistence technology (for example, hunting and gathering, plant cultivation with the hoe, plant cultivation with the plow, industrial technology) is a prime determinant of other societal characteristics. As a result of taking this course, students should be able to apply this

ecological-evolutionary perspective to understanding and explaining similarities and differences among the major types of human societies that have existed, including hunting and gathering, horticultural, agrarian, fishing, herding, maritime, industrial, industrializing, and Marxist-Leninist societies. (These terms will be defined later in the course.)

Another focus of the course is on the biological bases of human nature in view of recent progress in *sociobiology* (also called *evolutionary psychology*), which has been defined as “the application of evolutionary biology to the social behavior of animals, including *Homo sapiens*” (David Barash). We will see how sociobiological thinking illuminates behaviors that are at the core of social relations such as parental behavior, sexual development, incest taboos, differences in sexual strategies between men and women, dominance hierarchies, cooperation, and altruism. We will see in particular how the approach helps understanding differences in orientation, life-strategies, and behavior between the sexes. This material is rather new, still somewhat controversial, and not guaranteed to be politically correct! I believe, however, that sociobiology is not only a genuine new scientific paradigm that is revolutionizing the social sciences, but also the basis for a humanistic approach to male-female relations and for grounding the community of the human species beyond ethnic and other particularistic divisions.

There are two intellectual aspects of the course worth noting. First, the sort of reasoning that the course uses repeatedly involves the behavior of *groups*, such as whole societies or social classes. It is not always easy to think in those terms, because we are accustomed (and perhaps even “hardwired”) to explain the behavior of individuals in terms of their interests, beliefs, motivations, etc. If you find the content of the course disconcerting in that way please talk about it with the instructor or TA.

Another issue is *ethnocentrism*, the widespread human tendency to believe in the superiority of one’s own ethnic group and culture. Since the course focuses on explaining variations among societies, we will inevitably make many comparisons between societies, in order to explain similarities and differences between them. Many interesting comparisons will involve the United States. For example we will want to ask: Compared to other industrial societies like those of Western Europe, are the United States more or less democratic? Is the country more or less dependent on foreign imports? Are Americans more or less wealthy? More or less religious? Do they have more or less opportunities? And always we will ask: Why? The outcomes of such comparisons may be flattering or unflattering to this country. The outcomes of some comparisons may be surprising in the sense that they don’t fit with preconceived ideas that we may have about the standing of this society relative to others. These preconceptions can be powerful and prevent us from examining comparative materials objectively and logically. So we need to be alert to this pitfall when we discuss the United States relative to other countries.

### 3 Readings

#### 3.1 Books

Readings are from the following books, available at the bookstore:

Patrick NOLAN and Gerhard LENSKI. 2009. *Human Societies: An Introduction to Macrosociology*. (11th edition.) Paradigm Publishers. Paper.

Rosemary HOPCROFT. 2010. *Sociology: A Biosocial Introduction*. Paradigm Publishers. Paper.

Jared DIAMOND. 2005. *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*. New edition. Norton. Paper. (The earlier edition is fine, too.)

## 3.2 Class Notes

The class notes and the exhibits (figures and tables) that I show in class can be found on the World Wide Web at the address:

<http://www.unc.edu/~nielsen>

Click on the link for Soci111 and then on Class Notes in the side bar. You can download or print these notes as you wish. I must reserve the right to revise/update the notes at any time during the session. The date of last modification is indicated with each module.

## 4 Exams & Requirements

### 4.1 Honor Code

THE HONOR CODE WILL BE IN FORCE FOR ALL EXAMINATIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS

For more information on student duties under the Honor Code please see

<http://honor.unc.edu/students/rights.html>

Please note in particular the following section:

[It is the responsibility of students] To maintain the confidentiality of examinations by divulging no information concerning an examination, directly or indirectly, to another student yet to write that same examination.

However, for both the individual assignment and the team project you are allowed (and encouraged) to freely cooperate with members of your team and other students in the class, as well as consult any sources (as long as they are acknowledged).

### 4.2 Requirements

The midterm and the final are multiple-choice exams. You need to bring

- a “bubble sheet” for electronic scanning, available free of charge at Student Stores
- a pencil (#2 preferred) with an *effective* eraser (soft, pink,..., *not* hard and all dried up!) so you can erase your answer completely if you change your mind

For examples of multiple-choice questions of the type used in the exams click on

- a sampler of multiple-choice questions.

Your final grade in the class will be based on four requirements.

#### (1) Midtem (30% of course grade)

The midterm will take place during regular class time on

- Tue 28 Feb 11:00 AM – 12:15 PM

It consists of 80 to 90 multiple choice questions.

#### (2) Final (40% of course grade)

The final will take place on

- Tue 1 May 12:00 Noon – 2:30 PM

The final will consist of 140 to 150 multiple-choice questions. The final is cumulative, with about 1/4 to 1/3 of the questions pertaining to materials covered before the midterm, the rest pertaining to materials covered after the midterm.

**(3) Quizzes (10% of course grade)**

About 10 surprise quizzes will be given in class during the semester. The total score on quizzes represents 10% of the final grade. Each quiz is scored on 2 points; you get 1 point for just answering the quiz; you get the remaining point for answering the (2 or 4) questions correctly. Your total score is based on your 8 best quizzes, so it is possible to miss as many as 2 quizzes and still make the maximum score. On the other hand, *there will be no excuse nor makeup for a missed quiz, no matter the reason for the absence from class.*

**(4) Team Assignment (20% of course grade)**

The team assignment consists in preparing and giving a PowerPoint (or equivalent) presentation on a specific society (either a society that no longer exists but is known to us through documents, such as a preindustrial society, or an existing industrial or developing country). In some cases one or more team members will be personally familiar with the society in question. There will be 7 teams of about 7 members each covering altogether 3 archaic societies and 4 existing societies. The societies will be specified later based in part on special knowledge available in the class.

Assignment of students to teams and teams to specific societies will be done on the basis of a questionnaire about student preferences and background, with the following schedule:

- Tue 24 Jan Questionnaire on preferences & background *released*
- Thu 26 Jan Questionnaire on preferences & background *due*
- Tue 31 Jan Team assignments and organizational meeting (end of class)

The schedule of presentations is the following:

1. Tue 14 Feb Hunting & gathering society
2. Tue 21 Feb Horticultural society
3. Tue 13 Mar Agrarian society
4. Tue 27 Mar Existing industrial or industrializing society
5. Tue 3 Apr Existing industrial or industrializing society
6. Tue 10 Apr Existing industrial or industrializing society
7. Tue 17 Apr Existing industrial or industrializing society

Grading of the project will be based on 4 elements:

- (a) Presentation as embodied in the PowerPoint (or equivalent) document (team score)
- (b) Actual in class 20–25 minutes presentation followed by answers to audience questions, with team members answering questions from the audience as if they were “interviewed” about “their” society (team score)
- (c) Design of 5 multiple-choice questions about important points of the presentation; some of these questions will be revised by instructors and included in exams (team score)
- (d) Individual participation to project based on survey of team members at the end of the term: this is an individual score affecting 1/4 of the project score.

### 4.3 Grading

Each exam is scored on a percent scale from 0 to 100; the total score for the quizzes is on a scale from 0 to 10; the team assignment is scored on a scale of 0 to 20. The grade for the course is calculated as the weighted sum of scores

$$CG = 0.30 \times MIDA + 0.40 \times FINA + QS + 0.2 \times TA$$

where MIDA is “adjusted” midterm score (on 100), FINA is “adjusted” final score (on 100), QS is quizzes score (on 10), and TA is team assignment score (on 100). (For the meaning of “adjusted” see below.)

Conversion to a letter grade is done *only once* at the end of the semester to determine the final grade. *In principle*, the correspondence with letter grades is as follows:

A	=	90–100
B	=	80–89
C	=	70–79
D	=	60–69
F	=	less than 60

*In practice*, I compensate for the fact that exams may vary in difficulty by adjusting the scores both after the midterm and after the final. I do this by adding the same number of percentage points to the exam scores of all students. The resulting, adjusted score is labeled MIDA (for the midterm) and FINA (for the final). If necessary, I may also adjust the cut-off points when calculating the final letter grades at the end of the semester. Grade adjustments are made *only to the advantage of students* (i.e., I never take off points or raise the cutoff for a given letter grade).

### 4.4 Posting of Grades

Exam scores and final grades will be posted in a manner to be announced later.

### 4.5 Make-Up Exams (Lack Thereof)

- A make-up exam will be arranged only for true emergencies. The instructor must be notified before the exam takes place (if at all possible). A desire to leave early before the end of the semester, vacation rentals, plane reservations, marriage plans, marriage plans of relatives or friends, other appointments interfering with the exam schedule (including job interviews), or other exams scheduled on the same day are emphatically *not* valid reasons.
- All make-up exams are oral exams. Although a few students do well on oral exams, experience has shown that make-up grades tend to be lower than grades on the regular multiple choice exams.
- There is *absolutely* no make-up for the final exam. Students who anticipate that they will not be able to take the final on the announced date must drop the class at this time.

The following is a useful short version of the Exam Make-Up Policy:

THERE ARE NO MAKE-UP EXAMS IN THIS COURSE

## 5 Frequently Asked Questions

### (1) How much of the exams (midterm and final) depends on the readings?

It is difficult to give a precise answer to this question. I would reckon that at least 90% of the questions on the exams are reflected in some way in the lectures (i.e., what I say in class) and on the class notes on the web and in the team presentations on specific societies. Perhaps some 10% of the questions (it is hard to be more precise, and this proportion may vary across semesters anyway) are not directly reflected either in the lectures in class or the notes on the web, but relate to materials in the readings. I do not have a precise idea of how doing the readings (as opposed to not doing them) affects the score of students on the exams. My impression is that doing the readings increases substantially the probability of answering correctly the 10% or so of questions that are not directly reflected in the lectures or in the notes. Doing the readings may also increase the probability of answering correctly the 90% or so of questions that *are* reflected in the lectures and the notes, as the readings illuminate and reinforce understanding of the materials taught in class. Again, I cannot tell the extent to which doing the readings affects the probability of a correct response to questions in these two categories, as I don't have relevant research evidence, but my impression is that the benefit is substantial.

### (2) Will there be a study guide?

Except for the short sampler of questions there is no study guide *as a separate document*. However, the class notes on the web contain many questions (starting with Q – ). It turns out that almost all of these questions correspond to a question on one of the tests (midterm or final). The only difference between questions in the notes and questions on the exams is that questions on the tests are formatted as multiple-choice or true-false questions, whereas questions in the notes are typically open-ended. If you can answer the questions in the notes chances are you will be able to answer the corresponding questions on the exams. You can think of the situation as having a study guide that is interspersed, so to speak, within the class notes.

### (3) When I study for the exams, what should my priorities be?

Ideally you should have done the readings by the time you begin to study in earnest for the test. Then concentrate on the notes and any personal notes you may have added to the web notes from the lectures in class or from the readings. Make sure as you go along the web notes that you figure the answers to the questions interspersed in the notes. The materials relevant to answering the question are usually not far away. If you really cannot figure out the answer to a question in the notes, email your TA or the instructor. But chances are that a long list of questions to the TA or the instructor, especially at 2:00 AM before the test, will remain unanswered. Always try answering the questions yourself first.

## 6 Outline & Readings Schedule

### 6.1 Important Dates

- (1) Tue 24 Jan – Preferences & background questionnaire *released*
- (2) Thu 26 Jan – Preferences & background questionnaire *due*
- (3) Tue 31 Jan – Team assignments & organizational meeting (last 10 minutes of class)
- (4) Tue 28 Feb – **Midterm** (Presence required)
- (5) Tue 1 May 12:00 Noon – 2:30 PM – **Final** (Presence required)

- (p1 ... p7) Presentation 1 to 7 (Presence of team members required)

## 6.2 Key to Readings

**HS: Human Societies** Chapters 1–14; read chapter (HS 1, HS 2, etc.) of the text by date indicated (except on the first day of class).

**SBI: Sociology: A Biosocial Introduction** read Chapters 1 (pp 1–19), 2 (pp 21–44), 3 (pp 45–65), 4 (pp 67–83), 5 (pp 85–100), 6 (pp 101–116), 7 (pp 119–137), 8 (pp 139–162). There will be additional chapters TBA assigned after the Midterm.

**GS: Guns, Germs, and Steel** read Prologue (pp 13–32), Chapters 4 (pp 85–92), 5 (pp 93–103), 10 (pp 176–191), 14 (pp 265–292), 17 (pp 334–353), and 19 (pp 376–401) during period between GS–*begin* and GS–*finish*.

## 6.3 Outline

No	Date	Subject/Activity	Web	Readings
1	Tue 10 Jan	The Human Situation	M1	HS 1
2	Thu 12 Jan	Human Societies as Systems	M2	HS 2
		-o-		
3	Tue 17 Jan	cont'd		
4	Thu 19 Jan	Levels of Selection/Altruism	M3	SBI <i>begin</i>
		-o-		
5(1)	Tue 24 Jan	Altruism and Relatedness	M4	
6(2)	Thu 26 Jan	Altruism and Reciprocity	M5	
		-o-		
7(3)	Tue 31 Jan	Sex Roles/Strategies	M6	
8	Thu 2 Feb	Film – <i>Sex Unknown</i>	SU	SBI <i>finish</i>
		-o-		
9	Tue 7 Feb	Evolution of Human Societies	M7	HS 3, GS <i>begin</i>
10	Thu 9 Feb	Types of Human Societies	M8	HS 4
		-o-		
11(p1)	Tue 14 Feb	Hunting & Gathering Societies	M9	HS 5
12	Thu 16 Feb	cont'd		
		-o-		
13(p2)	Tue 21 Feb	Horticultural Societies	M10	HS 6, GS <i>finish</i>
14	Thu 23 Feb	cont'd		
		-o-		
15(4)	Tue 28 Feb	<b>Midterm</b>		All
16	Thu 1 Mar	Agrarian Societies	M11	HS 7
		-o-		
	Tue 6 Mar	Fall Recess – NO CLASS		
	Thu 8 Mar	Fall Recess – NO CLASS		
		-o-		
17(p3)	Tue 13 Mar	cont'd		
18	Thu 15 Mar	Evolutionary Bypaths	M12	HS 8
		-o-		
19	Tue 20 Mar	The Industrial Revolution	M13	HS 9
20	Thu 22 Mar	Industrial Societies: Economy	M14	HS 10
		-o-		
21(p4)	Tue 27 Mar	cont'd		

*Continued on next page*

No	Date	Subject/Activity	Web	Readings
22	Thu 29 Mar	Industrial Societies: Ideologies	M15	HS 11
		-o-		
23(p5)	Tue 3 Apr	cont'd		
24	Thu 5 Apr	Industrial Societies: Stratification	M16	HS 12
		-o-		
25(p6)	Tue 10 Apr	Industrial Societies: Family	M17	HS 13
26	Thu 12 Apr	cont'd		
		-o-		
27(p7)	Tue 17 Apr	Industrializing Societies	M18	HS 14
28	Thu 19 Apr	cont'd		
		-o-		
29	Tue 24 Apr	cont'd		
		-o-		
(5)	Tue 1 May	<b>Final 12:00 Noon – 2:30 PM</b>		All

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