

Frequently Asked Questions

Race, Gender, Class, Ethnicity (SOCIOL 106) – Spring 2026 Prof. Mark Pachucki, UMass Sociology

General

Q: I'm new to Sociology; will this course be a good fit for me?

A: Yes! *Race, Ethnicity, Class, Gender* is a general-interest sociology class that aims to expose you to thinking about how we're all connected in society with a multitude of similarities and differences. It is one of our required 100-level courses for the major. Current sociology majors will likely find themselves in a mix of students from all around the university.

Q: Do I need any statistical or quantitative background for this class?

A: No! We'll be considering how sociologists use theory and evidence to identify, understand, and study race, ethnicity, class, and gender and how they play out in our lives based on a wide range of observational and experimental data. Students are not expected to have any in-depth knowledge of social science methods or statistics. The title of the course obviously leads with 'race, gender, class, ethnicity' – but the order doesn't really matter. We want students walking away thinking about how different social dimensions contribute to how we live our lives and contribute to inequalities. The title of the class could just as easily be "Class, social status, language, religion, race, ability", or "Nationality, sexuality, relationships, class, race, ethnicity".

Q: I'm in the course, but I don't seem to be getting emails from Canvas. Since I'm new to Canvas, I'm worried that I don't have my Canvas settings correct.

A: You can check this in a specific Canvas course by going to Account (at left) → Settings → Ways to Contact (Email addresses) and check that the email address listed is the one you'd like to receive notifications at. This sometimes happens if this is the first course you're taking that uses Canvas, and sometimes if whatever default email you have on file with the university is different than the standard [xxxxxxxxxx]@umass.edu. You should also adjust Account → Notifications to turn on "Announcements" and any other settings you wish.

Q: What's the best way to earn an "A" in this course?

A: Come to class – we don't take attendance, but staying engaged is the #1 recommendation. Do the readings ahead of class, and listen/watch the assigned media (podcasts, films). Be there for the weekly quiz, stay current on your notecards. Turn in your written assignments (2 essays) on time, and pay attention to the grading rubric for each assignment when we hand it out. It will tell you details of how we'll be evaluating your work. Don't hand in a first draft! The writing center is available for helping you with your writing, and we as a teaching staff are available to read and give advice on drafts during our office hours. Don't wait until later weeks of class to get in touch if you're struggling. And remember, we're evaluating your work, not you as a person.

Q: How do you pronounce the Professor's last name?

A: It's pah-CHUCK-ee. Speaking of which, tell us how YOU pronounce your last name using the NameCoach tool in your menu in the left-hand side of the course website. It takes you 10 seconds to set it up, it and helps us to honor your name.

Class organization & preparation

Q: Will the slides from the lectures be available online? Will you be posting video or audio of the lectures if I miss a class?

A: Yes. The slides from each lecture will be posted after each class. We do not record or stream lectures (nor do we allow recording in this classroom). We encourage you to make a couple friends/seatmate-neighbors to check in with on what you missed.

Q: Can I record your lectures to help me retain and learn the material better?

A: No, we do not allow recording in the classroom unless you have an approved accommodation from Disability Services. In the State of Massachusetts, it is [against the law to record without all parties' consent.](#)

Q: How much reading is assigned each week?

A: This is an intro-level 4-credit course, and we would estimate weekly class preparation (reading, assignments) to be ~4-5 hours outside of lecture. One of the goals of this course is to get you comfortable reading more than you may be used to – we've assigned several books during the term, and there are a number of supplementary shorter readings.

Q: How much will the readings cost me?

A: Less than \$35. There are several chapters from an assigned online text that you can buy by the chapter (*A Sociology Experiment*, 2025), three general-interest books (one of which is available as a free e-book via our library), and supplemental short readings are sprinkled throughout the term, alongside podcasts and freely-accessible movies.

Q: Why do I have to write a weekly “notecard”? That seems better-suited to rote memorization – I’m not in high school, nor am I prepping for the bar exam or MCAT or anything like that.

A: Fair point! Our intention is not to have you rote-memorize concepts in this class – if that's all you're doing, within 2 weeks of class getting done, the chances of you remembering what you learned falls precipitously, to say nothing of 2 months after class ends. No – the chance here is for you to (a) gradually, during the term, proactively reinforce what you're learning in a given week just for yourself – for your own study purposes, and (b) to actually write down – longhand! On paper with a pen! We know from a lot of education research that actually writing something down helps to cement it in your brain. That's why we insist that you write it out, and then take a picture of the notecard and upload it sometime during the week in question (but no later than Friday @ 1159p)– rather than just typing something out.

Communication & teaching staff

Q: Who is my TA? When should I contact them, and when should I contact Prof. Pachucki?

A: TAs are assigned to blocks of students by last name – Stefanie Robles will be working with students with last names *A-M*, Monica Benros DeBarros for students *N-S*, and Choonhee Woo for students *T-Z*. Given the large size of the class, you should first check the syllabus to make sure the question isn't answered there, then email them – you're welcome to also email Professor Pachucki. We prefer email contact for routine questions, and for you to use our student office hours for more in-depth conversations.

Q: What are student hours for? When should I plan to come by?

A: Come to ask any questions you have about the material, come by to ask any questions about our major, or any questions you have about what it's like to be a scientist. Maybe Prof. Pachucki said something that interested/confused/provoked/or (unintentionally) offended you. What we do know is that students who make use of office hours at any time – and not just when they're having trouble in class – generally do better in class. This is part of the “hidden curriculum” of college. We'll be there whether anyone shows up or not, and it's part of our commitment to be accessible to you outside of the classroom.

Q: I am registered through the Office of Disability Services and have an accommodation that allows me to have extra time to turn in assignments, and extra time on exams. How will the logistics work?

A: ODS will get in touch with us after you have registered to let us know. You should also touch base with your TA and me in office hours so we can make sure we're on the same page. For the first exam, let us know at least one week in advance that you intend to take this accommodation and we will offer a separate room in Thompson Hall to take it there. For the final exam, you need to notify the Office of Disability Services at least a month in advance and they will be arranging space.

Assignments & logistics

Q: How are the written assignments graded?

A: The two 800-word responses are graded on a 10-pt scale on the basis of argument, organization, evidence and how well the paper addresses the prompt. These assignments are fairly short, and the prompts will be geared towards you digging into a topic we've been wrestling with. It's a good way to pull together your reading notes into some coherent ideas, and if you write them well, they can also serve as another source of exam and quiz prep for you. These writing assignments will account for 30% of your grade.

Q: The class is clearly being offered right now (Spring 2026). But will it also be offered next year (academic year 2026-27)?

A: Yes, it is offered every year, typically in Fall and Spring. Faculty rotate teaching this class.

Exams

Q: What is the format of quizzes?

A: Generally, these will be simple 2-question quizzes – one multiple-choice, and one short-answer. We'll do this weekly at the end of one of the classes (M, W). These are not intended to be “gotcha” questions or probing some super-obscurer detail of the week’s material. It’s more a “you with us?” kind of thing. If you happen to be absent for a legitimate reason, you may take a make-up quiz at your TA’s office hours that same week, or next week only (so, if you miss week 3’s quiz, you may take a makeup ONLY at your TA or Prof. Pachucki’s Week 3 or Week 4 office hours).

Q: What is the format of exams?

A: They are a combination of short answers and multiple-choice questions. The midterm will cover Week 1 until Week 6, inclusive of March 9 (first day of “Social status & class”). The final exam will cover Week 8 through the end of the term. On each exam there will be: (a) 5 multiple-choice Qs (you can choose from a possible 8 questions) – worth 8 points each; (b) 3 (you can choose from a possible 5) short answer Qs – 20 points each.

Q: What do I need for an exam?

A: Pencil or pen is fine, it makes no difference. We'll ask you to put away/turn off/flight mode all cellphones, and space yourselves out around the room. To reduce distraction, we'll allow foam earplugs (i.e. from CVS, not headphones) to help folks focus and concentrate if you like.

Q: What's the best way to prepare for exams?

A: The best way to prepare is to (a) attend lectures; (b) be disciplined about taking notes on the readings during the term to get the main ideas in a given chapter/short article/podcast/movie; and (c) review the “key concepts” listed at the end of each week’s lecture along the way, not just in the two days before the exam. Know these concepts inside & out.

Q: Will you be grading exams blind? And why do you do this?

A: Yes, we separate the cover page & question pages (which will be identified with your name and your UID# or some other random 8-digit digit #) from the remaining answer pages (which we ask you to use the same 8-digit random# on throughout). We then separate the cover pages, and after the exams are fully graded, we match and re-attach cover pages and reunite them with their answer pages. Graders work from a common rubric, then do a first pass of grading for equality; Prof. Pachucki then takes a second pass to ensure consistency.

Q: Do you have any recommendations for strategies while I'm taking the exam?

A: Budget your time. Keep an eye on the clock, and allocate 2/3 of the time for short answers, and 1/3 of the time for multiple-choice. We'll aid in this by giving periodic time checks.

Miscellaneous

Q: I have a friend/sibling/parent/pet who took a prior semester of Sociology 106 and they gave me not just their notes but also their midterm/final exams. How should I use this information to my maximal advantage?

A: This is a brand-new syllabus, so there shouldn't be any prior notes/exams at all! That said, please see the syllabus statement (p10) that "Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty." We want you to do your own work, and your own learning. To this end, we switch out about 25% of the readings each semester in order to keep things fresh and current, and to also generate brand-new exam and quiz questions every term.

Q: I have a friend/sibling/parent/pet who would like to visit class. What's your policy on that?

A: Not a problem – this is a public university, and so long as there is space and don't disrupt the class, an open classroom aligns with standards of free inquiry and expression, which is a core tenet of academic freedom in higher education. With this statement, they are invited. Just let your TA or Prof. Pachucki know who they are, ideally before class (he will call on them if you don't!).